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Motorsport

Washington, 20 July 2002

Audi leads ALMS field through Washington

Audi overcomes the first test in the middle of the US capital Washington with brilliance: During the qualifying session for the fifth round of the American Le Mans Series (ALMS), Frank Biela conquered pole position with only a marginal lead. Together with his partner Emanuele Pirro, the three times Le Mans winner will start the race right beside the second Infineon Audi R8 of Rinaldo Capello and Tom Kristensen.

During the 20 minutes of qualifying, the two Audi drivers delivered an exciting battle for pole at the first appearance of the ALMS in Washington. Four times, Rinaldo Capello and Frank Biela switched the top position and were only separated by a slender fraction. Shortly before the chequered flag, Frank Biela moved to the front with a margin of only 25 thousandths of a second.

For a long time, Johnny Herbert in the 2001-spec Audi R8 of the Champion team also battled at the top. But at the end of the session, Herbert had to be satisfied with fourth position on the grid, as Jan Magnussen in the fastest Panoz split the Audi trio and secured third place.

Beside the special demands of the tight Washington track, which features hairpin corners under a train bridge, drivers and machine also suffer from the enormous heat: During qualifying it was over 90 degrees Fahrenheit (30 degrees Celsius) in the US capital while the track temperature increased to over 120 degrees Fahrenheit (50 degrees Celsius).

The fifth round of the 2002 ALMS starts on Sunday at 12:00 hrs local time and leads the 34 sportscars over a time of 2:45 hrs. Frank Biela and Rinaldo Capello are to start the Infineon Audi R8 with the starting numbers one and two.

Quotes after qualifying

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Especially on such a short track the gaps are always very small and the fight for position is close. During qualifying, my car was good, but not perfect. In two or three corners I had a little bit too much understeer. But it was still enough for the pole and so I'm very satisfied."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "In these conditions, the tyres are good for more than just one fast lap, and so we saw a nice battle for the pole position. I'm very proud of Frank's performance today and hope, we can continue like this during tomorrow's race."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "My last lap would definitely have been the fastest, but unfortunately I ran out of fuel. Congratulations to Frank for this pole position and of course to the entire crew to put our two cars in the front row of the grid."

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Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "That was a great and interesting fight for the pole today. This circuit is very demanding for the drivers, the tyres and the brakes, because the heat is enormous. Thanks to our doctor I'm fit again, because I had some back trouble over the past few days. In the race we will give everything and try to keep off the walls. Believe me: This is not that easy."

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "Right at the end of the session, I went off at Turn One. While I was braking for the corner, somehow the side of my foot went on to the accelerator and I ended up in the tyre wall. The front bodywork is damaged but nothing significant broke. Despite this setback, it won't be a big problem for the race."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "The organisers have done a wonderful job with this track. Our Audi is definitely more competitive here in Washington – we're closer to the "factory" Audis which of course are a later specification. The race will be very tight. Anything can happen - we need a little luck with traffic - but we definitely have the speed to post a podium."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "Excellent qualifying, very interesting! By the end of the session, Dindo went short on fuel, nobody expected such a long fight for the pole position. The layout of the track is tight but good. The security precautions, like fences, walls are made professionally while there have been few incidents. I just hope that does not change which will make for a very interesting race."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "Between our two cars there was an extremely tight fight with just a few thousandths of a second between them and with numerous changes at the top. This proves that again we have two cars on a high level which is an important precondition for a tough race. The new racetrack in Washington is impressive, made very professionally, is extremely short but very interesting. That became clear to us when we worked on the setups."

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Starting grid at Washington

1. Biela/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 03.287s
2. Capello/Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 03.312s
3. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz)	1m 03.739s
4. Herbert/Johansson (Audi R8)	1m 03.858s
5. Tinseau/Angelelli (Cadillac)	1m 04.330s
6. Herta/Auberlen (Panoz)	1m 04.442s
7. Bernard/Collard (Cadillac)	1m 04.604s
8. J. Field/C. Field (MG Lola)	1m 05.985s
9. C. Dyson/Weaver (Riley & Scott)	1m 07.728s
10. Knight/Block (MG Lola)	1m 08.173s

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

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