



Press Information

Le Mans, 13 June 2004

“Japanese” Audi R8 wins Le Mans

Roughly 200,000 spectators witnessed a triple Audi victory at the 24-hour race at Le Mans and one of the tightest finishes in Le Mans' history. Leading by merely 41.354 seconds, Seiji Ara in the cockpit of the Audi R8 fielded by Audi Sport Japan Team Goh crossed the finish line ahead of Johnny Herbert at the wheel of the R8 entered by Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx. For both the 30-year old Japanese driver and Team Kazumichi Goh today marked the first victory in the world's major endurance race. Audi works driver Rinaldo Capello clinched his second Le Mans win in a row. Tom Kristensen achieved his sixth Le Mans exploit, now equalling the previous record holder, Jacky Ickx. The Dane is the first driver ever to clinch five consecutive victories at Le Mans.

For Audi – following the races in 2000, 2001 and 2002 – today marked the fourth Le Mans triumph of the R8. This year's race was clearly dominated by an open battle between the three Audi importer teams chasing each other from the first through to the last minute, thus pushing each other towards a new distance record. The victorious Audi R8 completed 379 laps (5169.970 kilometres), topping the previous record by four laps.

In the early stage of the race all four Audi R8 were leading the field. Shortly before the end of the second hour, Allan McNish and JJ Lehto both hit oil while running at high speed, causing them to slide off the track and crashing into the barrier. Yet, the massive impact proved the robustness of the R8: both cars were repaired and continued the race.

On the advice of his doctors, Allan McNish did not re-enter the race after the crash, so team-mates Frank Biela and Pierre Kaffer had to handle the remainder of the 24 hours between the two of them – with an impressive result: after the one-hour repair, the two Germans fought their way up from 44th to fifth place. Team ADT Champion Racing with JJ Lehto, Emanuele Pirro and Marco Werner, after having lost half an hour on account of the crash, even managed to clinch a podium position.

The battle for victory fought by the second Audi R8 fielded by Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx and Audi Sport Japan Team Goh remained a thriller through to the very end. The U.K. trio of Jamie Davies, Johnny Herbert and Guy Smith, having led the field right from the start, lost their lead when the push rod of the left rear wheel suspension of their R8 had to be replaced. Though the repair had cost the Britons two laps, they nearly recovered the set-back in a remarkable chase to catch up again, benefiting, to some extent, from the “Japanese” Audi R8 briefly catching fire during one of the last refuelling stops. Yet, Seiji Ara kept his cool in the final stage, defending his lead over Johnny Herbert, as the latter was getting closer and closer.

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Quotes after the race

Seiji Ara (Audi Sport Japan Team Goh / Audi R8 #5): "I'm really happy to have won this race. Even before the race I was under a lot of pressure, not least because I knew I'd be competing alongside two extremely successful team-mates, Tom and Dindo. I didn't want to disappoint them. Now, I'll need a little time to digest what happened today. And of course I'll have a glass of sake, as well."

Rinaldo Capello (Audi Sport Japan Team Goh / Audi R8 #5): "My exploit with Bentley last year makes me feel particularly happy about this year's victory with Audi – and even more so since the race had not started all that well for me. Because of braking problems right in the early stage, I spun into the gravel, causing me to lose some time. When this happened, I simply promised myself to keep cool. Since we were able to solve the problem during my first pit stop, the Audi R8 was running perfectly afterwards, and we were back in the race with our full competitive power."

Tom Kristensen (Audi Sport Japan Team Goh / Audi R8 #5): "Now, I've actually won Le Mans five times in a row, equalling Jacky Ickx's record of six wins. Honestly, I hadn't even dreamt of it. I've always been lucky, though, to have been able to race at Le Mans with some fantastic teams. My fellow drivers, and Jacky Ickx, too, think that I'm a lucky bastard. That's probably true. I just hope that I'll survive this night, now, because my family, friends and a lot of Danish fans are here. I know we'll be having an incredible party."

Jamie Davies (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #88): "Unfortunately, I lost some time because I was given a stop-and-go penalty for overtaking while the yellow flag was out. On top of that, while lapping, I touched a slower car and had to head for the pits to have my car checked for possible damage. Nevertheless, it was an exciting race, and I'm absolutely happy with the result."

Johnny Herbert (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #88): "Now, I've finished second for the third time in a row. This year, I had good chances to repeat my 1991 victory. The outcome of the race was open for a long period of time. But that's the way things are in racing: sometimes you get lucky, and at others, the lucky stars shine for someone else."

