

Audi in the American Le Mans Series – From Sebring to Adelaide

The Le Mans 24 Hour race ended with a clear triple victory for Audi in 2000. This classic is not only one of the greatest challenges in international motorsport, it is at the same time one of the most popular sporting events in the world.

For two years a new championship has been run specifically for the fascinating Le Mans sportscars: The American Le Mans Series (ALMS).

The Team Audi Sport North America competed in the twelve round series for the first time in 2000 – with huge success: Two races before the season final, Audi already clinched both the manufacturers' and the drivers' titles. At nine out of twelve rounds an Audi R8 crossed the finish line first. Audi celebrated six double victories. With a triumph at the season final in Australia's Adelaide, AUDI AG crowned one of the most successful years of its long motorsport tradition.

A summary of the ALMS races:

Sebring: Audi takes off with a dream start into the 2000 season. Team Audi Sport North America celebrates a double victory at the 12 hour classic in Florida, despite one of the two R8 losing precious time after a tyre puncture. The third-placed BMW is one lap behind.

1. Biela/Kristensen/Pirro (Audi R8) 360 laps
2. Alboreto/Capello/McNish (Audi R8) + 39.111s
3. Lehto/Müller (BMW) - 1 lap
4. Auberlen/Gounon/Soper (BMW) - 2 laps
- 5 Lienhard/Theys/Baldi (Doran-Judd) - 23 laps
6. Taylor/Angelelli/van de Poele (Cadillac) - 29 laps

Charlotte: As the preparation for the Le Mans 24 Hour race has first priority, Team Audi Sport North America competes in North Carolina with two cars in the 1999-spec (R8R). Both R8Rs are set back through collisions, but finish 6th and 8th thus collecting precious points.

1. Lehto/Müller (BMW) 125 laps
 2. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz) + 7.884s
 3. Schiattarella/de Radigues (Lola-Judd) - 1 lap
 4. Gounon/Auberlen (BMW) - 1 lap
 5. O'Connell/Katoh (Panoz) - 1 lap
 6. Pirro/Biela (Audi R8R) - 3 laps
- ...
20. (8th prototypes) Alboreto/Capello/McNish (Audi R8R) - 32 laps

Silverstone: At the first appearance of the ALMS in Europe, the 1999-spec R8R cars compete again. Nevertheless, Audi leads the race over long stretches before both cars fall back due to lengthy pit stops. The final phase is furious: After his Audi's suspension broke in a collision, Rinaldo Capello reaches the finish on only three wheels to take third.

1. Lehto/Müller (BMW) 98 laps
2. Brabham/Magnussen (Panoz) + 33.493s
3. Capello/McNish (Audi R8R) + 1m 44.322s
4. Katoh/O'Connell (Panoz) - 1 lap

5. Biela/Pirro/Alboreto (Audi R8R) - 1 lap
6. Collard/Bernard (Cadillac) - 1 lap

Nürburgring: After the triple triumph at the Le Mans 24 Hour race, Team Audi Sport North America races the 2000-spec Audi R8 in the ALMS again. Both cars take up the round in the Eifel region from the first row, but incalculable weather with partly torrential rain turns the race into a lottery. Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro make an unlucky decision in their tyre choice and finish third. Earlier in the race, Allan McNish retires with his Audi R8 after spinning off.

1. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz) 185 laps
2. Lehto/Müller (BMW) + 1m:33.627 secs
3. Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) - 3 laps
4. Graf/O'Connell/Kato (Panoz) - 4 laps
5. Montagny/Goossens (Cadillac) - 4 laps
6. Kelleners/Policand (Reynard-VW) - 5 laps
- ...
30. (14th prototypes) Capello/McNish (Audi R8) - 101 laps

Sears Point: After the disappointing home round on the Nürburgring Audi strikes back in California: Rinaldo Capello and Allan McNish start from pole position and lap the entire field. Emanuele Pirro and Frank Biela secure a double victory despite a collision with a lapped back-marker.

1. Capello/McNish (Audi R8) 114 laps
2. Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) - 1 lap
3. Lehto/Müller (BMW) - 2 laps
4. Auberlen/Gounon (BMW) - 2 laps
5. Brabham/Magnussen (Panoz) - 8 laps
6. Field/Sutherland (Lola) - 12 laps

Mosport: In Canada Audi wins one of the most heart-stopping races of the year by half a car length in a photo finish. Shortly after the start rain turns the race into a turbulent lottery. Rinaldo Capello and Allan McNish lead the race clearly but remain on rain tyres even when the track begins to dry up. Towards the end they narrowly avoid being overtaken by Jörg Müller in his BMW. Emanuele Pirro retires shortly before the end after a collision with a lapped GT vehicle.

1. Capello/McNish (Audi R8) 94 laps
2. Lehto/Müller (BMW) + 0.148s
3. Auberlen/Gounon (BMW) - 1 laps
4. Beretta/Wendlinger (Chrysler) - 3 laps
5. Fellows/Pilgrim (Corvette) - 3 laps
6. Archer/Donohue (Chevrolet) - 3 laps
- ...
17. (6th prototypes) Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) - 9 laps

Dallas/Fort Worth: In the oven of the Texas Motor Speedway, the Audi R8 proves it can handle extreme heat. At more than 40 degrees in the shade Audi celebrates a clear double victory. The decisive moment comes just ten minutes before the finish when radio communication between Rinaldo Capello and the pits fails: The Italian doesn't use the last safety car phase for refuelling, so Frank Biela is the winner of the Texas round.

1. Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) 127 laps
2. Capello/McNish (Audi R8) + 12.673s
3. Brabham/Magnussen (Panoz) - 1 lap
4. Lehto/Müller (BMW) - 3 laps
5. Auberlen/Gounon (BMW) - 3 laps
6. Katoh/O'Connell (Panoz) - 4 laps

Portland: Rinaldo Capello and Allan McNish clinch the fourth consecutive win for Audi, despite pole-setter Capello falling back to eighth place after colliding with a lapped GT vehicle in the opening phase. The other Audi R8 leads but loses a full lap as it has to refuel before the first safety car phase whilst the opposition can wait. From seventh place Emanuele Pirro and Frank Biela plough through the field to finish fourth.

1. Capello/McNish (Audi R8) 136 laps
2. Brabham/Magnussen (Panoz) + 57.456s
3. Lehto/Müller (BMW) - 1 lap
4. Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) - 1 lap
5. Johansson/Smith (Reynard) - 1 lap
6. O'Connell/Katoh (Panoz) - 2 laps

"Petit Le Mans", Road Atlanta: After the double success at the Sebring 12 Hours and the triple triumph in Le Mans, Audi finishes the third important long distance race of the season in the first two places. Whilst Michele Alboreto, Rinaldo Capello, and Allan McNish experience a trouble-free race, the other R8 loses its lead in a collision at half time. The diffuser of the Audi R8 is so badly bruised that it can't be changed. Still, Frank Biela, Tom Kristensen, and Emanuele Pirro manage second place in their damaged car after nine hours and 1000 miles of racing.

1. Alboreto/Capello/McNish (Audi R8) 394 laps
2. Biela/Kristensen/Pirro (Audi R8) - 3 laps
3. Brabham/Magnussen (Panoz) - 3 laps
4. O'Connell/Katoh/Graf (Panoz) - 5 laps
5. Lehto/Müller (BMW) - 11 laps
6. Bernard/Collard (Cadillac) - 14 laps

Laguna Seca: After a tough fight resulting in a one-two finish, Audi secures the manufacturers' title of the American Le Mans Series two races before the end of the season. In the opening phase of the Laguna Seca round the situation looks grim for the Audi R8s as they fall back to fourth and fifth places. But the Audi pilots reel in their opponents one by one, regaining the lead halfway through the race.

1. Capello/McNish (Audi R8) 119 laps
2. Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) + 0.352s
3. Lehto/Müller (BMW) + 11.331s
4. Gounon/Auberlen (BMW) - 3 laps
5. Smith/Johansson (Reynard) - 3 laps
6. Field/Sutherland (Lola) - 7 laps

Las Vegas: With another double success Audi clinches the drivers' title of the American Le Mans Series one race before the final. The decision comes with a collision one hour before the finish, involving five of the six leading prototypes. Rinaldo Capello is pushed into the greens by a competitor. Emanuele Pirro emerges from the crash holding the lead, which he holds on to until the chequered flag.

1. Biela/Pirro (Audi R8) 129 laps
2. Capello/McNish (Audi R8) + 44.947 secs
3. Gounon/Auberlen (BMW) - 1 lap
4. Schiattarella/de Radigues (Lola) - 4 laps
5. Smith/Johansson (Reynard) - 4 laps
6. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz) - 6 laps

Adelaide: Spectacular racing and a clear win for the Audi R8 sporting a crocodile design in front of 150,000 spectators make the final of the ALMS a season highlight. After a turbulent 5:45 hours, Rinaldo Capello and Allan McNish win 21 laps ahead of the field. The Scotsman secures the drivers' title. The Audi R8 of Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro is involved in an accident but the duo work their way back up through the field displaying breathtaking racing to finish sixth in the Prototypes class. With this win Audi rounds off a successful season - this time on New Year's Day 2001.

1. Capello/McNish (Audi R8) 225 laps
2. Konrad/Slater/Heath (Lola-Ford) - 21 laps
3. Beretta/Wendlinger/Dupuy (Chrysler) - 23 laps
4. Belloc/Amorim (Chrysler) - 23 laps
5. Müller/Luhr (Porsche) - 26 laps
6. Wars/Graham/Menzel (Porsche) - 34 laps

ALMS: Final Points after 12 races

Drivers

1. Allan McNish (Audi R8) 270
2. Rinaldo Capello (Audi R8) 257
3. Emanuele Pirro (Audi R8) 232
4. Frank Biela (Audi R8) 231
5. Jörg Müller (BMW) 221
6. JJ Lehto (BMW) 220
7. David Brabham (Panoz) 213
8. Jan Magnussen (Panoz) 203
9. Bill Auberlen (BMW) 161
10. Hiroki Katoh (Panoz) 153

Manufacturers

1. Audi 264
2. BMW 217
3. Panoz 208
4. Lola 154
5. Reynard 136
6. Cadillac 116