

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE : Two poles and two podiums at Brands Hatch!

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#News

Last weekend, Brands Hatch, Kent, welcomed the penultimate round of the Sprint Cup of the GT World Challenge. Second in the overall championship rankings as they headed to the UK, the crew of the #88 AKKA-ASP, Timur Boguslavskiy and Raffaele Marciello, saw their hopes dashed despite two poles and crossing the finish line of Race 1 in the lead (before getting a penalty) and a retirement, while in the lead, in the last third of the last lap of Race 2 due to a puncture. They will now be fighting for the title of vice-champion in Valencia, Spain (25/26 September) as the 2021 Sprint Cup Champions are already known. After being at the front for the practice sessions, and a half-hearted first race, the two other AKKA-ASP teams shone brightly in Race 2 by getting a podium each: overall podium (P3= for Petru Umbrurescu and Jules Gounon (#89) and the Silver podium (P3) for Konstantin Tereschenko and Jim Pla (#87) The next meeting of the GT World Challenge will be an Endurance race with the German round held at the Nürburgring where, just like Spa, the weather might have some surprises in store.

After a few weeks off, the racing season picked up again and the protagonists of the Sprint Cup headed to England, to the very technical track, shaped by curves and an undulating terrain, that is Brands Hatch. Out of the thirty cars entered, team AKKA-ASP lined up three Mercedes-AMG GT3, entrusted to the regular crews.

As of the first track time during the free practice sessions, the AKKA-ASP armada led the way and Jim Pla (#87) took the lead ahead of Raffaele Marciello (#88), whereas Jules Gounon (#89) was fourth. This particularly effective start was confirmed in the pre-qualifying session with all three cars in the Top 10. Timur Boguslavskiy and Raffaele Marciello (#88) were P4, Konstantin Tereschenko and Jim Pla (#87) P5 and third Silver, whereas the pair of Petru Umbrurescu and Jules Gounon (#89) were ninth.

On the kind of track where overtaking can prove delicate thanks to the narrowness of the track, the qualifying sessions were crucial.

In the first session, which would set Race 1, Timur Boguslavskiy (#88) facing strong competition, didn't hold back and took the second time overall. Konstantin Tereschenko (#87) finished 9th Silver (P15 overall) and Petru Umbrurescu (#89) was 17th. At the end of the day, the polesitter (#38) got a penalty and fell back two places on the grid. This decision allowed Timur Boguslavskiy to start from pole for the very first time.

In the second qualifying session, Raffaele Marciello (#88) placed himself quickly at the front by setting the best time. Jim Pla (#87) and Jules Gounon (#89) were also off to a great start. But after 8 minutes, a short shower interfered with the session and froze the times. With fewer than 5 minutes to go when the rain ended, some drivers headed back out on track and improved their times, including Jules Gounon (#89). By the end, Lello Marciello (#88) won his 8th pole position in Sprint Cup, Jules Gounon (#89) was 4th and Jim Pla (#87) 7th, unable to make a second attempt.



Race 1 – Pole, victory, penalty, and disappointment

The first race of the weekend took place Sunday by the end of the morning. Although overcast, the weather was not threatening, but it was still a fresh 16°C out.

For his first time on pole, Timur Boguslavskiy managed his start, but could not resist for long the pressure put on him by the #38 (who was deprived of the pole) and yielded the lead. Set in second place, the Russian driver showed fierce resistance to the repeated attacks of his rivals throughout his stint, adopting a sustained rhythm to keep them at bay. Konstantin Tereschenko (#87) and Petru Umbrurescu (#89) were P16 (P9 Silver) and P20 respectively. As the laps went by, the positions stabilised as the leader headed off with a lead of over 14 seconds.

As soon as the pitstop window opened, Raffaele Marciello took over the #88 and headed off on the hunt. Jim Pla (#87) was P14 and Jules Gounon (#89) P16. The driver of the #88 increased the pace bit by bit and closed in on the #38 McLaren that was still leading. With 15' to go, Lello Marciello was right up behind the McLaren, whereas the #32 Audi, leading the championship, was coming up on the Mercedes. The fight intensified when the trio caught up to the drivers at the back of the field. With only 5' of the race to go, mired in traffic, Raffaele Marciello tried to pass, but got caught in a sandwich between a Ferrari and the leading McLaren that he touched lightly. This contact propelled the #38 off track. The Italian crossed the chequered flag in the lead, ahead of his main rival in the championship, the #32 Audi, but a few hours later, the #88 would get a stop and go penalty, converted into 40 seconds, for his implication in the accident. Denied a victory and points (17th overall), it was looking more and more complicated to get the title. Jim Pla (#87) was 11th (P7 Silver Cup) and Jules Gounon (#89) 12th.



Race 2 – Overall podium, Silver podium, and another disappointment for the #88

When the lights went green, polesitter Raffaele Marciello (#88) confirmed his place as leader by keeping the advantage. It was also worth mentioning the good start of Jules Gounon (#89) in fourth place, and Jim Pla (#87) who gained a place into P6, second place Silver.

After a few laps behind the Safety-car (a car went off track), the race started up again. The ever-increasing pace allowed Lello Marciello (#88) to give himself some breathing space over his pursuers, notably the #6 Mercedes-AMG and the #32 Audi. A gap he would increase up to 8 seconds before it was time to change drivers. Jules Gounon (#89) was also on a roll (P4), as was Jim Pla (#87) who was fighting for the Silver Cup lead.

After the driver change, the positions didn't change much. Timur Boguslavskiy (#88) did not let up and continued to defend his leadership, showing, as in Race 1, a great fighting spirit. Petru Umbrurescu (#89) keeps impeccably the 4th place while Konstantin Tereschenko (#87) fell one position (P7), now P3 Silver.

The end of the race came without any changes and victory seemed (finally) to be smiling down on Team AKKA-ASP. But in the final passing, everything changed. As Timur Boguslavskiy managed to hold off the assaults of the #6, in the last third of the last lap, the #88 Mercedes-AMG slowed suddenly, allowing a few of his pursuers to pass. A puncture, followed by deviating off trajectory, to then return to the track before losing a wheel and crossing the line in P6 before coming to a stop. The crew of the #88, Raffaele Marciello and Timur Boguslavskiy is now third in the Sprint championship, 9 points behind in the quest for the vice-championship title. Next stop, Valencia!

Despite it all, at the end of this crazy race, there were two opportunities to rejoice with two new podiums. The duo of Umbrurescu-Gounon (#89) stood on the third step of the overall podium, and the third step of the Silver podium went to the pair of Tereschenko-Pla (#87). Both crews made a flawless and brilliant race. That proves the team can also count on their two top drivers, Gounon and Pla, and their brilliant new recruits Tereschenko and Umbrurescu.

So long Brands Hatch, it's time to head to the Nürburgring for the next Endurance round on the 4th and 5th of September.