

Porsche 963 establishes itself as third major player and fastest LMDh car

05/02/2024 Preview, FIA World Endurance Championship WEC, Round 2, Portimão (Portugal)

- Porsche Penske Motorsport starts from positions five and seven
- Works team feels well prepared for the Portimão race
- Pink Porsche 911 RSR of Iron Dames sets second fastest GTE time

The Porsche 963 tackle this year's first FIA World Endurance Championship WEC race on European soil from grid rows three and four. Kévin Estre posted the fifth-best lap time in the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve. As such, Porsche Penske Motorsport has established itself as the third major player. Within the 11-strong Hypercar class, the works team fields the fastest hybrid prototype complying with the LMDh regulations. In the sister car, Frenchman Frédéric Makowiecki qualified in

seventh. Of the six Porsche in the GTE Am category, the Iron Dames 911 RSR was among the fastest. Sarah Bovy, Michelle Gatting and Rahel Frey tackle the six-hour race from the second grid spot in their class.

Frenchman Kévin Estre and his works driver teammates André Lotterer from Germany and Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) take up round two of the FIA WEC season from P5 on Sunday. In the 15-minute qualifying, Estré clocked a lap time session of 1.32.404 minutes, thus beating the Hypercars from Peugeot and Cadillac, among others. At the wheel of Porsche Penske Motorsport's second Porsche 963, his fellow countryman Frédéric Makowiecki was only slightly slower on the 4.653-kilometre rollercoaster track with a time of 1:32.560 minutes. He shares the cockpit with Michael Christensen (Denmark) and the American Dane Cameron.

"Our Porsche 963 was the fastest LMDh racing car in today's qualifying," states Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. "The systematic work in the practice sessions paid off in the lap times. We were able to make the best of the opportunities here in Portimão and did a great job overall. We've made progress but we're definitely still too far off the LMH vehicles. Our solid performance makes us optimistic for tomorrow's race, even though the nice weather and warmer racetrack don't particularly play into our hands. Right now, we wish our guys the best of luck for round three of the IMSA season."

In the GTE-Am category, the pink Porsche 911 RSR fielded by the Iron Dames squad once again gave a gripping show for pole position in this class. At the season opener in Sebring, Sarah Bovy beat the Corvette driven by Ben Keating from the UK. In Portimao, the Belgian and her teammates Michelle Gatting (Denmark) and Rahel Frey (Switzerland) line up on the second grid spot, just 0.217 seconds off the pole-sitter. Her top time in the second sector of the track remained unbeaten. In the second-best Porsche, local hero Miguel Pedro Ramos planted the racing car campaigned by Project1 – AO on position eight. The Portuguese driver shares the No. 56 cockpit with the former Porsche Junior Matteo Cairoli from Italy and his young compatriot Guilherme de Oliveira. Position nine in the GTE Am class is occupied by Dempsey Proton's No. 77 Porsche driven by team boss Christian Ried (Germany), Mikkel Pedersen (Denmark) and Julien Andlauer. The Frenchman also came up through the ranks via the Porsche Junior initiative.

The six-hour endurance race on the 4.653-kilometre rollercoaster circuit close to Portugal's Algarve coast takes off at noon on Sunday (1:00 pm CEST). The TV station RTL Nitro broadcasts the last race hour live on free TV. Large segments of the WEC season opener can also be viewed live on pay-TV Eurosport 2. For a fee, the FIA WEC app provides a live stream and live timing.

Also today, round three of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship will get underway in Long Beach (USA). There, the two Porsche 963 fielded by the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team tackle a sprint race over just 100 minutes at 2:05 pm local time (CEST: 11:05 pm). Outside the USA and Canada, the entire race can be viewed live on the website IMSA.tv.

Drivers' comments after the qualifying

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): "Not a bad session. We're certainly still too far off pole position, but we managed to further improve our qualifying package. At the moment we're behind Toyota and Ferrari. But unlike in Sebring, we're now ahead of Cadillac, and that's an improvement. Our race preparations are going well and that's definitely different from the qualifying. Peugeot and Cadillac are currently our closest rivals. Let's see if we can do better than Ferrari over the race distance."

