

STRAKKA RACING

It Never Rains, but it Pours

The bright sunshine of an Indian Summer hit Silverstone as forty cars prepared for qualifying ahead of tomorrow's 1000 Kilometre final round of the 2009 Le Mans Series, but there were dark clouds in the Strakka Racing garage. The engine in the team's Ginetta-Zytek GZ09S, widely touted as a likely candidate for pole in the hands of Danny Watts, refused to start.

The team worked against the clock to persuade the Zytek V8 to fire up, but to no avail, and with moments to go before the end of the twenty-minute session, it became evident that Danny's chances of joining the other prototypes on the track was over. "It's just one of those things," he shrugged. "It's not the first time something like this has happened in motor racing, and I'm sure it won't be the last, but it is enormously frustrating."



The problem arose at the end of what had already been a challenging two days for the Silverstone-based race team. "I'm very disappointed, but mainly for the lads in the team," said Nick Leventis, co-driver in the #23 Ginetta-Zytek. "We had a handling issue yesterday (Friday) that meant that we lost both the day's practice sessions chasing a set-up that was unachievable, but from the start of Saturday the car was much improved, and we knew then that we had a fast car and the pace to do well in qualifying."

This transformation came early enough in the final practice session to encourage Piers Phillips, the Team Manager at Strakka Racing, to prepare the car for a trial run in qualifying trim, but the planned laps had to be aborted when the first signs of the starting issue arose. "Friday had been the most difficult day we've had all season," he said, "but within a couple of laps of the third session on Saturday morning we knew we'd got the set-up sorted. We may have lost two-thirds of our usual practice time getting there, but we were much, much happier. Then we encountered an electrical problem at the end of that third session, but we believed it had been fixed and we were optimistic about qualifying. We now suspect that it wasn't."

"I felt we had an excellent chance of qualifying in the top three or four, at least, but that rather assumed that the car would actually start," said Nick Leventis. "It shows the strength of spirit in the team that everyone dealt with the disappointment in a very mature and positive manner." It was a feature that Piers was also keen to emphasise. "Everyone has pulled together and remained focused, and that has been very encouraging to see, but this has clearly put us slightly on the back foot," he said.

The team now faces a start from near the back of the grid, along with a number of other front-running prototypes that also failed to set a time in qualifying. "Rest assured, wherever we start from, we'll fight back with determination," said Nick. "We did it at Spa, and we can do it again here."

The race will start at 11:35 tomorrow, and will last for 195 laps or six hours, whichever is achieved first.



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