

CLASSIC DRIVER

FIA GT at Imola



Held in scorching heat, the latest round of the FIA GT Championship produced only 14 finishers - but six of those were on the same lap just minutes from the end. The Corvette that was so fast at Silverstone won, but Ferrari now have their main weapon up to speed - the 575 GTC Evoluzione 2005.

It was the Lamy/Gardel Larbre Competition Ferrari 550 Maranello that actually finished on the podium behind Longin/Kumpen/Hezeman's Corvette, but the potential of the 575 GTC was all too apparent. Fitted with Pirelli tyres and with Melo/Belloc (G.P.C. Giesse Squadra Corse) on board, the car came home in sixth after experiencing fuel supply problems. The crew had long held second place. The new 12 cylinder engine was making its first appearance in the car, one designed by Ferrari Corse Clienti. Further aerodynamic modifications are planned ahead of the next round in Brno, Czech Republic, on 25/26 June.



For Maserati, and its two, two-car teams, it was known that the Vitaphone Racing Team's MC12 would have a difficult time with the 80kg of ballast in addition to the 10kg imposed at the start of the season. Bertolini/Wendlinger (JMB Racing) would similarly struggle with their 70kg of extra weight as well as the 10kg. Despite this, Fabio Babini and Thomas Biagi claimed an extremely important third place at the end of a closely fought race. The result means that they hold on to the lead in the drivers' championship. The Italian crew were truly superb as they displayed extraordinary courage in finishing on the podium. The duo hounded the Corvette early on and, as at Silverstone with the Astons, in the closing stages closed in on Labre's 550.



Despite all this it was the first win for the Corvette C5-R. Mike Hezemans, Bert Longin and Anthony Kumpen put in a faultless performance, leading for nearly the entire three hours, except for a short time before their second pit-stop. They crossed the finish line 19 seconds ahead of the Larbre Competition Ferrari, with three different cars on the top three places, within 24 seconds of each other. "It is a great result after two near misses. It has also be a great weekend for me, as I got pole position, fastest lap and the win! I am quite proud of myself today !" a jubilant Mike Hezemans said.

Results:

1. Longin/Kumpen/Hezemans Corvette C5R
2. Lamy/Gardel Ferrari 550 Maranello
3. Babini/Biagi Maserati MC12 GT1
4. Bertolini/Wendlinger Maserati MC12 GT1
5. Peter/Buncombe/Rusinov Maserati MC12 GT1
6. Melo/Belloc Ferrari 575 Maranello GTC

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