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Motorsport

Interview with the ALMS champions

- **Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro discuss the 2005 season**
- **Seasoned campaigners want to race on**
- **Audi R8 is of special importance for both drivers**

Frank Biela (41) and Emanuele Pirro (43) won the 2005 American Le Mans series (ALMS) Drivers' Championship in the team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8. They were presented with their trophy at the ALMS championship gala in Monterey (California) on Sunday evening. The two Audi works drivers discuss their winning streak in the USA and their plans for the future.

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What does winning the title mean to you?

Frank Biela: "An enormous amount. Every title is great. However, after the difficult DTM year, this 'comeback' feels particularly good. It's fair to say that the self-confidence did suffer a little last season."

Emanuele Pirro: "After last season didn't run as expected, it was important for me to be competitive again, and we were exactly that the whole year. That we also won the championship is obviously fantastic. It gave me confidence and motivation back."

How difficult was the jump from the Audi A4 DTM back to the R8?

Biela: "I didn't find it as difficult as the jump the other way. I think that my driving style suits the R8 more than that required in the DTM at the moment. I couldn't change the driving style I'd been born with. That's why stepping back into the sportscar was much easier. After two or three races I felt completely at home again."

Pirro: "I often drove in different race series at the same time earlier in my career and never had a problem getting used to the various cars. In the DTM I had to force myself to change my driving style. The DTM demands a special driving style, on which I worked for a year. That's why I had to rediscover my normal driving style for the R8. But it didn't take very long."

The Audi R8 will now be put out to pasture, what meaning did the R8 have for your career?

Pirro: “Everybody knows that the Audi R8 is an extraordinary car. But as is usually the case, you’ll realise only much later just how unique the Audi’s run of success really was. I’m proud to have been a part of the project. I won the first race, took the first Le Mans victory and also now the last championship for the R8.”

Biela: “The Audi R8 has a very special place in my career – simply because of the six long years that I spent driving the car. And obviously because of the sweet success: Le Mans, American Le Mans, Sebring and and and – I’ve won a lot of great races and championships with the R8.”

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From your point of view how was the 2005 season?

Biela: “Very good. There was a short acclimatisation period in the first three races. The turning point came after Le Mans with three successive victories. Everything ran very smoothly. The team works extremely well. The atmosphere in the team is incredibly good. The season was big fun. Winning the championship was the icing on the cake.”

Pirro: “Things improved constantly. We started the season with a couple of question marks hanging in the air. After two or three races they were gone. Things actually went better than expected. At the end it was almost too easy, we won the championship at the penultimate race of the season.”

What is the special charm of endurance racing and the American Le Mans series?

Pirro: “The best thing is that you have to drive flat out all the time in today’s long-distance races. In a modern long-distance race every tenth of a second counts, even in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. In the past, it never occurred to me to look after the car and tyres during a long-distance race. Furthermore, it’s a great feeling to have a team mate with who you get on so well. The races in America are something very special. The circuits are fabulous. You don’t have as much fun on the modern European circuits. There is also a fantastic atmosphere in America.”

Biela: “First and foremost the type of race car is excellent. Driving a sportscar is a huge amount of fun, and the races are interesting. There are driver changes, and strategy plays an important role. The American race tracks are fantastic. Flying backwards and forwards across the Atlantic is stressful, but the races in the USA are simply great fun.”

In the meantime you are both over 40. How much longer do you want to drive?

Biela: “It’s clear that this question is posed more frequently when you are over 40. I’m now 41. I hope that I have another two, three or four competitive years in me. We’ll see what I do afterwards, just how competitive I’ll still be and whether I’m still enjoying myself. At the moment I definitely want to continue driving.”

Pirro: “I’d like to drive for a few more years. I’d certainly like to finish my career at Audi. I owe Audi a great deal, but have also given Audi a lot. I’d like to sit down with Dr Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport) and decide together when the time is ripe to retire. However, at the moment I feel top fit and in good form. And I still have a lot of fun racing.”

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