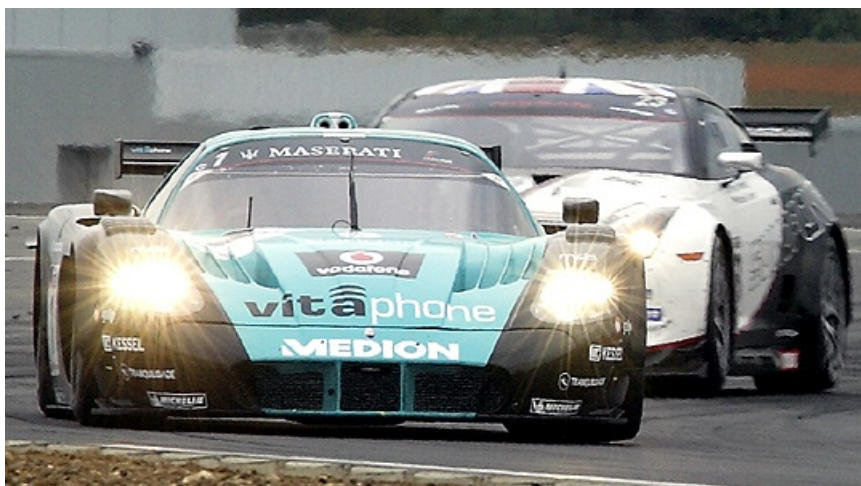

'Silverstone Supercar' Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy 2010

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All change at Silverstone - even your correspondent. Regular Classic Driver readers will know I normally report on historic racing events, but last weekend I was thrown in at the deep end of the contemporary GT racing scene with a few, topsy turvy days at the second round of the FIA GT1 World Championship.

Before we look at those ups and downs, there was one constant that made me feel a little at home: the feature race of the weekend was for the historic **Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy**. This beautiful prize - topped by a figure of Mercury - was first contested in 1905 and past winners include **Nuvolari, Moss, Hulme** and **Graham Hill**. As for the rest of the weekend, competitors could take nothing for granted.

Travelling from the inaugural Championship round in **Abu Dhabi**, with its air temperature of 30deg, Silverstone presented contestants with something a little different - 8 degrees with a chilling breeze to accompany it.



In order to maintain 'balance of performance', the more successful cars from **Abu Dhabi** had ballast weight added by the FIA stewards while others had it removed. The final change, before racing started, came in the shape of the just-opened, £5m extension to Silverstone's GP circuit. This infield loop (**Arena Section**) turns 90deg right at **Abbey**, before gently curving left towards the arena area which consists of a 90deg right (**Village**), shortly followed by the sweeping left-hander (**Loop**), before exiting left (**Aintree**) on to the old **National Straight** joining the original circuit at **Brooklands**.

Thus presenting the **Tourist Trophy** competitors with completely uncharted territory.



Aston Martin occupied the front row of the grid for Saturday's TT qualifying race and, in contrast to the marque's performance in **Abu Dhabi**, it proceeded to dominate events. **Makowiecki/Accary** took the flag in their #9 DBR9 followed by **Hrschi/Piccione** in the sister #10 Aston. Pole-sitters **Turner/Enge** managed 4th in the #7 DBR9 after picking up two drive-through penalties, both for cutting the pit entry!

Consequently, **Astons** blanketed the front row again for Sunday's TT and, by the end of lap one, held the first three places. Unfortunately, **Abu Dhabi** race winner **Romain Grosjean**, in the GT40-resembling **Ford GT Matech**, suffered a complete turn of fortune, crashing out at **Copse** corner on lap one with broken suspension. On the second lap, **Mike Hezeman's Corvette Z06** was destroyed by fire down at **Stowe**, bringing out the safety car while the debris was cleared and closing the field back up again.



At the restart, the three leading **Astons** scampered off but the mid-field dices that followed kept the windswept spectators on the edge of their seats. You might not see much overtaking in F1; watch GT1, you'll get plenty there.

After 25 minutes, the pit-stop window opened with the **Turner/Enge #7 Aston** immediately diving in, giving the drivers early fresh rubber and a clear track to capitalise on it. By the end of the stops, **Thomas Enge** was hot on the exhaust of the #9 lead **DBR9** with **Thomas Accary** at its wheel.



One lap after the pit stops it was announced that **Accary** was to serve a drive-through penalty for an infringement during the driver change. We waited. Lap after lap, the **#9 Aston** sped past the pits just holding its advantage. The public address system then called for the **Hexis AMR** team manager to report to the chief steward's office and officials prepared the black flag.

Suddenly, **Accary** was in the pits, stopping the **Aston** briefly before leaving again, followed by two rubber tracks as he wheelspun his way along the pit road. Game over now, he had a secure second place but the lead was lost. Meanwhile, **Jamie Campbell-Walter**, #22, was elbowing the aptly named **Sumo Nissan GT-R** up into a well-deserved third place.

So there you have it: the headline reads **Aston Martin** takes first and second place in the historic **Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy**.



Postscript: All change again... Racing over, trophies presented but, while most people were packing to leave, the stewards were hard at work in race control, along with the scrutineers in *parc ferme*.

Stop Press! Re-write that headline, the victorious **Aston DBR9** was excluded from the results as its underfloor skid-plank was found to be worn marginally beyond the permitted thickness.

So the second-placed **Aston** surely must be promoted to first place? No, No, No! They had received a 15-second, post-race penalty for not serving that drive-through in time. The famous Trophy now goes to the British-based, #22 **Sumo Power Nissan GT-R** driven by **Warren Hughes** and **Jamie Campbell-Walter**.

The GT1 circus moves on to **Brno** in three weeks' time, but the **Young Driver Aston Martin Racing (AMR)** team is appealing against the scrutineers' ruling, so it could be all change yet again before they get there.

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