



Press Information

Le Mans, 11 June 2004

Fourth Le Mans pole position for Audi

For a fourth time after 2000, 2001 and 2002, an Audi R8 starts the famous Le Mans 24 Hours from the front of the grid. Thursday evening, former Formula 1 driver Johnny Herbert captured pole position of the French Endurance classic for the newly formed Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx. The Briton beat last year's pole time set by Tom Kristensen (Bentley) by 0.005s. Herbert's team mate Allan McNish, who had been fastest in Wednesday's first qualifying session, also improved his time making it a silver front row. Five-time Le Mans winner Tom Kristensen qualified fourth for Audi Sport Japan Team Goh. American Team ADT Champion Racing fully concentrated on race setup, starting at 4 p.m. on Saturday from the third row.

Quotes after qualifying

Jamie Davies (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #88): "I started from GTS pole here last year and won my class in the race – in car #88 so the omens are quite good. We came here with a job to do and so far we've accomplished that but the hard work is still to be done."

Johnny Herbert (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #88): "I'm obviously highly delighted at achieving my first-ever Le Mans pole-position – that had been missing from my CV. My lap before the break had been messy so I knew that barring a massive amount of traffic, I could go quicker on the re-start which I managed. I'm highly delighted with the way the qualifying has gone – I won from pole in Monza!"

Guy Smith (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #88): "I've concentrated on our car's race set-up and we're happy with what has been achieved. We've gathered important data in very hot and cooler conditions. Obviously last year's Le Mans victory here was something very special and I'd love to repeat it."

Frank Biela (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #8): "We can look forward to an exciting race. It will be a tight battle among the four Audi R8 sports cars. I am happy with second place on the grid. But it is even more important we found a good race setup. Qualifying is not so important at a long race like Le Mans."

Pierre Kaffer (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #8): "I'd wished I'd been able to drive more during practice. Despite I feel really comfortable in the Audi R8 and I am really looking forward to my debut at this endurance classic. For me a dream comes true with this."

Allan McNish (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #8): "In some respects, it was a shame that we had to change the engine before the last part of qualifying because I was looking forward to another crack at the pole, but the priority is obviously the 24-hour race itself so you have to balance your focus."

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Seiji Ara (Audi Sport Japan Team Goh / Audi R8 #5): "I am very happy with our position on the second row of the grid. The team has improved the car in many small details step by step during practice. Now it really feels fantastic and we are well prepared for the race."

Rinaldo Capello (Audi Sport Japan Team Goh / Audi R8 #5): "On race tyres we have been consistently fast. I'd loved to do a good qualifying time and I am convinced I'd been able to go faster. But I never had a clear lap. Especially at Le Mans it is easy you get stuck in traffic and lose precious time."

Tom Kristensen (Audi Sport Japan Team Goh / Audi R8 #5): "Congratulations to Johnny Herbert. In my last attempt to get pole position I got stuck three times. I had been optimistic because the pole was possible. That's proved by the sector times. But it is more important that all three drivers had a good feeling with the race setup we found. The fastest qualifying time does not mean very much any more on Saturday at 4 p.m."

JJ Lehto (Team ADT Champion Racing / Audi R8 #2): "There hasn't really been qualifying days for us. We have been mainly concentrating on race setup trying to make the car as good as possible for the race. This is the biggest thing at Le Mans. We are very happy because all three drivers have been driving the same amount of laps. And now everybody is happy with the car as well. Being sixth on the grid does not make any difference. The fight starts later on."

Emanuele Pirro (Team ADT Champion Racing / Audi R8 #2): "We started with a car that was not perfect. We improved it during the first practice and we were very happy at the end of the day. After the car was rebuilt for the race, however, the car did not seem to be the same anymore. Fortunately we found the reason, so now we have back the R8 we like and I am quite confident about the race."

Marco Werner (Team ADT Champion Racing / Audi R8 #2): "During practice we had to sort out many things and could not really take advantage from the qualifying tyres. Obviously I'd prefer to be more in front. But it is important we are well prepared for the race distance, and this is the case now. The cars which have mixed themselves between the Audi R8 cars, probably won't be able to match the high pace for a very long time."

Kazumichi Goh (Team Director Audi Sport Japan Team Goh): "Fourth position is okay, it's just 10 meters from the pole. Our team did a good job making the car very consistent. We concentrated on the race set up during both qualifying days. Of course we tried also qualifying tyres, but unfortunately Tom was held up during his fast lap. Anyway, Le Mans is a 24-hour race. We will find out Sunday evening where we are. I promise the race fans, it's going to be good race to watch."

Sam Li (Team Director Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx): "All six drivers and our entire team have all worked brilliantly. Our qualifying performance over both days has been flawless – but now the hard work begins. I am looking forward to the race, especially as the reliability of the Audi R8 has always been impressive. And that's what counts at Le Mans."

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Dave Maraj (Team Director Team ADT Champion Racing): "Today we had a problem with the car we initially couldn't locate. That's why we decided to forget about qualifying and concentrate on finding the problem. This was the right decision as we finally found that the shock absorbers we built in today were not working properly. We replaced them with the shocks we used yesterday and that worked. Now we have a good car for the race."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): "Team Veloqx has shown a great performance qualifying both cars on the front row and giving Audi another pole position at Le Mans. The two other teams right from the beginning worked a bit more for the race. At the end, all four R8 cars did similar fast times under race conditions. Then, it makes no big difference if you start from fourth or sixth position. Apart from a few punctures, both practice days were very trouble free. The Veloqx team precautionary changed the engine of car #8 following a problem with the fuel injection. Now we are looking forward to an exciting race where nobody will get presents."

The starting grid at Le Mans

- 1 Davies/Herbert/Smith (Audi R8) 3m 32.838s
- 2 Biela/Kaffer/McNish (Audi R8) 3m 33.233s
- 3 Wallace/Brabham/Shimoda (Zytek) 3m 33.923s
- 4 Ara/Capello/Kristensen (Audi R8) 3m 34.038s
- 5 Collard/Bourdais/Minassian (Pescarolo-Judd) 3m 34.252s
- 6 Lehto/Werner/Pirro (Audi R8) 3m 34.927s
- 7 Katoh/Michigami/Fukuda (Dome-Mugen) 3m 36.285s
- 8 Lammers/Dyson/Kaneishi (Dome-Judd) 3m 36.353s
- 9 Short/Barff/Barbosa (Dallara-Judd) 3m 39.260s
- 10 Coronel/Wilson/Firman (Dome-Judd) 3m 40.261s

Editorial notes

We can be contacted on location at Le Mans and at the Nürburgring by E-mail at lemans@audi-motorsport.info and nuerburgring@audi-motorsport.info.

An Audi press conference with Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, all the drivers and the team principals will be held on Friday, 3 p.m., at Le Mans in the Automobile museum.

Photographs and further information are available in the Internet:
www.audi-sportpress.com (accreditation required)

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