



ASIAN LE MANS SERIES

Okayama

2nd November 2009

OAK Racing seals Asian Le Mans Series LMP2 title

Despite OAK Racing's excellent 2009 campaign, which had included four podiums from five Le Mans Series rounds and the blue riband Le Mans 24 Hours, the team had yet to conquer the top step of the podium. But that all changed at Okayama last weekend after securing both LMP2 victories at the inaugural Asian Le Mans Series in Japan.



OAK Racing entered their #24 Pescarolo-Mazda, the same car that finished third at the 24 Hours of Le Mans last June. Richard Hein and Jacques Nicolet, the prototype's regular gentlemen driver pairing, were joined at the wheel for the weekend by Matthieu Lahaye who has campaigned the squad's sister #35 entry throughout the season. Indeed, it was the first time that the trio, part of the OAK fold since 2008, would drive together.

Split into two, three-hour races, the new Asian Le Mans Series took place over two days (October 31 and November 1) at the Okayama circuit. 23 cars took the start each looking to secure a guaranteed and highly coveted place on next year's Le Mans grid, while OAK were also keen to impress on engine-supplier Mazda's home soil.

Despite ending the weekend with both class wins to their name, the nature of each victory couldn't have been more different. The opening encounter saw several incidents which forced the drivers and team to raise their game in order to maintain a comfortable gap over LMP2 rivals IRS. A loss of fuel pressure forced Lahaye, who'd started seventh overall and on class pole position, to pit early, having spent the entire previous lap coasting in an effort to avoid further damage. Hein then took over and was able to maintain a fast, fluid rhythm despite the tight nature of the circuit and inevitable traffic build-up, while also looking after his tyres. Nicolet was then installed for the final hour and looked set for victory until pitting with just seven minutes remaining to replace a louvre damaged by tyre debris. The rules state that cars must finish the race with all original bodywork intact so the team produced a flawless performance to replace the front nose in record time. Nicolet rejoined with time to spare and duly took the chequered flag first in class and seventh overall.

"Races are never won until you cross the finish line," said Team Manager **François Sicard**, at the end of race 1. "We were perhaps a bit complacent about the size of the grid and that the race wouldn't be that difficult thanks to the strength of our chassis, tyre and engine combination which has been competitive all season. But it wasn't a walk in the park, neither for the team or drivers despite their very good stints. It was 'hot', to borrow an expression often used by Matthieu!"

Race 2 would play out in a more relaxed fashion the following day. Lahaye remained in contact with the LMP1 runners during much of his opening stint while building a comfortable gap back to the IRS Courage and managing the GT traffic well, before handing over to Nicolet. With a two lap lead at his disposal, Jacques continued the



excellent work, lapping less than a second shy of his pro co-driver thanks to pace and consistency. Hein completed the trio's impeccable day with a faultless performance of his own and although delayed briefly in the pits with just minutes remaining thanks to a spark plug issue, he would not be denied, taking the chequered flag to wrap up the race and inaugural Asian Le Mans Series spoils.

Matthieu Lahaye:

"I am delighted to have taken part in this adventure with the team. I really wanted to reward everyone for their efforts during the season. It was an important race for me and a first chance to team up with Jacques and Richard. They have proven throughout the year just how far they have progressed and were amazing team mates all weekend!"

Richard Hein:

"We are winners in the Asian Le Mans Series! Some might think that the Series was easier to win as there were fewer competitors but the first race proved that that's not the case. In this type of race, you have to be cautious as much with your rivals as yourself. We approached it the same way we have all year; professionalism, determination and concentration. Matthieu was great, priceless in fact and a real reference point for us. Over the season with Matthieu and Jacques, we did not make a single mistake. For me, it was a perfect year."

François Sicard, Team Manager:

"The overall review of the season is very positive. We have competed in eight races and finished six times on the podium, including two wins which is a reward for all the team's hard work. OAK Racing is a team which is progressing all the time and we will work this winter to build a strong programme for 2010 with the objective of fighting for wins on a regular basis in the Le Mans Series, as well as at the Le Mans 24 Hours and other races. We hope to start the 2010 season as we have finished the 2009 campaign!"

Jacques Nicolet, driver and President of OAK Racing:

"The Asian Le Mans Series marks the end of the season and could not have finished better than with two wins. I'm as happy as a driver as I am the team owner! Coming to Japan has given us an opportunity to add to Mazda's successful endurance racing heritage by winning in their home country. We are delighted to conclude the season like this after a successful first year partnership with Mazda and Dunlop, as well as the constructive partnership with AER."

Thierry Guillemot, President of Mazda France Automobiles and active partner of the team, attended the event with some directors of the Mazda Corporation, including its Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Mr Masa Moro:

"What a pleasure to win in the Land of the Rising Sun in front of the Mazda Corporation and several of its enthusiastic directors! I would like to congratulate the entire team which provided us with an end-of-season full of emotion and whose results are looking good for the coming season. I'm looking forward to next year and the continued partnership with OAK Racing!"

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