The more things change, the more they stay the same...someone famous once said. Perhaps the same can be said for the 2019 starting grid for the 24 Hours of Le Mans, which will kick off tomorrow, Saturday 15 June, at 15h00. With the titles decided in the LMP1 and GTE Pro classes, the importance of this race is certainly not lost on the drivers in the LMP2 and the GTE Am classes, as these classes are still up for grabs at this final race of the inaugural WEC Super Season.
What hasn’t changed is the team at the top of the LMP1 class, and as expected, Toyota still rule the class with the #7 car ahead of the #8 car. Also in the LMP2 class, it is just the order of the top few cars which has been shuffled slightly, with the #28 TDS Racing car ahead of the #31 DragonSpeed car with the #36 Signatech Alpine car now in third place.
On the track though, the two GTE classes was where the action really was, with the order at the top of these two classes changing constantly throughout Q2 and Q3. There are three different manufacturers occupying the first three positions in the Pro class. In the final analysis, the qualifying order in the Pro class was: #95 Aston Martin, followed by the #67 Ford and the #63 Corvette. The Porsches are quite spread out in the class as follows: #93 (4th in class), #92 (7th), #91 (13th) and #94 (15th). Speaking to Pascal Zurlinden, Director GT Factory Motorsports, at the Porsche ‘Meet the Team’ on Friday, he said that the reason the four RSRs were so spread out in the class was because the #91 and #94 cars were in the pits, and when they went out they got on the wrong side of a slow zone train. It was nothing technical, but the two cars were just in the wrong place at the wrong time – so it is still all to play for!
In the Am class, the Porsche cars were running strongly last night holding the top two positions with the #88 and #77 Dempsey-Proton cars running in tandem. In third place was the #84 Ferrari. But at the end of Q3 the two Porsches were separated by the #89 Risi Competizione Ferrari GTE Evo. The remaining Porsches in the Am class were spread out as follows: #86 Gulf Racing (4th in class), #78 Proton Competition (5th) and #56 Team Project 1 (6th).
The sad news from the week’s action is that the #99 Krohn Racing Porsche RSR has been withdrawn. This is a story we have been following closely since the incident occurred on Wednesday in which the Porsche was written off. The driver, Tracy Krohn, was taken to hospital where he was kept overnight on Wednesday for checks and although he felt fit on Thursday, he was not allowed to drive for a week which ruled out his participation in the weekend’s race. A replacement car was located and the team were ready to run with that car, but the ACO’s medical team would not permit him to drive. Speaking with Tracy Krohn on Thursday night, he was obviously very disappointed, as were Nic Jonsson and Patrick Long, but Krohn was quite accepting of the rules and said that he would be back next year.
The author with Tracy Krohn after his accident. As you can see, he is in excellent health.

As several drivers in the different Porsche teams commented, grid position is not a priority for them at Le Mans, the only benefit coming by way of an extra point for pole position. The race is a long one with plenty of time to move up the class, so there was little sense in hammering the car only to gain one or two places on the grid.
The ACO conference on Friday morning at 10h00 gave the assembled media a brief look at what the 2019/2020 season looked like, and a very brief and general idea of the 2020/2021 regulations that would see the introduction of the Le Mans Prototype Hypercars. The ACO only shared a few specifications of the forthcoming Hypercar generation, highlighting that they will have an 800 kg weight limit and be powered by a 750 hp engine. Hybrid technology is optional, and the aerodynamic package will enjoy a healthy degree of freedom, but the class will be tempered by BoP. The cars could either be constructed from a clean sheet of paper, or they could be adapted from existing GT production models, but little else was shared. So the word there is, watch this space. Porsche GTE Am driver, Patrick Dempsey, was also on hand to receive his Spirit of Le Mans trophy from the ACO President, Pierre Fillon.
At the ACO press conference on Friday morning
The 2019/2020 WEC season will be comprised of 33 cars, made up as follows: LMP1 – 8 cars; LMP2 – 11 cars; GTE Pro – 6 cars; and GTE Am – 8 cars. However, the GTE Pro class looks particularly thin with both Ford and BMW terminating their participation at the end of the 2018/2019 Super Season, while in the Am class, the Project 1 team will be entering two identical cars next year.
The WEC will kick off with the 4 Hours of Silverstone in September 2019, and it will finish with the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June 2020. Speaking with Vincent Beaumesnil, the ACO Sports Director on Thursday, he told me that they had decided to end the season on a high with the main event, rather than have it as the third race of the season. So it looks as though the WEC season will continue to be split over two years, for some time to come, just as it was for 2018/2019.
Around this time tomorrow, we will be sending the 61-car field on its way for the inaugural Super Season 24 Hours of Le Mans finale. Be sure to check our website for our full race report after the event. Enjoy!!

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Images by: Virtual Motorpix/Glen Smale