

Fanatec GT2 European Series - Paul Ricard (France) - Pole, victory and podium!

07-04-2024

#News

The kick-off of the fourth season of the Fanatec GT2 European Series took place last weekend at the Paul Ricard Circuit in France with a record entry list for this spectacular discipline whose cars run at more than 700hp (but with limited aerodynamic support)... Akkodis ASP Team has entered one car in Pro-AM this season, the winners at the Red Bull Ring last year, Benjamin Ricci and Mauro Ricci (#61), who finished in the Top 10 of the first race (P7 Pro-AM), but were forced to retire during the second race, five minutes before the chequered flag. In the AM category, the team doubled up by lining up the #87 Mercedes-AMG GT2, driven by Jean-Luc Beaubelique and Gilles Vannelet, and the #53, with Christophe Bourret and Pascal Gibon. After two 50' races with many twists and turns, the #87 took its first AM victory, followed by a podium (P2) a few hours later. The #53, in the AM Top 5 in the first round, finished just off the podium in the last race of the meeting (P4 AM). The next round will take the cars to Misano (17-19 May), on the coast of the Adriatic sea.



The weather was particularly mild when the protagonists of the GT2 European Series arrived at the Paul Ricard Circuit for the kick off of the 2024 season. On the long Mistral straight (1.8km), the powerful GT2 cars have what it takes to show off. In the Akkodis ASP Team clan, the first laps in free practice allowed the three crews entered to take their marks.

The #61 with Mauro and Benjamin Ricci was the best Mercedes-AMG, P4 overall and P3 Pro-AM. Second AM, Gilles Vannelet and Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) were P7 overall, while Pascal Gibon and Christophe Bourret (#53) finished the session P13 (P6 AM).

In the Pre-qualifying session, the duo of Mauro and Benjamin Ricci (#61) took second place in the general classification, only 0.117 seconds off the leader. Gilles Vannelet and Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) dominated the AM category, in the top five of the overall classification, while Pascal Gibon and Christophe Bourret (#53) were fifth.

The tension rose when it was time for qualifying. In Q1, Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) set the 3rd time in AM, to start from the 4th row (P7), just ahead of Pascal Gibon (#53). Mauro Ricci (#61) set the 12th time overall (P6 Pro-AM).

In Q2, Gilles Vannelet (#87) hammered the nail and took pole in AM, P5 overall. Benjamin Ricci (#61) settled on the 4th row (P6 Pro-AM) and Christophe Bourret was P6 AM on board of the #53.



RACE 1 - First AM victory for the Beaubelique-Vannelet duo!

The battle began as soon as the race started. Having taken an excellent start, Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) took the second position in AM after 10' (P5 overall). Mauro Ricci (#61) did not dawdle either and took three places to sit P5 Pro-AM (P9 overall). Heckled at the start, Pascal Gibon (#53) ended up in P11.

These first sequences of the 50' race saw the Safety-car come on track after a hit. At the restart, the fights got going again.

After 20', Jean-Luc Beaubelique took over in the AM class, Mauro Ricci was P7, just ahead of Pascal Gibon, who had made a wonderful climb and was in the AM Top 3.

The driver change shuffled the cards, but the pace did not let up. The #61 took a 5s penalty for not respecting the track limits.

Then in P6 and P2 AM, Gilles Vannelet (#87) pulled the stops to take the lead once more in the category. Benjamin Ricci (#61) was P8 while Christophe Bourret (#53) was P4 AM. The #61 was once again called to order for not respecting the track limits, while Gilles Vannelet took the lead in AM with 15' to go.

The final 15 minutes were quite busy, with some nice battles among the front runners.

In the end, the #87 Akkodis ASP Team Mercedes-AMG GT2, driven by Gilles Vannelet and Jean-Luc Beaubelique took their first AM victory, a strong result for the French duo. In the same category, Christophe Bourret and Pascal Gibon (#53) finished in the Top 5 (P12 overall). In the Pro-AM class, Mauro and Benjamin Ricci entered into the Top 10 in the overall classification, P7 in the category.



RACE 2 - Another AM podium (P2) for the crew of the #87!

A few hours later, as the end of the afternoon, while the temperature was at 19°C, 17 cars were at the start of the second race.

Having started in P5 and despite a plummet to P17 after a contact at the first corner, Gilles Vannelet (#87) managed a superb relay at a sustained pace to climb back up to P2 AM, before handing the wheel over to Jean-Luc Beaubelique. Still in AM, Christophe Bourret (#53) finished his relay in fifth position (P11 overall). Benjamin Ricci (#61) also reclaimed positions to come back into the Pro-AM Top 5.

The second part of the race was also an opportunity for some great battles for the overall and category standings, with no favours given between the drivers... But at 5 minutes from the chequered flag, while sitting in P8 overall and P6 Pro-AM, Mauro Ricci headed back to the pits and did not return to the track.

Jean-Luc Beaubelique crossed the finish P2 AM (P5 overall), while Pascal Gibon finished P4 AM (P9 overall).

At the end of this first meeting, the Beaubelique-Vannelet duo scored some big points, but also for the Akkodis ASP Team. They will have to keep up the rhythm for the next round of the season, on the 18th and 19th of May at the Misano circuit in Italy. A little taste of the holidays by the Adriatic coast.