Guy Smith (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #88): "The race was so tough that we didn't even have any time to breathe. We were under permanent pressure. After my 2003 victory, the result is somewhat disappointing for me, but we did give our best."

Frank Biela (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #8): "Having to contest a race with only one team-mate, as I had to this year, was a completely new experience for me. Unfortunately, early on, we had an incident of the kind that can always happen at Le Mans. This was really too bad. What counts, though, is that Allan and JJ were not injured. My thanks to the team for having repaired the body perfectly after this crash."

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Pierre Kaffer (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #8): "The best laid plans can go awry, as the saying goes... It takes a lot of luck and skill to get out of Le Mans unscathed. When I was told about Allan's mishap, I just knew that something unusual had to have happened, because Allan has so much experience and hardly makes any mistakes. I learnt a lot about Le Mans this weekend. The fact that I drove one of the fastest laps in the race makes me very happy. It would simply be super if I could compete here again with an Audi next year."

Allan McNish (Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx / Audi R8 #8): "I hit oil in the Porsche corners at high speed. The car was damaged heavily and the impact so massive that I went to the Medical Centre to be checked. The doctors strictly advised against my continuing the race. I'm really disappointed because my Audi was absolutely competitive."

JJ Lehto (Team ADT Champion Racing / Audi R8 #2): "It's a real pity that my accident caused my team to fall back that much right in the early stage of the race. I'm very disappointed. But there was nothing warning the drivers of the oil at this dangerous point. No flags, nothing. It was like driving on ice. Yet, making it to the podium under these conditions really isn't such a bad result, is it?"

Emanuele Pirro (Team ADT Champion Racing / Audi R8 #2): "This was really an exciting race. The outcome of the fight between the two top runners was completely open. Too bad, that two Audi R8 cars fell behind right in the early stage, and that one of them was ours. Congratulations to Goh and Veloqx. And I'm happy, as well, to have been able to stand on the podium at Le Mans for the sixth time in a row. Next year, I want to try winning here again."

Marco Werner (Team ADT Champion Racing / Audi R8 #2): "I'm highly satisfied with our third place. After the crash we didn't think that there'd be such a happy end for us in this race. The Audi team proved its capabilities yet again. There aren't many teams which can prepare a car after a crash in such a way that it runs perfectly again. One should never give up, because Le Mans is always worth fighting for."

Kazumichi Goh (Team Director Audi Sport Japan Team Goh): "Today is the happiest day of my life. I'm so happy that we've been able to win this race together with our partner, Audi. We clearly proved that a multi-cultural crew can achieve a lot."

Sam Li (Team Director Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx): "The drivers and the team worked hard, and we were very close to victory. Audi and Michelin are two fantastic partners for our sports car programme. It's a funny feeling, though, to be leading the race over a period of 15 hours and then ending up in second place with a mere 41 seconds behind the winner."

Dave Maraj (Team Director Team ADT Champion Racing): "Our motto for the race was: nothing is guaranteed, but anything is possible. It's too bad, though, that we weren't part of the fight for ultimate victory. After the accident, the team did a fantastic job. The mechanics prepared the car again perfectly. The

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drivers constantly drove fast laps. Given these circumstances, our third place was the best possible result."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport): "I'm proud of the whole Audi squad. The outcome of the race was open until the final lap and there wasn't a single minute that was boring. A dual of the type we saw in the last few hours is relatively rare in the history of Le Mans. All three teams have done a great job. I don't think that anyone would have thought it possible for the two cars to end up in the top ten after those heavy crashes."

Le Mans results

- 1 Ara/Capello/Kristensen (Audi R8) 379 laps
- 2 Davies/Herbert/Smith (Audi R8) + 41.354s
- 3 Lehto/Werner/Pirro (Audi R8) - 11 laps
- 4 Ayari/Comas/Treluyer (Pescarolo-Judd) - 17 laps
- 5 Biela/Kaffer/McNish (Audi R8) - 29 laps
- 6 Gavin/Beretta/Magnussen (Chevrolet) - 34 laps
- 7 Lammers/Dyson/Kaneishi (Dome-Judd) - 38 laps
- 8 Fellows/O'Connell/Papis (Chevrolet) - 45 laps
- 9 McRae/Rydell/Turner (Ferrari) - 50 laps
- 10 Maassen/Bergmeister/Long (Porsche) - 52 laps

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