

CLASSIC DRIVER

2007 Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy - FIA GTs at Silverstone

Even with its new two-hour format, allowing entrants to run flat-out for longer periods, the FIA GT round at Silverstone saw the 2006 winning team victorious again as the Vitaphone Racing Maserati MC12 beat the two pursuing Chevrolet Corvettes by a margin of over 30 seconds. The highest Aston Martin DBR9 of Austrian Jetalliance Racing, with drivers Karl Wendlinger and Ryan Sharp, finished in fourth position, on the same lap but 1:14.268 secs behind the winners.

Now in its 102nd year, the United Kingdom's oldest motor race was started in characteristic style on Friday morning by the convoy of supercars leaving the **Royal Automobile Club's** Pall Mall address in a police-escorted convoy to **Silverstone**. The Club's Chairman, Tim Keown, travelled with the famous trophy in a **Jaguar XKR** convertible, arriving at the home of the British Grand Prix at lunchtime, by way of nearby **Towcester race course** where the 30+ cars (including a **Spyker** and **Bugatti Veyron**) lined up for a photo-call.



Practice had seen eventual second-place men **Hezemans/Deletraz** and their **Corvette C6R** take pole position, ahead of ex-Formula One driver **Karl Wendlinger** in the blue and white **Aston Martin**, closely followed by the **Salo/Biagio MC12** and the **Scuderia Italia DBR9** of **Babini/Davies**.

In GT2, it was the **Ferrari F430 GT** of **Scuderia Ecosse** that took pole, but not the car of ex-World Champion **Nigel Mansell**; **Mullen/Kirkaldy** just beating **Bruni/Melo** similarly-mounted for **AF Corse**.





When the Dodge pace car pulled off at 12.00 on Sunday it was Aston Martin all the way as the **JetAlliance DBR9** comfortably led the following **Corvette** and **Maserati**, giving cheer to the owners of the incredible collection of over 90 **Aston Martin Vanquish** motor cars parked nearby, owners that had been specially invited by Astons to celebrate the final year of model production at **Newport Pagnell**.

The British manufacturer's hopes of a repeat of its 2005 success at the TT fell within 20 minutes or so as first the yellow **Corvette** and then the blue and green **Maserati** caught and passed the **DBR9**. The rest of the race was an ongoing battle between the **Vitaphone** and **Scuderia Playteam Sarafree MC12s**, the two **Corvettes** and various **DBR9s**. The opening race's winners, the German **Lamborghini Murciélago** of the **All-Inkl.com** team, were never really on the pace, the leading car finishing 9th overall.



At the finish, it was a fairly comfortable win for the **Vitaphone MC12**, although the **Corvettes** proved once again what a strong package they are and how **Aston Martin** will have to be at the peak of its game at **Le Mans** this year when it comes up against the 'works' all-yellow cars.

One of the highlights of the GT1 race was the **Playteam Sarafree MC12** of **Bertolini/Piccini**, a pairing that made an extraordinary comeback after a drive-through on lap one costing them around forty seconds. **Bertolini**, Maserati's official test driver, climbed from twentieth to seventh place before handing over to **Andrea Piccini** and garnering an eventual finish in 5th place, on the same lap as the winners.



The GT2 class saw the eagerly-anticipated return by **Mansell**, the hero of so many **British Grands Prix** in the 80s and 90s, produced a typical gritty performance but he didn't, in reality, challenge for the class lead despite being in one of the top cars. It was a **Ferrari F430 GT** benefit in GT2 with the **AF Corse** car of **Vilander/Muller** taking the class ahead of the **Team Edil Cris** duo of **Ruberti/Pasini**.



As usual in European FIA GT events, the main race was supported by two one-hour **GT3** rounds and, at Silverstone, the first of a new **GT4 European Cup** series that saw the British debut of **Aston Martin's N24 V8 Vantage GT** car, the two yellow cars finishing on the podium in both races.

The **GT3** race had a bumper entry of over 50 cars and the surprise of the meeting was the speed of the Swiss-prepared **Matech Racing Ford GTs**, gaining pole for the first race and running strongly in both legs although not finishing highly in either, both rounds won by the **Kessel Racing Ferrari F430 Challenge** duo of Henri Moser and Gilles Vannelet. Sunday's race proved particularly exciting as the bright red Ferrari was pushed all the way by the number 15 **S-Berg Racing Lamborghini Gallardo** driven by Erik Janis, who finished just 0.5 second adrift.

Overall Results -

1. Biagi/Salo Maserati MC12 GT1 2:00:57.020
2. Hezemans/Deletraz Corvette C6R + 37.465
3. Kumpen/Longin Corvette C5R + 1:04.259
4. Wendlinger/Sharp Aston Martin DBR9 + 1:14.268
5. Bertolini/Piccini Maserati MC12 GT1 + 1:18.710
6. Ramos/Montanari Maserati MC12 GT1 + 1 lap

2007 FIA GT Calendar -

20/05 Romania - Bucharest
24/06 Italy - Monza
08/07 Germany - Oschersleben
29/07 Belgium - Spa-Francorchamps
08/09 Italy - Adria
23/09 Czech - Republic Brno
30/09 France - Nogaro
21/10 Belgium - Zolder

Editor's Note: *I was able to sample the weekend's action from behind the wheel of a **Porsche 911 Carrera** for the Supercar Tour, and at the controls of the **Aston Martin Works Service** converted manual transmission Vanquish for the **Vanquish Celebration Day** on Sunday.*

*Both superb occasions that we will be covering in further detail this week on **Classic Driver**.*

Story: *Steve Wakefield*

Photos: *FIA GT - Strictly Copyright*

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