



First Round – 8 April 2006

Istanbul Qualifying Story

After free practice sessions under the sun and on a dry track, the drivers and their teams have been surprised by the arrival of the rain. But everybody agrees with the fact that nothing is predictable at Istanbul Park! And that is one of the charming aspects of this racetrack!!

The B-Racing team may disagree with the charming aspects of surprises in general: they didn't expect to leave Turkey so fast! But the Lamborghini Murcielago has lost its third engine for the beginning of the season (two during the Official Testing session at the Paul Ricard HTTT circuit), and what is they have no reserve, the German team has been obliged to withdraw from this race. But sure is that they will be more present than ever at Spa!

Cool weather, hot times at Istanbul Park

Just seven hundredths of a second separated the fastest two cars in qualifying for the opening round of the Le Mans Series at the Istanbul Motopark in Turkey. Nicolas Minassian and Emmanuel Collard fought a superb duel in their Creation and Pescarolo respectively, Collard capturing the position at 1m 40.266s on a track that was not completely dry.

"It took a long time to get heat into the tyres, and then I had a small flat-spot on a front tyre when I made the time" said Collard, who made two consecutive laps good enough for pole position before Nicolas Minassian challenged in the Creation, fractionally slower at 1m 40.336. This, said Minassian, was despite a gearshifting problem which had his car in the wrong gear a couple of times during the fastest lap.

The superb Istanbul Motopark was hosting its second Le Mans Series race within six months, having been the venue for the final round in 2005, but the hoped-for spring weather was taking a weekend off, and as temperatures plunged to 11-degrees C in the afternoon light rain began to fall just as the Prototype cars set off for the qualifying session. On Friday the Pescarolo Sport C60 Judd and the Creation Autosportif CAO6/H set the pace in warm, dry conditions and in qualifying, it was the Racing for Holland Dome-Mugen of Jan Lammers and Alex Yoong that moved up to third place on the grid. Pescarolo has a very strong pairing in Collard and Jean-Christophe Boullion, while Minassian is teamed with the experienced endurance racers Felipe Ortiz and Beppe Gabbiani.

Fourth and fifth in LMP1 were the two new Courage LC70s, the Mugen V8 powered 'works' car of Shinji Nakano, Haruki Kurosawa and Jean-Marc Gounon just one-fifth of a second faster than the Judd V10 powered Courage run by the new Swiss Spirit team, with Marcel Fassler and Harold Primat. Sixth and seventh were the Chamberlain Synergy Lola B06/10 AER, ready for its Le Mans Series debut, and the Lister Storm LMP Hybrid.

RML MG snatches LMP2 pole

The brand-new Rollcentre Racing Radical SR9 Judd was the centre of attention on Friday, clearly the fastest car in LMP2 despite being prepared for its debut race, but the RML MG Lola EX264 AER changed up a gear at exactly the right moment in qualifying for Tommy Erdos to claim pole position by a full second, in fact to go fourth fastest overall and claim a place on the second row of the grid. The Brazilian got a clear lap and made the most of it, setting his personal best time in two days at 1m 42.336s, while Joao Barbosa, in the Radical SR9 Judd, failed to get a working temperature into his tyres and set a slower time than on Friday at 1m 43.359s. This was good enough for the fourth row of the grid, very good for a debutant, but below the expectations of team owner Martin Short. Third and fourth were two Courage C65s, the Barazi Epsilon entry ahead of the better entry from Paul Belmondo Racing.

Lamy still the 'lord' of GT1

Portuguese Pedro Lamy, who played a key role in Larbre Competition's winning performances in 2004 and in 2005, started the 2006 season with a confident pole position at the Istanbul Motopark, this time in Jack Lecomte's new Aston Martin DBR9. Lamy waited patiently while a driveshaft, which snapped in an earlier session, was replaced, then banged in the pole position time on his second flying lap, returning to the pits with four laps completed. Job done! Lamy's time of 1m 48.180s was a full second faster than his pole position time here last year in the Ferrari, and a second quicker than that of the PSI Experience team Corvette C6-R. The Cirtek Motorsport Aston Martin DBR9 was third fastest with Antonio Garcia at the wheel, and the Convers MenX team Ferrari 550 Maranello fourth with Peter Kox at the wheel.

Viva Espana in GT2

New team, new car, and pole position at the first appearance; debuts don't come much better than that! Jesus Die Vollarroel made the test at Paul Ricard with his new Ferrari 430 GT, the team named Icer Brakes after his sponsor (a brake specialist company), and let his young Swedish co-driver Peter Sundberg do the qualifying. Pole position was the reward, a full half-second quicker than the Team LNT Panoz Esperante which had led the pace until the last few moments of qualifying.

"It was difficult psychologically because it was raining a bit and the wipers were going, but I still had grip" said Sundberg. "I wasn't sure how hard I could push but then a Porsche ahead of me locked a wheel under braking, and made a cloud of smoke, so I thought it was OK and really pushed for a fast lap." His time of 1m 55.774s stood clear of a number of cars on 56's, the Panoz Esperante of Richard Dean, the Virgo Motorsport Ferrari 430 driven by Tim Sugden, the GPC Sport Ferrari 430 of Fabrizio de Simone, and fifth, the leading Porsche of LMS GT2 champion Marc Lieb, now in the Autorlando GT3 RSR.

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