

Zandvoort, 28 August 2005

Motorsport

Audi driver Ekström second at Zandvoort

- **Title fight in the DTM remains thrilling**
- **Audi drivers shine, pushing to make up ground**
- **Audi expands lead in manufacturers' standings**

The fight for the title in Europe's most popular touring car series remains thrilling: even after the eighth DTM round at Zandvoort, the Netherlands, the two most promising candidates for the title continue to be separated by merely one point. After Audi driver Mattias Ekström had captured the lead with his victory at the Nürburgring, he is now ranking behind Zandvoort winner Gary Paffet again with a very small gap. In the manufacturers' standings, Audi managed to further expand its advantage over Mercedes.

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After a less than perfect qualifying practice, the Audi drivers displayed their fighting spirit by pushing hard to make up ground. From fifth place on the grid, Mattias Ekström improved to third as early as in the starting phase. Shortly before the second half of the race, he got closer and closer to Gary Paffett until his Audi A4 DTM lost the front left flics after slightly touching Christian Abt's car. Despite the loss in aerodynamic balance, the reigning DTM champion stayed the course to finish in second place.

Le Mans record winner Tom Kristensen finished fourth to consolidate his third place in the standings despite having started from fifth row and struggling with an A4 DTM that had suffered severe front end damage as well. The Dane particularly thrilled the 77,000 spectators with a spectacular overtaking manoeuvre in the penultimate corner, pushing past Marcel Fässler (Opel).

Martin Tomczyk, as well, almost beat the Swiss driver to the photo finish at the finish line. Having started from position 15, the Bavarian was ultimately lacking merely 247 thousandths of a second for fifth place.

Another remarkable feat of making up ground was performed by Pierre Kaffer: from 18th place on the grid, he pushed forward to eleventh in his 2004-spec A4 entered by Audi Sport Team Joest to ultimately finish directly behind his teammate, Christian Abt, who was handicapped by a bout of flu and whose car had suffered severe damage in a starting collision. Rinaldo Capello and Frank Stippler were knocked off the track by competitors and – like Allan McNish - had to retire.

Quotes after the race

Mattias Ekström (Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline #1)

2nd place, + 12.015s

“I had a good start and was able to overtake Marcel Fässler and Gary Paffett. The car felt quick, and the pit stops were super as well. After contact with Christian’s car, though, I lost the small front left flics. From then on, I was no longer able to follow Gary. The championship remains thrilling. I’m sure that this year the decision won’t come until the finale at Hockenheim.”

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Tom Kristensen (Audi Sport Team Abt #5)

4th place, + 20.042s

“After the whole weekend – except for the Super pole – had gone really well, I was looking forward to the race. On the first laps, Frank and Allan helped me move forward. My thanks to them for that. The pit stops, as well, were super. The fight with Marcel (Fässler) was very good, but I damaged my car. Apart from severe understeer there were vibrations as well. Later in the race, I fought with Marcel again, yet the quickest in our trio was Martin, who was right behind me. Because he didn’t attack me, I was able to pass Fässler in the last but one corner. It’s a particularly good feeling to make up a position so close to the finish line.”

Martin Tomczyk (Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline #2)

6th place, + 21.120s

“Our strategy was good, the pit stops, too, and I’m satisfied with my performance. Regarding the fight with Tom (Kristensen) and Marcel Fässler: I was quicker but ‘like a good boy’, stayed behind Tom.”

Christian Abt (Audi Sport Team Joest Racing #14)

10th place, + 37.719s

“As late as in the warm-up things had really been looking well, but in the race the tyres didn’t work one hundred percent. That probably had to do with a collision after the start, which caused something on the rear axle to get bent. Each set of tyres lasted about six laps, then the times dropped. In the end, I felt my case of flu as well. I felt completely weak. I’m sorry about touching Mattias’ car – I didn’t see him and had no radio warning either.”

Pierre Kaffer (Audi Sport Team Joest Racing #15)

11th place, + 39.113s

“As in the past few races my performance was good, now we need to finally do well in the qualifying too. Grid positions are extremely important in the DTM. The first lap went well, I was able to overtake several competitors straight away. I then caught Christian but I had so much understeer that I wasn’t able to attack.”

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Allan McNish (Audi Sport Team Abt #6)

15th place, - 6 laps

“Jamie (Green) didn’t get away at the start. I evaded him but was hit in the side. That damaged my aerodynamics as well as the steering, so I had to pit early. Later, there was an incident with Mika (Häkkinen), I made room for him – but he, unfortunately, didn’t for me and that caused me to have a flat. To top it off, there were problems with the brakes because a plastic bag had clogged the radiator. Too bad: this was an awful race after a good qualifying.”

Rinaldo Capello (Audi Sport Team Joest #18)

Retired (collision)

“After the warm-up we completely changed the set-up. And guess what: my Audi A4 DTM was running like a charm in the race. We had fixed the problem with understeer and my lap times – especially when I was alone on the track – were alright. I’m sure that a seasoned driver like Bernd (Schneider) didn’t knock me out intentionally when I was defending my position against him. Now I’m looking forward to the race at the EuroSpeedway.”

Frank Stippler (Audi Sport Team Joest #19)

Retired (collision)

“After 200 meters my aerodynamic balance was gone due to a few contacts with other cars, and my car didn’t handle as well anymore as it had in the practice sessions. During the pit stop we had to remove a few damaged parts, and that cost

time as well as rhythm. Then I got stuck behind Manuel Reuter, ruined my tyre and was hit hard by Laurent Aiello. That was the end of my race.”

Hans-Jürgen Abt (Team Director Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline): “Of course we’d rather have won. But we can be satisfied with this team result. We made the best of our grid positions. Yet one has to admit that today it would have been very difficult to win the race against Gary Paffet – because his performance was very good. Nevertheless, we expanded our lead in the manufacturers’ standings. And the one point in the drivers’ championship, we’re going to re-capture as well.”

Ralf Jüttner (Technical Director Audi Sport Team Joest): “Alright, it’s still the same situation: whenever we make it into the Super Pole, we just don’t score any points, although things started out quite well with Christian. But with each set, the performance of his tyres was gone after a short time. Pierre handled his situation pretty well, particularly considering the position from which he started. Frank and ‘Dindo’ were spun, and the guys that did it received a drive-through penalty for this. From then on, their races were finished as well.”

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): “On the whole this was a good team performance. That Mattias would be competing with Gary Paffett for victory in this race, nobody would have thought after the qualifying. It shows how tight the DTM field is. In the last third of the race Mattias wasn’t able to keep pushing because he had lost the flics after a collision with Christian. He had to limit himself to bringing home the car without ruining his tyres. The championship remains thrilling, it’s always one point moving back and forth. For the spectators, this is the greatest situation in motorsport.”

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**Photographs, sound bites and further information available on the Internet:
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