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Motorsport

Ingolstadt, 13 September 2002

For Audi ALMS hot phase begins

After a month-long break the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) now revs up. The Team Audi Sport North America faces an intensive final spurt with three races inside just four weeks. The Laguna Seca race in California on 22 September marks the beginning. On 5 October the Le Mans prototypes compete on the streets of Miami (Florida) for the first time. And just one week later, on 12 October, the "Petit Le Mans" in Road Atlanta (Georgia) marks the final round, and the last opportunity for the title decision.

With three rounds to go Kristensen and Capello are separated by three points at the top of the ALMS overall rankings. However, both Audi works drivers cannot afford to make the slightest error. Ex-Formula 1 pilot Johnny Herbert, who competes for the Audi customer team Champion Racing, lies within striking distance just 23 points in arrears. Theoretically, a total of eleven pilots still hold title chances.

The Laguna Seca circuit, situated only a few kilometres from the Californian coastal city of Monterey in rolling countryside, is regarded as especially challenging. Famous and infamous is the "Cork Screw" section of the track, a steeply declining corner combination. Fine sand is blown across the track from nearby dunes, often making the circuit very slippery. The Team Audi Sport North America has yet to be beaten in Laguna Seca and now aims for its third consecutive victory. The crew travels to California earlier than planned in order to rebuild the R8 of Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro there, after it sustained severe damages at the Mosport race.

In order to be fit for the final spurt, the Audi works pilots have enjoyed some quiet time over the last few weeks. Emanuele Pirro relaxed with his family in Sardinia, Frank Biela spent time with his daughter in Marienbad. Rinaldo Capello vacationed in Italy's Calabria region, with a short break for the presentation of the new Audi R8 in Lago Maggiore. Tom Kristensen joined his team mate in Canelli (Italy) for a cycling tour and had a very special rendezvous at the beginning of September: At home in Denmark, he was invited to a dinner with Queen Margrethe II.

Quotes prior to the race in Laguna Seca

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Laguna Seca is one of the most challenging tracks I know. At first it looks easy, but you need a couple of laps to find the optimal line and speed. Emanuele and I were very strong here in the past two years, and that shouldn't change this time. For us the championship is out of reach, so now we're concentrating on single successes."

AUDI AG
I/GP-S
Sportpresse
D-85045 Ingolstadt
Tel. +49 (0)841 89-34200
Fax +49 (0)841 89-38617
sportpresse@audi.de

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Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "I feel well recovered and fit again. I like Laguna Seca a lot and can hardly wait to climb in to the R8 cockpit again. To take the championship needs a small miracle. But the desire to win is still there: Frank and I want to win as many as possible of the three remaining rounds."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Laguna Seca is one of the most beautiful tracks of the ALMS, exactly as we drivers like it. I can't wait for the first free practice to begin. The track is extremely technical and features many fast corners. Suspension and aerodynamic set-up must be perfect. Our R8 should be very competitive in Laguna Seca. I've posted two pole positions in a row there – but this time Tom is driving the qualifying session and not me."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Last year was my first time in Laguna Seca. The track is situated in one of the most beautiful regions of the USA and is a lot of fun. Dindo and I had bad luck though: We were sidelined by a clutch failure. That was the first and to date only retirement of a works R8 due to a technical problem. Naturally, we want to finish this time and preferably as the winner – though not at any cost as we have a good advantage in the championship."

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "Despite a 20 second time penalty last year after 120 laps I finished less than two seconds behind the winning car of Biela/Pirro. This will be my second time in Laguna Seca, I love this circuit. After securing fifth, third and second at the last three ALMS races, I'm hoping to keep this trend going and take my first ALMS victory."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "Laguna Seca is one of my favourite circuits in the USA. Several of the corners are interesting and are a big challenge. Qualifying here is very important as overtaking is very difficult. Last year I managed to qualify on the first row alongside Dindo, and finished the race in third. So we're keen to bring home a good result for the Champion team as well."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "The Laguna Seca track offers little grip due to the sand. Additionally, the conditions keep changing: Foggy and cold in the morning, sunny and warm in the afternoon. The data we collected from the last two years are very helpful for the set-up. I expect an interesting race: Panoz was always very strong in Laguna Seca and Cadillac held the pace very well at the previous round in Mosport."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "Our goal in Laguna Seca is to repeat the good results of the last years. We anticipate however an exciting clash between Audi, Cadillac and Panoz. For Frank and Emanuele it's the last chance to turn the tide in their fight for the title. Last year they were sitting far behind in the championship, but in the end still managed to overtake Tom and Dindo. We have two balanced and strong driver teams and 2001 proved that a good championship is exciting right to the end."

Schedule in Laguna Seca

Friday, 20 September
12:30 – 14:30 hrs (21:30 – 23:30 hrs) Free Practice

Saturday, 21 September

AUDI AG
I/GP-S
Sportpresse
D-85045 Ingolstadt
Tel. +49 (0)841 89-34200
Fax +49 (0)841 89-38617
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08:00 – 09:00 hrs (17:00 – 18:00 hrs) Free Practice
11:10 – 12:10 hrs (20:10 – 21:10 hrs) Free Practice
14:35 – 14:55 hrs (23:35 – 23:55 hrs) Qualifying (prototypes)

Sunday, 22 September

08:00 – 08:30 hrs (17:00 – 17:30 hrs) Warm-up
12:00 – 14:45 hrs (21:00 – 23:45 hrs) Race (2:45 hrs)

Local times (CET time in brackets)

Drivers' championship

1. Tom Kristensen (Audi)	165 points
2. Rinaldo Capello (Audi)	162 points
3. Johnny Herbert (Audi)	142 points
4. Frank Biela (Audi)	136 points
5. Emanuele Pirro (Audi)	135 points
6. David Brabham (Panoz)	125 points
7. Jan Magnussen (Panoz)	120 points
8. Bill Auberlen (Panoz)	115 points
9. Stefan Johansson (Audi)	112 points
10. Bryan Herta (Panoz)	104 points

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Manufacturers' championship

1. Audi	172 points
2. Panoz	136 points
3. Riley & Scott	83 points
Lola	83 points
5. Cadillac	52 points
6. Ascari	19 points

Photos and further information on the internet:
www.audi-sportpress.com (accreditation required)

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