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 963 #5): "The qualifying was acceptable. However, I made two or three little mistakes and didn't quite pull a perfect lap together. All in all, our performance was good. Our preparation and the choice of tyres are geared towards the race. Let's see what we can achieve tomorrow."

Sarah Bovy (Porsche 911 RSR #85): "Second on the grid for tomorrow's race is definitely a great spot given the extremely high level of competition. This distance suits me and the other two ladies very much. We've already won the ELMS in Portimão. Still, it's very easy to make a mistake here. We'll stay focused and try to get the best out of it."

Results

Hypercar class:

1. Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa (CH/NZ/J), Toyota #8, 1:30.171 minutes

2. Conway/Kobayashi/Lopez (UK/J/ARG), Toyota #7, 1:30.444 minutes

3. Fuoco/Molina/Nielsen (I/E/DK), Ferrari #50, 1:31.596 minutes

5. Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6, 1:32.404 minutes

7. Cameron/Christensen/Makowiecki (USA/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 1:32.560 minutes

GTE-Am class:

1. Keating/Varrone/Catsburg (USA/ARG/NL), Corvette #33, 1:41.362 minutes

2. Bovy/Frey/Gatting (B/CH/DK), Porsche 911 RSR #85, 1:41.579 minutes

3. Alessi/Mann/de Pauw (I/USA/B), Ferrari 488 GTE Evo #21, 1:41.628 minutes

8. Pedro Ramos/de Oliveira/Cairoli (P/P/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 1:42.024 minutes

9. Ried/Pedersen/Andlauer (D/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 1:42.105 minutes

10. Hardwick/Robichon/Tincknell (USA/CDN/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 1:42.198 minutes

13. Wainwright/Pera/Barker (UK/I/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 1:43.273 minutes

14. Schiavoni/Cressoni/Picariello (I/I/B), Porsche 911 RSR #60, 1:43.528 minutes

Porsche Penske Motorsport also claims podium result in the WEC

- FIA World Endurance Championship works team achieves third in Portimão
- Porsche 963 won the IMSA race in Long Beach just hours earlier
- Faulty tank system sensor adds extra suspense shortly before the finish
- Porsche 911 RSR of Iron Dames clinches another podium result in Portugal

Porsche Penske Motorsport has wrapped up round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) at the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve with a podium result. After six hours of racing, Laurens Vanthoor, Kévin Estre and André Lotterer crossed the finish line third with their Porsche 963. For the works team, this marks the second major success with the LMDh prototype within a few hours: In Long Beach, California, their team colleagues had won the 100-minute sprint race in the IMSA WeatherTech Sportscar Championship, with the sister Porsche 963 securing third place. In the GTE-Am class, a Porsche also clinched a podium result in Portugal. At the wheel of their Iron Dames' 911 RSR, Sarah Bovy, Rahel Frey and Michelle Gatting fought hard for victory over long stretches and ultimately reached the flag in third place.

This was the first time that the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team contested two races on two continents almost at the same time on one weekend. The transatlantic teamwork between the IMSA and World Endurance Champion crews paid off for the sports car manufacturer. In Long Beach, Nick Tandy (United Kingdom) and Matthieu Jaminet (France) drove to victory in the Porsche 963 after a highly dramatic 100-minute sprint. Their teammates Felipe Nasr (Brazil) and Matt Campbell (Australia) were celebrated for their hard-fought third place.

The two Porsche 963 campaigned by the WEC team headed into the six-hour race on the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve from positions five and seven. In the first few metres, Laurens Vanthoor promptly overtook one of the two Ferrari in his No. 6 hybrid prototype, however after ten minutes, the Belgian had to relinquish his fourth place. The strategic gamble after the first stint yielded greater rewards: Both Porsche 963 opted against changing the tyres during a refuelling stop. The time saved in the pits gave them a good ten seconds, which put them in third and eighth place.

While problems hampered several of their rivals in the first three hours, the No. 6 car was still on course

for a podium result and the sister car managed to progress to fifth place up until midway through the race. With a good 100 minutes left on the clock, a problem involving the power steering forced the No. 5 prototype into the pits for a longer repair stop. Just under an hour later, it rejoined the race in P11 in the hypercar class.

