

# GT4 European Series – Spa-Francorchamps – A pole and another podium!

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## #News

The fourth round of the GT4 European Series, held at the legendary Spa-Francorchamps circuit, marked the start of the second half of the season for the 39 cars entered. The most demanding of European tracks, that alternates 19 medium and high speed corners, as well as long straights over its 7 km, gave the three AKKA-ASP crews a kick of adrenaline. After taking the pole in Pro-AM in Race 2, Jim Pla and Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87), the winners of the last race at Zandvoort, didn't turn it into a win in the Ardennes, suffering from a retirement in Race 1 and issues with a sensor in Race 2. Silver Cup winners in the second race in Zandvoort, Paul Evrard and Timothé Buret (#88) were particularly successful at Spa during qualifying, placing twice on the second row. They finished second overall in the first race, but were penalised by a stop and go in the second. In the AM category, the duo of Ricci, Mauro and Benjamin (#61), entered into the Top 5 in the qualifying session, before finishing Race 2 at the foot of the podium. After a (well merited) summer break, the championship's protagonists will meet on the 4th and 5th of September at the Nürburgring, Germany, on the other side of the Eifel...



Heading into this fourth round of the GT4 European Series, the three AKKA-ASP duos already mastered the subtleties of the track, having raced there the previous weekend during the French FFSA GT4 event.

This knowledge of the track was clear in the free practice sessions already, with some great times set, including the best in Pro-AM for Jim Pla/ Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87), second in Silver for Paul Evrard/ Timothé Buret (#88) and third AM for Mauro and Benjamin Ricci (#61).

During the qualifying sessions, the tension went up a notch and the competition increased. In the first session, interrupted by a red flag 3 minutes from the end, Paul Evrard (#88) performed well and placed himself on the second row of the grid, 4th overall and in Silver Cup. Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) finished 11th Pro-AM (P29 overall) and Mauro Ricci (#61) 8th AM.

The second session was very competitive and propelled Jim Pla (#87) into the Pro-AM pole (P5 overall), whereas Timothé Buret (#88) managed, just like his teammate a bit earlier, the 4th best time in the session (P4 Silver Cup) which would end up becoming third place. There was a bit of a scare for Benjamin Ricci (#61) who spun at the start of the session, but who completed Q2 in the AM Top 5.



## Race 1 – The duo of Evrard/Buret (#88) took a wonderful podium!

The circuit of Spa-Francorchamps is notorious for its sudden changes in the weather, but there was no risk of rain at the start of this first race.

With 39 cars on track, things were a bit tight at the La Source hairpin, at the end of the pit straight, but there were no big incidents to report. Paul Evrard (#88) got pushed around a bit and found himself in 6th place, stuck up the exhaust of the #12 BMW. Things heated up on track, as Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) found out, victim of a contact and forced to join the pits after 3 laps. A broken rod made it impossible to continue. It was a great disappointment for the crew who had been sitting in second place in the championship in Pro-Am before the race. The fighting was just as intense in the AM Cup where Mauro Ricci (#61) had a lot to do.

When the pit-stop window opened, Paul Evrard (#88) was still in 4th in Silver. Timothé Buret improved on the place as he took to the track in third. Benjamin Ricci slid into the cockpit of the #61 and headed into the battle raging in the AM category.

At the front, Timothé Buret (#88) was very combative, determined to try his luck for the top step of the podium. But at 22 minutes from the end, a Full Course Yellow procedure was called, followed a few minutes later by the arrival of the Safety Car on track. With 11 minutes to go, the restart allowed the driver of the #88 to make a decisive attack to take second place, fighting off the #30 Alpine. Despite the pressure on him right up until the chequered flag, he crossed the line in second place overall and in the Silver Cup, a nice opportunity to gain some big points for the championship. This second part of the race, especially intense, allowed Benjamin Ricci to finish 7th AM.



## Race 2 – A race that won't be quickly forgotten...

The next day, the second race of the event took place a few hours before the start of the 73rd edition of the 24 Hours of Spa. The weather, as often is the case at Spa, had decided to be a spoilsport. The track was mostly damp, but some parts were still dry, and a light rain was still falling on some parts. The main issue would be what tyre to choose. Most of the competitors decided to stay on slicks.

As the lights went green, Timothé Buret managed his start perfectly and took the lead, but as he dove down into La Source, the #88 went wide before re-joining the ideal trajectory in P2. Jim Pla (#87) held onto his position, P5, and Benjamin Ricci (#61) was 8th AM.

The start of the race was like a balancing act. The first confrontations in these conditions provoked quite a few thrills. The #88 slipped into P3 just before the safety car appeared after a run-off. Less than 10 minutes later, the race restarted delicately. Timothé Buret (#88) lost one, then two places (P5), just ahead of Jim Pla (#87) who then lost pace because of a problem with a sensor limiting the engine power, and fell down to 11th place. After the driver change, Paul Evrard (#88) was still in the Top 5, Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) was P11, and Mauro Ricci (#61) P9 AM. But the pit-stop for the #88 was put under investigation, and then penalised with a stop-and-go for not respecting the minimum time. All hope of a podium, which meant points for the championship, was gone. The end of the race saw the return of the rain, but it wasn't enough to mess up the classification. Paul Evrard (#88) crossed the chequered flag P20 (P12 Silver), Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) was P8 Pro-AM, whereas Mauro Ricci (#61) finished in a nice 4th place in AM.

The championship will take a break for the month of August before the protagonists meet up on the 4th and 5th of September at the Nürburgring, Germany, not far from Spa and also in the Eifel hills.