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Motorsport

Road Atlanta, 11 October 2002

Frank Biela remains king of ALMS qualifying

Six times he did the qualifying this season, six times he conquered pole position – with this tremendous feat, Frank Biela remains king of ALMS (American Le Mans Series) qualifying. With his fastest time at Road Atlanta, the three times Le Mans winner also keeps his own title chance alive: Going in to the final round, Biela is 13 points behind series leader Tom Kristensen who set the second fastest time in the companion R8 and starts beside his teammate from the front row of the grid.

Both drivers of the Team Audi Sport North America chose different strategies for the qualifying in the US state of Georgia: While Biela went out on the track with his Infineon Audi R8 at the beginning of the 20-minute session, Tom Kristensen waited in the pit-lane, listened to the times of his teammate and went out for the pole-position only in the second half of the qualifying. Doing so, he missed out on Biela's time by a margin of only one tenth of a second. The 2001-spec Audi R8 with Johnny Herbert in the cockpit achieved fourth position on the grid.

Even before the final round over 1000 miles or ten hours of racing it is certain that the new ALMS champion will again be an Audi driver. Best chances are with points leader Tom Kristensen, who is still hunted by Frank Biela. Rinaldo Capello, title defender Emanuele Pirro and Johnny Herbert only have mathematical chances to snatch the Driver's title. One week ago, Audi secured the Manufacturers' title with season win number seven while the Team Audi Sport North America clinched the victory in the Team championship.

When the race starts at 11:30 hrs, Frank Biela and Tom Kristensen will be behind the wheel in the Infineon Audi R8 sportscars. The Audi drivers take a special challenge at Road Atlanta: In opposite to most other of a total of 50 teams, who strengthen their cockpit with a third driver, Audi starts with the usual driver pairings in the second longest race of the American Le Mans Series.

Quotes after qualifying

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Six times behind the wheel, six times on pole – that is a great thing. I was a little anxious that my strong run could stop here at Road Atlanta. The additional point for the pole-position keeps my title hopes alive, although the chance is still slim."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "In a ten hour race the pole position is of course more a prestige thing. Originally, today it was my turn to do the qualifying. But I wanted to give Frank a chance to shorten the margin to the series leaders. And he made it with a great effort. Now I'm hoping that we keep on going like that and win the race tomorrow."

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Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "We've missed out the chance to score an extra point to make it a little bit safer at the top. But as has happened many times this year, the gap at the top was very small and Frank once again showed how fast he is. We will not let anybody put us under pressure but instead show a cool race."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Congratulations to Frank. I knew his time before I went out on the track and I thought I would have a good chance. But then I didn't get the maximum out of the car, maybe the tyre pressures were not perfect. Now we will completely concentrate on the preparation for tomorrow. The pole is gone, but the race is long."

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "We'd consistently been inside the top-three during tests and practice this week so to wind up only fourth on the grid is a little disappointing. Our Audi had a little too much understeer during qualifying. Nevertheless, I think Stefan and I can make it to the podium tomorrow."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "We're running with the latest aerodynamics for the first time and the car feels really good despite only having our first experience of the new body kit in Wednesday's opening tests. It's easier to drive and makes us even stronger. It's a long race and although the factory Audis will start as favourites, you never know what can happen during ten hours of racing."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "Our number one crew tried everything to make the impossible happen. Frank did the first step today, he really seems to be unbeatable this year in qualifying. Both cars on the front row is a great starting position. Now we will try to show a clear race and let both R8 sportscars finish in these positions."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "The tension is still there after this qualifying session. Emanuele gave Frank the chance to get this extra point, and Frank continued his unique series and used the opportunity. Now the spectators can look forward to this race as we will experience ten hours of exciting racing on Saturday."

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Starting grid at Road Atlanta

1. Biela/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 10.939s
2. Capello/Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8)	1m 11.070s
3. Weaver/Leitzinger/Wallace (MG Lola)	1m 11.883s
4. Herbert/Johansson (Audi R8)	1m 12.083s
5. Magnussen/Brabham/Donohue (Panoz)	1m 12.147s
6. Matthews/Goossens/Ave (Riley & Scott)	1m 12.155s
7. Bernard/Collard/Taylor (Cadillac)	1m 12.303s
8. Field/Dayton/Durand (MG Lola)	1m 12.343s
9. Lehto/Angelelli/Tinseau (Cadillac)	1m 12.579s
10. Nielsen/Elgaard (Reynard)	1m 12.726s

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

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