At the beginning of the final hour of racing, the safety car was deployed for the first time so that a vehicle could be salvaged. For André Lotterer in his Porsche 963, the timing could not have been worse: For the No. 6 car, which had reclaimed third place, a pit stop was almost due. After the race restarted at about 5:10 pm local time, the No. 51 Ferrari directly behind him also had to pit. Lotterer managed to defend his position. With only a few laps to go, another refuelling stop added extra suspense: At the previous pit stop, not enough fuel had been pumped into the car due to a faulty sensor. However, the advantage over the now fourth-placed Cadillac was enough for the Porsche to cross the finish line behind the victorious Toyota driven by Brendon Hartley (New Zealand), Sébastien Buemi (Switzerland) and Ryo Hirakawa (Japan) as well as the Ferrari of Antonio Fuocco (Italy), Miguel Molina (Spain) and Niklas Nielsen (Denmark).

“A first and two second places on the same race weekend: This fantastic result shows that our parallel commitment in the WEC and the IMSA is bearing fruit – we’ve picked up speed,” explains Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. “We had to fight here in Portimão, but all in all it worked out and we’re more than happy with third place. Our No. 5 car had a problem with the power steering and we now need to analyse this. We also need to take another close look at the reason behind the last refuelling stop that our No. 6 Porsche 963 had to make shortly before the finish. Still, it was great to see how focussed and goal-oriented the crew reacted under such tricky conditions in both cases.”

In the GTE-Am category, the 911 RSR fielded by the Iron Dames customer team put in an impressive performance over long stretches at round two of the WEC season. Sarah Bovy headed into the race from second on the grid but initially lost one position. After a lengthy duel with Ben Keating (UK) in his Chevrolet Corvette, the Belgian fought her way to the front after 45 minutes and then again after the first pit stop. The Swiss racer Rahel Frey extended the lead. It was only in the final third of the race that the pink Porsche had to let the Corvette and the No. 83 Ferrari pass. The 911 RSR of Project 1 – AO shared by Matteo Cairoli (Italy) and the two Portuguese Miguel Ramos and Guilherme de Oliveira reached the flag in sixth place. They were followed over the line by the identical No. 77 model driven by Julien Andlauer (France), Mikkel Pedersen (Denmark) and Dempsey-Proton team boss Christian Ried (Germany).

Drivers’ comments after the race

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): “This podium finish is really cool. That was hard work! Our mechanics have had very short nights. Third place is the reward for that. Honestly, this feels like a victory. But we still have to develop and improve the car. And we also have to maintain a flawless performance in the future.”

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 963 #5): "Congratulations to our sister car! I'm happy that a Porsche 963 is on the podium. Our race was very tough. We couldn't match the pace of the others and now we have to take some time to analyse what caused it, what's right and what's wrong. We want to be back up with the play at the next race in Spa."

Rahel Frey (Porsche 911 RSR #85): "We'll happily take this podium, of course. The points are important. However, we thought there was more in it for us. Unfortunately, we again made some minor mistakes. We have to eliminate them before Spa, and most importantly, Le Mans. Still, our pace was good and I'm proud of the girls. Despite us going all out on the track today, the Corvette and the Ferrari were slightly faster. We still have to find a bit of speed."

Results

Hypercar class:

1. Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa (CH/NZ/J), Toyota #8, 222 laps

2. Fuoco/Molina/Nielsen (I/E/DK), Ferrari #50, 221 laps

3. Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6, 221 laps

10. Cameron/Christensen/Makowiecki (USA/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 189 laps

GTE-Am class:

1. Keating/Varrone/Catsburg (USA/ARG/NL), Corvette #33, 206 laps

2. Perez Companc/Wadoux/Rovera (ARG/F/I), Ferrari #83, 206 laps

3. Bovy/Frey/Gatting (B/CH/DK), Porsche 911 RSR #85, 206 laps

6. Ramos/de Oliveira/Cairoli (P/P/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 205 laps

7. Ried/Pedersen/Andlauer (D/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 205 laps

9. Hardwick/Robichon/Tincknell (USA/CDN/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 204 laps

11. Wainwright/Pera/Barker (UK/I/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 204 laps

12. Schiavoni/Cressoni/Picariello (I/I/B), Porsche 911 RSR #60, 203 laps

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