

IMAGOLIVE

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Oggetto: FIA GT CHAMPIONSHIP - R10 SAN LUIS - RACE REPORT

FIA GT CHAMPIONSHIP – ROUND TEN AN AMAZING SEASON FINALE IN SAN LUIS

The breath-taking new Portrero de los Funes circuit, in the Province of San Luis, Argentina, provided a perfect backdrop for the final round of the 2008 season of the FIA GT Championship – a thrilling race which saw PK Carsport's Kumpen and Longin end an otherwise miserable season with a surprise win, an extremely popular home victory for Advanced Engineering Pecom Racing Team's Argentine duo of Russo and Perez-Companc, and the GT1 Drivers Title for Andrea Bertolini and Michael Bartels, who finished fifth. With the sun shining down on the spectators packed into



every grandstand and hillside around the spectacular circuit, it was truly a historic first race for this circuit, already a firm favourite with the drivers, and with the 52,000 spectators who attended over the weekend.

VICTORY FOR KUMPEN AND LONGIN



Every run of bad luck must come to an end, and for Belgian duo Anthony Kumpen and Bert Longin it happened in Argentina, when their Saleen S7R finally showed what it could do, crossing the finish line just 0.5 seconds ahead of the Phoenix Carsport Corvette of their former team-mate Mike Hezemans and 2004 Champion Fabrizio Gollin. A good day for Belgium was completed by the presence of SRT in third place, their Corvette C6R having been shared by Maxime Soulet and Argentine newcomer Christian Ledesma, who had already finished on the podium in the TC2000 race

earlier in the day.

Victory for the PK Saleen had not appeared to be on the cards earlier in the race. Frédéric Makowiecki took the lead at the start in the Larbre Saleen and, chased by pole setter Marcel Fässler, began to open up a lead. Fässler retook the lead after 19 laps, but the Saleen remained close behind. However, shortly after the driver change, Berville touched the wall with the nr 7 Saleen. The team attempted a repair but the car eventually retired. This left Fässler with a strong lead, and the Swiss driver, sharing with Ricardo Risatti of Argentina, looked like claiming a second win of the season. Unfortunately, his race also ended in the wall, just eleven laps before the end. The PK Saleen was then in the lead, chased by the nr 6 Phoenix Carsport Corvette, which needed to win and hope that the nr 1 Maserati finished out of the top six in order to claim the title. Hezemans took the lead, but Longin kept in contact, and when the Dutch driver went wide at the first corner, regained the advantage. Hezemans kept on pushing, but Longin resisted, crossing the line 0.561 in front of the Corvette to claim a fine win – and one of the closest on record in the FIA GT Championship.

"It was a terrible season but to finish the last race in first place is very important for us two, as this is important for next year. The car and tyres worked very well, and for the first time we were really competitive, and neither Anthony nor myself made any mistakes," Bert Longin commented.



Hezemans was philosophical about his Championship loss: "With 90 kg in the car it was always going to be difficult. We were in the lead but I made a little mistake coming into the first corner." Having started from the back of the grid, SRT's third place was a fine reward for the Belgian team. Fourth went to local heroes José Maria Lopez and Esteban Tuero in the ACA Argentina Ferrari 550 Maranello, with the new Champions Bertolini and

Bartels fifth. Fässler and Risatti were classified sixth and last, in a high attrition rate around this magnificent circuit.

BARTELS AND BERTOLINI CLAIM GT1 DRIVERS TITLE AFTER EXCELLENT SEASON



Fifth place today was sufficient to guarantee Michael Bartels and Andrea Bertolini's second FIA GT Championship Drivers titles, after their previous win in 2006. The duo have put in an amazing season, finishing in the points at every race, and winning the Total 24 Hours of Spa as real season highpoint. "This was a fantastic day," Bartels said. "We knew, coming here, that it looked easy on paper, but these are the most difficult races you can do, when you nearly have the Championship in your pocket.

In the end it comes down to a very motivated group of people, with very strong cooperation between Maserati Italy and the German team, as well as a fantastic combination of drivers. It has been a fantastic experience to work with Andrea this year."

Today's second place guaranteed second for Phoenix Carsport drivers Gollin and Hezemans, while the second Maserati crew of Negrao and Ramos took third in the 2008 GT1 Drivers classification despite not finishing today's race.

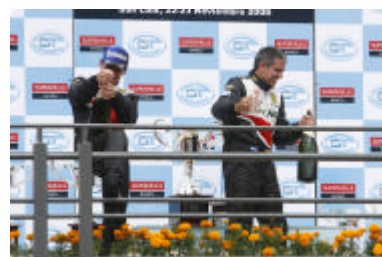
The team's title had been decided in Zolder, with Vitaphone Racing Team claiming their fourth consecutive title ahead of Phoenix Carsport Racing and Jetalliance.

RUSSO AND PEREZ-COMPANC WIN AT HOME

With a duo of Argentine racers claiming their first-ever FIA GT victory on home ground at a brand new Argentine circuit, there could hardly have been a more popular result in San Luis today. Advanced Engineering Pecom Racing Team's Matias Russo, who had claimed pole on Saturday, kept the advantage at the lights and began to build up a good lead.

During the middle stint, his team-mate Luis Perez-Companc was overtaken by the new GT2 Champion Toni Vilander, whose nr 50 AF Corse Ferrari had climbed back up from the very back of the grid, despite the 75 kg penalty weight. In the closing stages, however, Russo was able to retake the lead. Bruni and Vilander took second, with the second AF Corse car of Montanari and Biagi third after a late-race collision between the nr 56 and nr 60 cars, which had been fighting for the final podium position. "This is our first year in the category, and we learned little by little, making progress all the time," Russo said afterwards. "I don't think we have fully realised that we've won today yet. But I am very pleased with this incredible result"

The nr 56 CR Scuderia Ferrari and the nr 60 Prospeed Porsche finished fourth and fifth respectively; the nr 61 Prospeed car, which had qualified second, was an early casualty of the Potrero de los Funes walls. Malucelli and Ruberti finished sixth to secure second place in the GT2 Drivers Championship, and to help their team BMS Scuderia Italia to finish second in the Teams Championship, ahead of Prospeed Competition. Seventh went to Scuderia Ecosse, with Kessel Racing taking the final point in eighth.



And so the 12th season of the FIA GT Championship, which started in the Silverstone fog and finished in the San Luis sunshine, has drawn to an end. Congratulations to the Champions, Bartels and Bertolini in GT1, Vilander and Bruni in GT2, to Vitaphone Racing Team and AF Corse, as well as to all those involved. And an especial thanks to the people and Government of the Province of San Luis for providing such a wonderful circuit for the tenth round. As Andrea Bertolini said "I hope this track will

be on the calendar for the next ten years !"

The results remain provisional pending fuel checks on cars 4, 6, 37, 50, 95

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