

GT4 European Series – Final round Barcelona – Pole, victory, podiums, and Vice-Champion titles!

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#News

Highlight of the 2021 season, the final round of the GT4 European Series took place at the Barcelona circuit in Spain. On the 4'655 m of the Catalan track, the 43 GT4 entries faced each other one last time without holding back. In the end, it was a good harvest for Team AKKA-ASP – another pole and another Pro-AM victory in Race 2 (following a podium in Race 1), the second for Jean-Luc Beaubelique and Jim Pla (#87) who, in the process, won the title of 2021 GT4 European Series Vice-Champions in the category. The father-son duo of Mauro and Benjamin Ricci (#61) also made a good performance, standing on the second step of the AM podium in the first race following a fantastic climb up the field. Lacking in victory but not in performance, the pair of Paul Evrard and Timothé Buret (#88) were unfortunately not able to realise their potential. Lastly, Christophe Bourret and Pascal Gibon (#53) who stopped by the finale of the European Championship for a go, fought well in the first event but had to withdraw following a contact the next day. After their title in the France GT4 Championship, Team AKKA-ASP took home the title of GT4 European Series Vice-Champion.



The free practice sessions were an opportunity to make the first adjustments and to plan their upcoming strategies. This warm-up allowed the AKKA-ASP clan to get their bearings, in particular for Jim Pla and Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) who were in good form and determined to make the final act of the GT4 season a success, aiming for P1 overall and P2 Pro-AM. In the Top 8 (and 10) of the Silver Cup, Paul Evrard and Timothé Buret (#88) were present with “Bad Boys” on the hood of their car (they wanted it!). In the AM category, Mauro and Benjamin Ricci (#61) were proving to be diligent on this circuit that they love (P6 and P8), while Christophe Bourret and Pascal Gibon were gradually finding their feet (P12 and P8).

The two qualifying sessions were interrupted by several red flags. The first one was only disturbed for a few minutes, the second one was neutralised longer, following a spectacular accident (not serious). By the end of the first session, Paul Evrard (#88) was quickest, 12th Silver (P22 overall), then Christophe Bourret (#53) P7 Am (P34 overall), Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) P10 Pro-Am (P35 overall) and Mauro Ricci (#61) P11 Am (P42 overall).

The second session was more animated. Living up to the performances from the free practice sessions, Jim Pla (#87) took overall pole. Benjamin Ricci (#61), setting a very good time, finished P6 AM (P30 overall), ahead of Pascal Gibon P7 AM (P35 overall) and Timothé Buret (#88) P18 Silver (P37 overall) who suffered from a spoiled session and who could only do four laps.

Race 1 – Double podium (Pro-AM and AM) on the program

After the incidents from the qualifying sessions, there were only 41 cars on the starting grid. The sky was overcast with heavy dark clouds, but rain was not expected.

The race started without any notable incidents. Starting in P34, Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) made a great first lap and found himself in P29 (P8 Pro-AM). Paul Evrard (#88) ran in the Top 20 (P12 Silver), whereas Mauro Ricci (#61) and Christophe Bourret were following each other in AM, P7 and P8. After 15' of racing, the first Full Course Yellow slowed down the pack, followed by the safety car. At the restart, Paul Evrard (#88) was sitting in the Silver Top 9. The first part of the race was done and the driver changes went by without trouble.

Timothé Buret (#88) climbed up the field, P14 overall and P9 Silver, whereas Jim Pla (#87) was having a great time, P7 Pro-AM. Benjamin Ricci (#61) and Pascal Gibon were following each other, respectively P7 and P8 AM.

As the laps went by, tempers flared. While Timothé Buret (#88) was on the verge of the Top 10 (P7 Silver), he was given a drive through for having caused a collision. Forced to go back through the pits, the #88 driver fell down the order. He crossed the finish line P10 Silver (P18 overall).

With less than 10 minutes to go, there was another Full Course Yellow (followed by a safety car). There were only two laps left when the flags turned green again. Nothing could stop Jim Pla (#87), overjoyed, who really devoured his opponents. Completing the work started by Jean-Luc Beaubelique, Jim crossed the finish line second in Pro-AM (P6 overall), a 28-place gain! Benjamin Ricci, precise in his attacks and overtaking, didn't delay either. Having driven an excellent stint, he allowed the #61 crew to finish second AM after having climbed 21 places. The pair of Bourret-Gibon also had a good finish to the race, finishing P8 AM.

Race 2 – The perfect scenario for a perfect conclusion!

For the second race of the weekend and the last of the twelve of the 2021 season, 40 GT4 were lined up on the starting grid behind Jim Pla's #87 Mercedes-AMG. For the team, the goal was clear – go get the vice-champion title that was still within reach in the Pro-AM category.

The AKKA-ASP driver managed his start to perfection and started to make headway from the start. Making as big a gap as possible would allow his teammate, Jean-Luc Beaubelique, to manage his stint a bit easier. It was also a nice first lap for Timothé Buret (#88), who improved by seven places, whose qualifying session has been largely interrupted and who had had to start from 37th place on the grid. Benjamin Ricci (#61) dealt with the hotheads, while Pascal Gibon (#53) suffered a small collision on the following lap and had to head back to the pits. The #53 was unable to restart.

The laps went by at a steady pace at the front. Jim Pla (#87) continued to increase his lead (+4s after 20') and set the best lap time in the race, while Timothé Buret (#88) continued his steady climb up the field. Benjamin Ricci (#61), just as the previous day, managed a fantastic stint, sitting in second place in AM. At the end of his stint, Jim Pla had taken his lead to 9 seconds, while Timothé Buret gained 16 places (P21 overall).

After the driver change, Jean-Luc Beaubelique (#87) kept the advantage, but saw the Silver leader (#22) heading for him. The main goal was to contain the #42 Audi, already the champion of the category, to seal a second victory this season (after Zandvoort), but also the title of vice-champion. Paul Evrard, now at the wheel of the #88, continued the climb started by his teammate and claimed some more spots (P18 overall and P13 Silver), while Mauro Ricci (#61) was sitting in the AM Top 5. With 18' to go, Jean-Luc Beaubelique relinquished the lead of the race, but not the lead of the Pro-AM category. Putting up a good fight against the #42, Jean-Luc did not give up and kept his rival at a distance. With 4' to the chequered flag, a car went off track and caused a Full Course Yellow. The competitors crossed the finish line at 80km/h...

The duo of Pla-Baubelique (#87) scored their second success of the season and took home the title of 2021 Pro-AM Vice-Champions. Paul Evrard (#88) finished P11 Silver and P14 overall after a 23 place climb. Mauro Ricci (#61) closed the event in the AM Top 5 after a hectic relay against some rowdy opponents.

The season ended with a great victory and two Pro-AM GT4 European Series vice-champion titles, for the drivers and for the Team. After the GT4 France Champion title (team and drivers), Team AKKA-ASP is pleased!