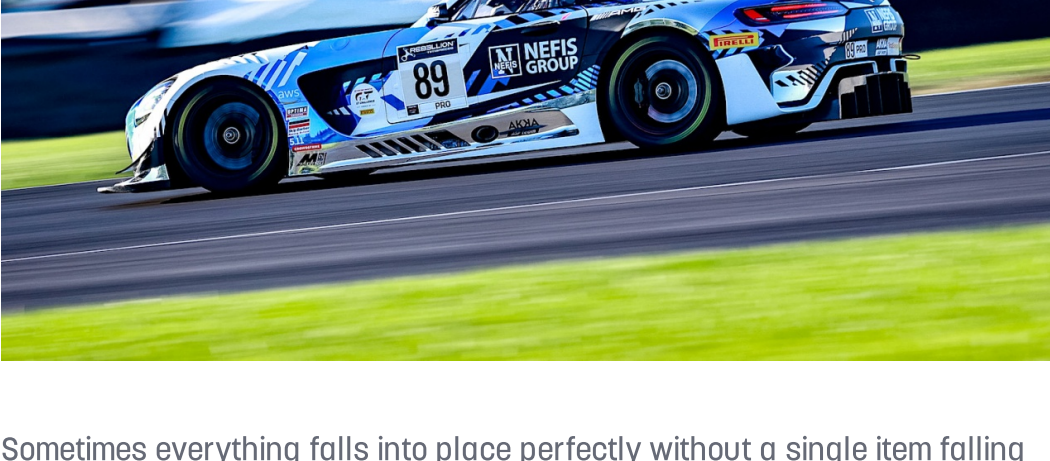


Intercontinental GT Challenge - A superb ‘Made in America’ podium !

#News

The 2021 transatlantic round of the Intercontinental GT Challenge will go down in history for Team AKKA-ASP. Already because of a last minute driver change (visa issues), which saw Dani Juncadella replace Felipe Fraga at short notice. But also due to the late delivery of the shipping container that held their material and car. Forced to use a DXDT Racing chassis, that happened to be spare, the team had to wait until Saturday morning (the day before the race) to recuperate their goods after a few twists and turns. In the end, after an action-packed race marked by numerous neutralisations and many varying race strategies, Raffaele Marciello, Dani Juncadella and Timur Boguslavskiy climbed onto the second step of the podium. The performance is all the more impressive because it was achieved by a tremendously well-trained crew and a very determined team. After America, the finale of the Intercontinental GT Challenge will take place on the 2nd of December on another continent, Africa, on the Kyalami circuit.



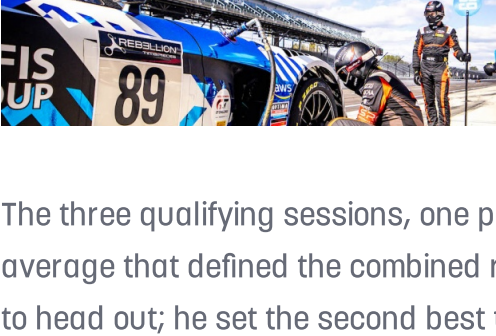
Sometimes everything falls into place perfectly without a single item falling out of place. Other times, frustrations just keep piling up. That’s kind of what Team AKKA-ASP experienced at the start of their first American campaign.

The announced line-up of Raffaele Marciello, Felipe Fraga and Timur Boguslavskiy was awaited, right until last Monday. However, following issues with his visa, the Brazilian could not get to the USA by the end of the week. And so Daniel Juncadella then took his place in the #89. Ironically, the Spanish driver had been replaced by Felipe Fraga during the two last rounds of the GT World Challenge Europe because of the DTM.

Having arrived at Indianapolis at the start of the week, the crew had the unpleasant surprise to find out that their container with their equipment and car hadn’t arrived. Shipped from Europe to a port in Virginia, the container had arrived over a week beforehand, but there were delays in delivering it to the circuit. The delivery was held up so much that Jérôme Policand’s team were forced to rent a Mercedes-AMG GT3 chassis from DXDT Racing (under GT America colours). This option allowed the team to discover the track and to get their bearings on this somewhat atypical layout. But you also need equipment to run a car. The solidarity between teams was at its best, with the championship’s teams lending what they could to help these castaways. A great big THANK YOU!

