

FIA WEC - 6 Hours of Imola - The apprenticeship continues

23-04-2024

#News

The second round of the World Endurance Championship (WEC) took place last weekend in one of the world's leading motorsport centres, at the Imola circuit in Italy. After a bit of a complicated start to the season in Qatar, Akkodis ASP Team continued their apprenticeship of the discipline. Although the free practice sessions were promising, the qualifying sessions were a bit disappointing (P16 for the #78 and P17 for the #87). But during the 6 Hour race, the rain arrived, setting the pace for the field of LMGT3 cars. After a race of rebounds, where slicks and wet tyres played the key roles, José María López, Esteban Masson, Takeshi Kimura in the #87 Lexus RCF GT3 finished in 15th place, while Kelvin Van der Linde, Timur Boguslavskiy and Arnold Robin, on board the #78, classified 14th. The next round of the world championship will be the 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps on the 11th of May.



Punctuated by the names of legendary corners, the Tamburello Variant, Acqua Minerale, the first laps of the two Akkodis ASP Team Lexus RCF GT3 were encouraging. After only finishing with one car in their inaugural race, the French team continued their discovery of the championship. The free practice sessions allowed the team to settle in and test different set-ups. They finished with a Top 9 for the #87 and a Top 17 for the #78.

The qualifying sessions were highly contested and in only a few minutes, setting a good time became an exercise in style, punctuated by a bit of luck. At the end of the session, getting into the LMGT3 Hyperpole, reserved for the Top 10, slipped away. Following the regulations, Arnold Robin (#78) and Takeshi Kimura (#87) were at the wheel, finishing respectively in 16th and 17th positions.



A soggy race!

The start of the 6-Hour race was given on Sunday at 13h00. The weather was uncertain and the temperature was quite cool, which never bodes well in Imola... The rain could arrive and be a spoilsport. The start was thunderous and clashes were inevitable, both in the GT and Hypercar classes. The first Full Course Yellow procedure was triggered.

At the restart, Arnold Robin (#78) and Takeshi Kimura (#87) entered into the dance. The laps went by and the pace picked up. After 1h30 of racing, Arnold Robin was in 11th, while Takeshi Kimura was sitting in P13.

Kelvin Van der Linde took up the relay in the #78 at the two-hour mark, and took advantage of the pit stops to take some positions, while taking a particularly assertive approach. Just before the halfway point, the #78 was P5, thanks to having taken one fewer pit stops than their adversaries, and a wonderful stint by Kelvin. Unfortunately, they lost the advantage thanks to a drive through for track limits, which also cost the team, forcing them out of the leader's lap.



A first spot of rain made the track tricky, but it was with 2h20 to go that events gathered pace. The rain became more intense and Race Control declared a wet track, bringing out the safety-car. Playing the balancing act for a while, the drivers had to resort to wet tyres.

Timur Boguslavskiy was in the #78 while Esteban Masson got into the #87. The conditions were delicate and managing the traffic was primordial. The two Akkodis ASP Team drivers managed the restart well. Unfortunately in Rivazza, Timur made a mistake and went off track, but did manage to get back onto the tarmac. This unplanned exit forced the #78 to head back to the pits and to put on wet tyres at the wrong moment.

In the #87, Esteban Masson had a great climb up the field to 6th place during his stint. But during the pitstop, the car would not restart. A minute went by and the #87 Lexus RCF GT3 found itself a lap down. For the final relay, José María López got into the car. The Argentinian fought like a devil to reclaim positions, all the while keeping an eye on his trajectory to not go outside the track limits.



The last part of the race was dominated by the battle taking place at the front. In the LMGT3 class, the game was up. The two Lexus RCF crossed the finish line. Kelvin Van der Linde, Timur Boguslavskiy and Arnold Robin (#78) were 14th, just ahead of José María López, Esteban Masson and Takeshi Kimura in the #87.

Valuable information was gathered last weekend to improve the performance level of both cars. For the third round, at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit (11th May), a layout that the team knows well, they will have to keep an eye on the weather, which is always fickle in the Belgian Ardennes.