

# GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE : 24 Hours of Spa

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## #News

### A good performance but the stars were not aligned for Team AKKA-ASP

As they arrived at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit to take part in the 73rd edition of the 24 Hours, the fourth round of the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup, it was full steam ahead for Team AKKA-ASP with three top notch crews and a sharp team. Raffaele Marciello's magnificent pole position in the #88 Mercedes-AMG at the end of the Super Pole session confirmed this impression, after the team had also set the best time in the Qualifying sessions. The start of the race looked good with the #88 leading the pack. With a strong pace and a staggered strategy, the trio navigated in the Top 3. But the Race Gods weren't on Jérôme Policand's side this year when, shortly before the 15-hour mark, the #88 entered the pits and never left them again, because of a broken shock absorber. That was a great disappointment for the drivers, Raffaele Marciello, Daniel Juncadella and Jules Gounon, as well as for the whole team. The second car entered in Pro, in the Intercontinental GT Challenge, the #89, did not fall short, qualifying in the Top 10 with Felipe Fraga, Timur Boguslavskiy and Lucas Auer. Then, during the race, maintaining themselves in the Top 12 (penalised by two drive-throughs for not respecting the track limits), the #89 crossed the finish line in the Top 10, the first of the Mercedes-AMG. Entered in the Silver category (along with 16 other cars, a record), the #87 Mercedes-AMG of Petru Umbrurescu, Simon Gachet, Konstantin Tereschenko and Thomas Drouet also reached the Super Pole to finish on the 8th row of the grid (P16), before finally starting from the 11th after receiving a penalty. A staggered strategy and penalties for not respecting the track limits plunged the #87 to around 30th place, 10th Silver. In the end, they crossed the finish line 7th in class and are sitting in a provisional 4th place in the Endurance Cup Silver Cup. There were mixed feelings at the end of this race, between satisfaction at having shown a very high level of performance and disappointment at not having delivered following those great prospects. The next Endurance event will be on the 4th and 5th of September at the Nürburgring circuit, not far from Spa and still in the Eiffel hills.

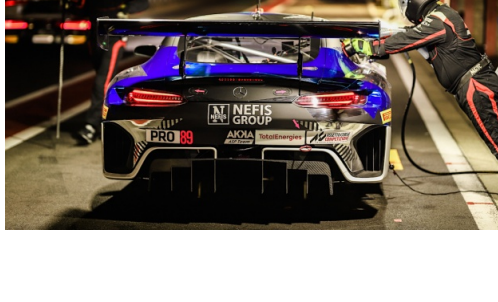


The 24 Hours of Spa rarely run according to plan, and yet everything had started so well...

As of the free practice sessions, the three AKKA-ASP Mercedes-AMG were on pace, up against very strong competition. No fewer than 58 cars were on track and at the end of the pre-qualifying sessions, the #88 was in the Top 6, the #80 was 11th, and the #87 was in 6th place in Silver.

The qualifying sessions, interrupted by two red flags (including one that caused a delay of more than 30 minutes in Q2), confirmed the level of performance of the #88 who set the best time (taking the average of the 3 or 4 drivers) for the trio of Marciello/Juncadella/Gounon. The three drivers of the #89, Felipe Fraga, Timur Boguslavskiy and Lucas Auer set the 13th best time, whereas the #87 of the quartet of Umbrurescu/Gachet/Tereschenko/Drouet set the 3rd best time in Silver (P17 overall).

With such results, the three AKKA-ASP crews found themselves in the Super Pole on Friday evening. The track conditions were optimal with a temperature of 24°C, and despite a few drops of rain on certain parts of the track, the trajectory dried quickly. The cars headed out in the reverse order of the qualifying classification, and penalties for not respecting the track limits kept on coming. Thomas Drouet in the #87 did not manage to avoid them and set the 16th best time (P3 Silver). Felipe Fraga set a great time and placed the #87 on the 5th row (P10). Raffaele Marciello was the last to complete his two laps in the #88. Perfectly connecting the 19 corners and the straights of the 7km layout, the Italian set his second consecutive pole position (he was also the quickest in 2020) and the third for Mercedes-AMG. Lello demonstrated once more what he's capable of...



