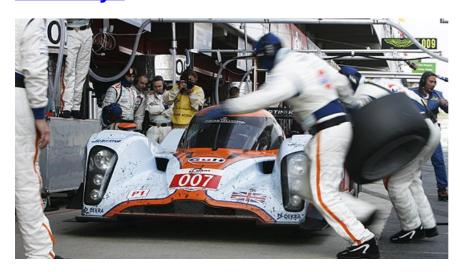
CLASSIC DRIVER

Reigning in Spain: Dream Debut Win for Aston Martin at Catalunya



Aston Martin Racing won the opening 1000km round of this year's Le Mans Series with its new LMP1 car.

The light blue and orange, Gulf-sponsored machines ran very well in practice (second and third on the grid) with '007', driven by **Jan Charouz** (CZ), **Tomas Enge** (CZ) and **Stefan Mücke** (DE), victorious after 209 laps of the **Catalunya** circuit.

The cars had been tested only briefly pre-season, and are developments of the production-based Aston Martin V12-powered prototype that ran so well in the **2008 Le Mans 24 Hours**. The **Le Mans Series** comprises five, 1000km endurance races at European circuits: **Catalunya**, **Spa-Francorchamps**, **Algarve**, **Nürburgring**, **Silverstone**.

Aston Martin Racing is one of 52 entrants in the series and competes in the top, 'LMP1' category. The marque is also represented in 'LM GT2' by **Drayson Racing** and its **Aston Martin Vantage GT2**. In LMP1, the British company's chief rivals are the ex-works **Audi R10 TDIs** of **Kolles Racing** and two **Pescarolo-Judds**.



That said, in Spain, another British team was making a stunning debut and that was Silverstone-based **Strakka Racing**. **Danny Watts** put the team's **Ginetta-Zytek GZ09S** on pole and the car (co-driven by **Peter Hardman** and **Nick Leventis**), eventually finished fifth, having experienced bad luck during the safety car and yellow flag periods.

Back to **Aston Martin** and it was a very strong showing with both cars consistently on the pace and 007 - driven at the time by **Stefan Mücke** - was able to pass the then-leading **Pescarolo-Judd** just a few laps before the end of the race. It had been at the top of the leader-board for over 60 laps and the final margin of victory was just 14.8 seconds.



Aston Martin Racing car number 009, driven by **Harold Primat** (CH), **Miguel Ramos** (PT) and **Darren Turner** (GB), was another top-three contender but dropped out after a spin 40 minutes before the end of the 1000km race.

Afterwards, a highly pleased **David Richards**, **Chairman of Aston Martin**, said: "This momentous victory is a fantastic reward for the many weeks and months of hard work put in by every member of the team. Endurance racing is above all a team sport, and I think that we have proved this once again today."



Stefan Mücke, who crossed the finishing line first, commented, "I'm absolutely delighted with this result, but it was a very close call at the finish. It was so tight at the end that I really did not know which way everything would go. Eventually we were able to take advantage of the safety car to close up, and then we found a gap in the traffic to pass the leader. He went to the inside, we went to the outside and thankfully it worked. Once we were through, I think we proved that we had the pace to win."

The next **Le Mans Series** round will be in Belgium, at **Spa-Francorchamps** on May 8-10. **Aston Martin Racing** will enter two Gulf-sponsored LMP1 prototypes in the **Le Mans 24 Hours** on June 13-14.

Text - Steve Wakefield Photos - Aston Martin Racing + DPPI + Marcus Potts / CMC

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