

CLASSIC DRIVER

Spa 24 Hours 2006



Having battled hand-to-hand for 24 hours at Spa it was the Team Vitaphone Maserati MC12 that eventuall triumphed over the Nr. 5 Phoenix Racing Aston Martin DBR9. The two car finished just 1 min 41 secs apart after 589 laps of hard racing. Aston Martin's nemesis in the USA, a Corvette C6R, was third, some 9 laps adrift.

Bartels, Bertolini and Van de Poele were victorious, ahead of the pole-sitting Phoenix line-up of Piccini, Deletraz, Fässler and Lemeret who had held the lead on and off until 30 minutes from the end.

Within one hour and forty five minutes of racing, the second Maserati, driven by Vosse-Davies-Biagi, was forced to retire, but with a second consecutive win at Spa, and his third of the season to date, Michael Bartels and his team-mate Bertolini have strengthened their lead in the classifications. Their team-mate for Spa, Eric van de Poele, was equally thrilled with his fourth victory in this classic event.

Bartels was ecstatic after the event "There is so much to tell about this race! First of all we have to say that was one of the most brilliant races in the 24 Hours race history, I think. It was a 24-hours sprint, and we have to say a special thank you to the drivers of the Nr. 5 car. We know all each other very well, and we knew that they are very good. It was an unbelievable fight, with an incredible fighting spirit, especially in our team because we were chasing them all the way through after a few problems at the beginning of the race... and then a few laps before the end there was just 5 seconds between the first car and us, after twenty-three and a half hours of racing. It is just unbelievable. We had a big fight and it was great. The fighting spirit in Vitaphone Racing and in Pirelli was unbelievable. But it's unbelievable, what the team did. Just unbelievable!"

The fight had become a battle between three cars when the Longin-Kumpen-Hezemans-Mollekens' Corvette joined in. The positions did not change much during the night even if the pace was very high. Two incidents characterised the night session for the Maserati MC12. The first came on lap 171 when, as it made its way back to the track following a pit stop, the entry of the safety car slowed its comeback. The second, between the eleventh and twelfth hours, on lap 274, it suffered a puncture on the home straight. The car was forced to run an entire lap with a flat left rear tyre before coming into the pits. This incident had a big effect on the Maserati's race.



During the first daylight hours, the MC12 continued its comeback and gained further precious seconds. On lap 465, just before 11am, Lemeret-Deletraz-Piccini-Fässler's Aston Martin spun on a patch of oil. Van de Poele, at the wheel of the Maserati MC12, did not have any problems, and managed to reduce the gap to only 9 seconds. This reopened the race five hours from the finish. An hour later, on lap 490, Bertolini – who had replaced Van de Poele – retook the lead with an advantage of more than twenty seconds over the Aston Martin. The pit stop on lap 500, three and a half hours from the end, was decisive: the positions were swapped once more and the closing stages of the race proved to be thrilling.

The rain began to fall just over two hours from the end of the race and the change in the weather affected all the teams.

The MC12 made its stop on lap 550, one and a half hours from the end. When he came back onto the track, Van de Poele had only a 10 second lead over Piccini but, lap after lap, this was reduced. By lap 557, it was down to only a second. The final stop was the decisive one. Michael Bartels substituted an exhausted Van de Poele and drove onto the track with a decisive lead over the Aston Martin with Fässler at the wheel. In the final 45 minutes, Bartels maintained the lead that he held over his pursuers, one that at the chequered flag was timed at 1'41"452. In third was Longin-Kumpen-Hezemans-Mollekens' Corvette C6R, nine laps down.





GT2 + 'G2' - Ferrari and Porsche all the way

Five of the Ferrari 430 GT2 cars were in the points at the end of the race. AF Corse claimed a brilliant 1-2, with Mika Salo, Rui Aguas and Timo Scheider victorious in the nr 59 car. They were followed by the Nr. 58 car of Matteo Bobbi, Jaime Melo and Rui Aguas, with the leading Scuderia Ecosse Ferrari third, fighting their way back up the grid after an early off. "It was very nice, the team did a fantastic job, the Ferrari car was wonderful, and the Pirelli tyres were working really well," Rui Aguas said afterwards. "My two team-mates, they did a wonderful job. They were really fast and constant throughout all the race. I would like to thank the mechanics also, it was very hard for them, they didn't sleep much. So I'm very happy and we got good points for the championship. It's my first time here, and my first win !"

Manthey Racing were first and second in the special 'G2' class with their brand new Porsche 911 GT3 RSRs, finishing 14th and 15th overall. The category was won by the Nr. 197 car of 2004 N-GT Champions Sascha Maassen and Lucas Luhr, joined by Marcel Tiemann, who last raced in the FIA GT Championship in 1998. "Our main goal was to come here and do a 24-hour test under race conditions, because as you know the car is brand new. For sure there is some work to do before Porsche can give this car to the customer, but we already know that it can be successful," Luhr said. "The good thing was to come here without any pressure for championship points, because Spa is always a really dangerous race for the Championship. It was not an easy race, we spent a little bit of time in the pits, but at the end of the day it is good for all of us."

Results Spa 24 Hours -

- 1 Van De Poele/Bartels/Bertolini - Maserati MC12 GT1 589 LAPS
- 2 Lemeret/Deletraz/Piccini/Fassler - Aston Martin DBR9 589 LAPS
- 3 Longin/Kumpen/Hezemans/Mollekens - Corvette C6R -9 LAPS
- 4 Pescatori/Babini/Enge/Kox - Aston Martin DBR9 -11 LAPS
- 5 Menten/Belloc/Bornhauser/Bouvy - Corvette C6R -24 LAPS
- 6 Salo/Aguas/Scheider - Ferrari 430 GT2 -29 LAPS



GT3 - Aston Martin takes its first pole position but double victory goes to Dodge Viper

Patrick Bornhauser and Frédéric Bouvy made it two wins in two days for the nr 10 Racing Logistic Dodge Viper Competition Coupe, but in qualifying, driving the Nr. 23 BMS Scuderia Italia Aston Martin DBRS9, Marcello Zani set the fastest time in the first qualifying session with a time of 2.27.458.

"This is the first pole position for me, and also for Aston Martin, so it is a real pleasure. Aston Martin and BMS did an incredible job and the car is pretty good. I pushed really hard, I have a good feeling here, and I really wanted to get a good result. This track is good for us, my team mate Massimiliano Mugelli is going well, so I'm sure that in both races we will be able to fight for the first position, in order to get important points for the Championship," Zani said.

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