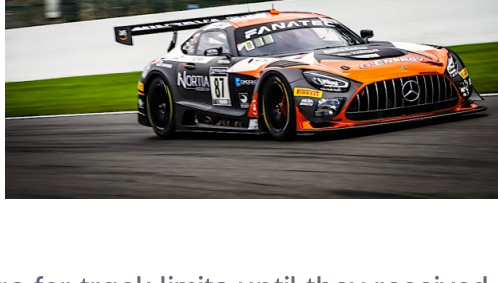
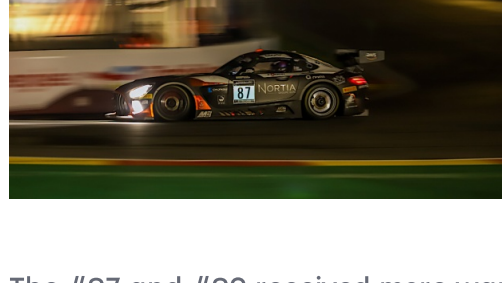
The start of the race was given at 4.30pm on Saturday. Weather wise - no rain. The 58 GT3 (and 9 manufacturers) were on the starting grid. Raffaele Marciello in the #88 on pole position, Lucas Auer in the #89 in P10, and Simon Gachet in the #87...P21 (having received a penalty). The poleman took a good start, kept his advantage and attempted to quickly put some distance between him and his pursuers. Lucas Auer (#89) kept himself in the Top 10 and Simon Gachet was 4th in Silver.

But, after only 22 minutes, the race was neutralised (Full Course Yellow then safety car), following a violent and spectacular accident at the Raidillon involving four cars, including some of the favourites. Immediately treated by the medical team, two of the drivers suffered non-life threatening injuries and the other two were unharmed.

After about an hour's interruption, the race resumed. Almost simultaneously, the rain appeared, getting heavier and heavier. The leader tried to resist on slicks, before deciding to change to wets and head to the pits, handing over the lead of the race to the #37 Audi, and sliding down to 3rd place, while the #89 was in the Top 5 and the #87 P4 Silver.

The #88 and #89 both did double stints, while the #87 alternated single and double stints.

Just before reaching the three-hour mark, the race was once again briefly neutralised and a few teams made the most of it by making a pit stop. Meanwhile, the leading car, the #37 Audi, and the #88 with Dani Juncadella at the wheel in second, didn't stop, forcing them to make the stop under green flags, which resulted in a fall down the overall classification. The #88 found itself in 15th and the #89 17th. The strategy became implicitly staggered.



The #87 and #89 received more warnings for track limits until they received a penalty, a drive through. The #89 fell to 26th and the #87 down to the Top 40 (P13 Silver). Things were getting seriously complicated, especially as this would not be the only drive through for the #89 and for the #87 which were also sanctioned for speeding in the pit lane. With a staggered strategy, the #88 found itself in P2 and in P8/P9, before also getting a drive through penalty just after the 7-hour mark for a non-conform pitstop. At midnight, after having taken his penalty, Raffaele Marciello rejoined the track, still in the leaders' lap (and managed to close the gap by 30 seconds).

In the middle of the night, the stints followed one another and the positions stabilised for the three AKKA-ASP crews. The #88 gained some terrain bit by bit and settled in the Top 3, whereas the #89 cruised between 11th and 13th place, and the #87 stayed in the Silver Top 10.

In the morning, Jules Gounon (#88), who was running in third, returned to the pits and made a stop that seemed to go on forever. In fact, the rear left shock absorber had been bothering the team since the early hours of the morning forcing Jules to fight during two hours to keep the right pace while sparing the car. But shortly after 7am, the shock absorber broke, forcing the #88 that had started from pole position to retire. It was a great disappointment for the team and the drivers. The Gods of Spa were clearly not on the side of Team AKKA-ASP. The stars had seemed perfectly aligned... but even so...

The last third of the race saw the #89 moving around in the overall Top 10, whereas the #87 was still solidly placed in the Silver Top 10. As neutralisations, rain showers and, at the end of the race, a real downpour followed, the two surviving crews of Team AKKA-ASP remained steadfast. The #89 of Felipe Fraga, Timur Boguslavskiy and Lucas Auer crossed the line in the top 10, the first Mercedes-AMG still in the race. Entered in the Silver Cup, the #87 of Petru Umbrurescu, Simon Gachet, Konstantin



Tereschenko and Thomas Drouet passed under the chequered flag 7th in their category.

In the provisional ranking of the Endurance Cup Silver Cup, the crew is sitting in 4th place (49 points). In the overall classification of the Endurance Cup, Raffaele Marciello, Daniel Juncadella and Jules Gounon are third with 36 points, as is Team AKKA-ASP (49 points).

The next meeting of the Endurance Cup will be on the 4th and 5th of September for three hours of racing at the circuit of the Nürburgring.