

CLASSIC DRIVER

2006 Le Mans 24 Hours



A record 235,000 spectators witnessed history being made last weekend as Audi became the first diesel-powered winner of the world's most famous motor race. It was a hot relentless grind as the local favourites, Pescarolo Sport, gamely took up the chase but looking at the overwhelming technical superiority and back-up there was only ever going to be one victor.

So it was Frank Biela (Germany), Emanuele Pirro (Italy) and Marco Werner (Germany) that clinched the sixth and most important Le Mans win for Audi so far. Dindo Capello (Italy), Tom Kristensen (Denmark) and Allan McNish (Scotland) also achieved a podium in finishing third overall, sandwiching the all-French driving line-up of Eric Helary, Franck Montagny and Sebastien Loeb in the number 17 Pescarolo-Judd C60.

The Audi R10 TDIs, each powered by a 650 hp V12 TDI engine, were by far the fastest and most economical cars. During the entire race, one was always at the head of the field. Le Mans record winner Tom Kristensen drove the fastest lap of the race, setting a 3m 31.211s time, and he was the first driver at the wheel of an LM P1 sports car to cover 16 laps with one fuel load. Completing 380 laps, Audi also set a new distance record.



Biela and Pirro celebrated their respective fourth Le Mans victory after 2000, 2001 and 2002. Thus, they rank in fourth position in the record books behind Tom Kristensen, Jacky Ickx and Derek Bell. For Audi, it was their sixth Le Mans win and the third in succession.

Audi's triumph was completed by Dindo Capello, Tom Kristensen and Allan McNish who finished third. The #7 R10 TDI was in the lead in the early phase of the race when the injectors of the right-hand cylinder bank of the V12 TDI engine had to be replaced in the fourth hour. Having dropped down to 16th position, Capello, Kristensen and McNish fought back with the fastest lap times in the field to third place in spite of further setbacks at night and in the early morning hours. Following a collision with a GT1 car, the undertray was loosened, and also the left-hand turbocharger had to be changed. Number 7 lost almost a full hour in the pits. Thanks to the mechanics who carried out all the repairs they still made it to the podium.

In LM P2, where the attrition was particularly fierce, the No.25 RML Lola AER of Thomas Erdos, Mike Newton and Andy Wallace managed a solid win, having led the class for almost the entire race. Behind it were the

No.24 Binnie Motorsports Lola Zytek of William Binnie, Allen Timpany and Yojiro Terada, and the No.27 Miracle Motorsports Courage AER of John Macaluso, Andy Lally and Ian James. From a Classic Driver point of view mention must be made of the #12 Courage-Mugen LC70 driven by [Gregor Fisker](#), Sam Hancock and Alexander Frei. Battling firstly with steering problems and then succumbing to engine failure early on Sunday morning the team had a difficult time of it but will no doubt return next year.



The GT1 battle is best [read elsewhere](#), suffice it to say there was just a hair's breadth for 20-odd hours between the two Aston Martin Racing DBR9s and two Pratt & Miller-developed Corvettes, with victory just going the American car's way in the last few. David Richards said recently that he'd like Le Mans to be run for road-based sports cars and if this year's race was anything to go by then that would be a very exciting concept.

GT2 saw three different marques on the podium. The winner was the No.81 Team LNT Panoz Esperante driven by the all-British team of Tom Kimber-Smith, Richard Dean, and Lawrence Tomlinson. Second place was won by the No.83 Seikel Motorsport Porsche 911 GT3 RSR driven by Lars Erik Nielsen, Pierre Ehret, and Domink Farnbacher, which suffered such misfortune in the last hour of the race; what seemed certain victory was denied them by a technical problem. In third place, in the model's Le Mans debut, was the No.87 Scuderia Ecosse Ferrari F430 GT in the hands of Chris Niarchos, Tim Mullen and British GT champion Andrew Kirkaldy.



The latter put on a fantastic show and was the only Ferrari to finish; none of the GT1 550s seeing the chequered flag.

And last but not least, a wonderful effort by the Japanese-entered Lamborghini Murciélago that sounded so fantastic over 24 hours resulted in the privately-financed team finishing in 23rd position, last in GT1 but a firm favourite with the crowd.

Don't forget the famous 'circuit de la Sarthe' will be reverberating to racing engines once more in just a few week's time when the track will host the **2006 Le Mans Classic** from 7 - 9 July. For further details please visit www.lemansclassic.com.

Race results

1 Biela/Pirro/Werner (Audi R10 TDI) 380 laps in 24h 04m 47.325s

- 2 Helary/Montagny/Loeb (Pescarolo-Judd) - 4 laps
- 3 Capello/Kristensen/McNish (Audi R10 TDI) - 13 laps
- 4 Gavin/Beretta/Magnussen (Chevrolet) - 25 laps
- 5 Minassian/Collard/Comas (Pescarolo-Judd) - 28 laps
- 6 Enge/Piccini/Turner (Aston Martin) - 30 laps

Text - Steve Wakefield

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