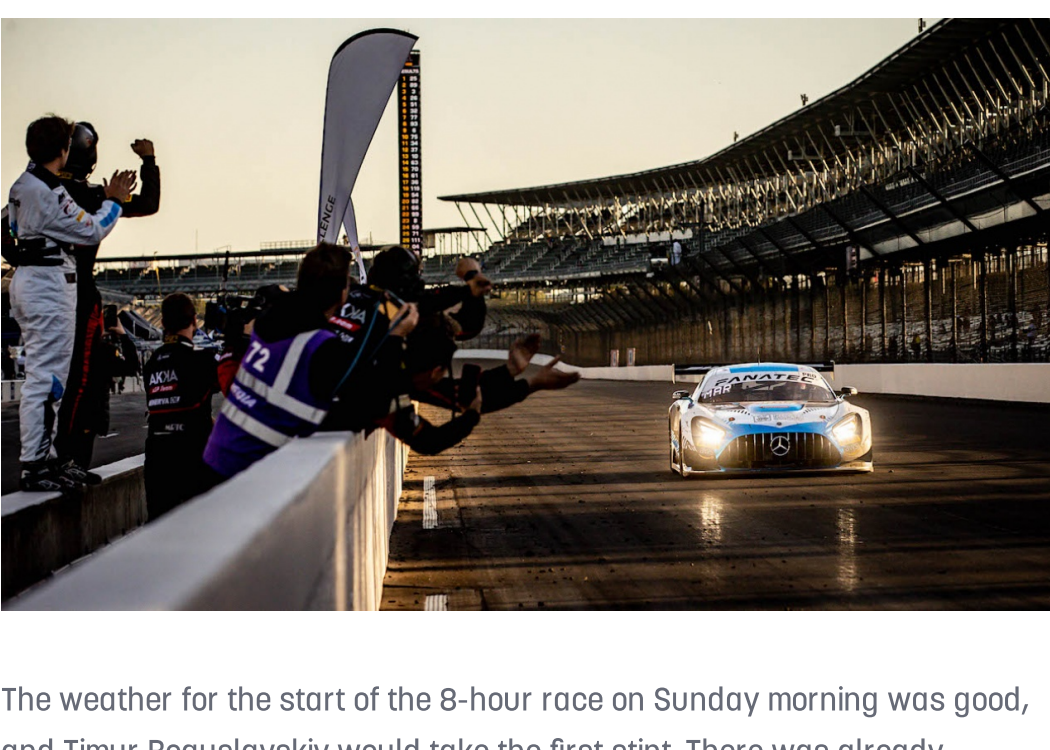
This temporary solution allowed Raffaele Marciello, Dani Juncadella and Timur Boguslavskiy to run during the private test sessions (Top 10) and the free practice sessions (P2). Finally, after having fought against the port authorities and having found a transporter to drive the 1’200km to the track, the container was delivered Saturday morning at 5:25AM local time, ahead of the Pre-Qualifying session.

Getting the Team AKKA-ASP car back was excellent, as Raffaele Marciello set the best time with 1:34.054, beating the BMW M6 by 178 thousandths.



The three qualifying sessions, one per driver, were used to produce an average that defined the combined ranking. Raffaele Marciello was the first to head out; he set the second best time (1:34.467). Timur Boguslavskiy set in Q2 a time of 1:35.395 (P12) and Dani Juncadella placed himself P13 in Q3 with a time of 1:34.965. In the end, AKKA-ASP finished P9 with an average of 1:34.942, which allowed them to take part in the ‘Pole Shootout’, or in other words, the Super Pole. This year, with more GT3 on track, the Super Pole was increased to 15 cars, compared to 10 last year. Raffaele Marciello set a time of 1:34.130 and so the #89 Mercedes-AMG would start from 8th position on the grid.

For Jérôme Policand, it was a complex exercise: “Qualifying and Superpole were difficult. We were lacking in speed with the new tyres, and of course, missing out on test sessions didn’t help our setup.”



The weather for the start of the 8-hour race on Sunday morning was good, and Timur Boguslavskiy would take the first stint. There was already contact in the first lap and only 7 minutes after the start was waved, the safety car came out on track. As the hours went by (along with many neutralisations), the #89 kept a good pace and navigated between 6th position and the lead, depending on the race strategies adopted (that weren’t always the easiest to follow).

With three hours to go, it was all still in play for the final victory, and the rhythm of the race was still being interrupted by neutralisations following contact or debris on track.



According to Jérôme Policand, the final two hours were decisive: “We chose the option to put ourselves in the lead by not changing Lello’s tyres and by only making a splash and dash to refuel. The manoeuvre paid off as we indeed took the lead. But the last two safety cars almost cost us dearly as a good portion of the field managed to refuel under full course yellow. At the restart, we were fourth. After the incident between the Ferrari and the #99 Mercedes with some stragglers, we finished in second place, 12 seconds from the winner. Overall, in comparison to the Audi and especially the Ferrari, we were lacking in speed. Timur, Dani and Lello were excellent. This round will go down in the team’s history, as starting without your car or your equipment, is unique, but above all very stressful as you can’t control anything.”



Goodbye to the USA and see you in South Africa, in Kyalami, on the 2nd of December for the finale of the 2021 Intercontinental GT Challenge.

