



Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup

BARCELONA (Spain)- 29/30 September – Final round

AKKA-ASP and Raffaele Marciello 2018 Blancpain GT Series Champions!

A fine harvest of podiums and titles in Barcelona...

This final round of the 2018 Blancpain GT Series allowed Team AKKA-ASP to be crowned as the Team Champions, while Raffaele Marciello took the drivers' title, two weeks after winning the Sprint Cup title alongside Michael Meadows. The Italian driver also finished as vice-champion in the Endurance Cup, as did AKKA-ASP in the Team classification. After winning the Sprint Silver Cup, Nico Bastian and Jack Manchester also secured the overall title in the Silver Cup (Sprint + Endurance) with another podium in the race. As for the duo of Eric Debard and Fabien Barthez, after taking a podium finish in the AM Cup (3rd in the race), they finished third overall in the Endurance AM Cup. In the final round of the season, the drivers of the #88 Mercedes-AMG did everything they could to claim the third title. Despite everything, Raffaele Marciello, Daniel Juncadella and Tristan Vautier finished second in the race after two consecutive wins in Catalonia in 2016 and 2017. A fine harvest of successes, to the delight of Jérôme Policand.





Traditionally, the final race of the season takes place in the warm Spanish sunshine, and more precisely in Catalonia. Once again, this year saw the circuit of Barcelona host the final round of the Blancpain GT Series with a top-level event and an exceptional grid of no fewer than 52 cars.

Two weeks after the crew of Raffaele Marciello and Michael Meadows won the Blancpain GT Series Sprint Cup and the pair of Nico Bastian and Jack Manchester were victorious in the Blancpain GT Series Sprint Cup Silver Cup, Team AKKA-ASP was in a good position to continue in the same way in

Spain. Up against the French team, however, the competition was fierce in both the team and drivers' competitions.



During qualifying, everyone was concentrated on their own aims. The first session, disrupted by a red flag, resulted in a patchy session where no-one could fully express themselves. The second, with yellow flags, a full course yellow and a finish under red flags, was no better. Not easy to set the best time with just one flying lap, to Daniel Juncadella's bitter experience.



In the third session, there was finally a flurry of lap time improvements. Behind the wheel of the #88, Raffaele Marciello set the fastest lap for a GT3 car in the Blancpain GT Series in Barcelona, with a time of 1.43.667. However, this effort still placed the car 6th overall after taking the average of the three sessions. Starting from the third row, it was clear that the task of claiming the win and the title would be more complex. There was the same disappointment for the #90, starting from the 10th row, and for the #87 (Jean-Luc Beaubelique, Mauro Ricci and Nico Jamin) on the 19th. However, there was great satisfaction for the #89 which claimed a magnificent pole position in AM. Fabien Barthez and Eric Debard do not do things by half. Last but not least, the #35 SMP Racing by AKKA-ASP car of Denis Bulatov, Alexey Korneev and Michael Meadows, claimed a ninth-row start.



The tension on the starting grid was clear, with so much at stake: three cars aiming for victory and the Endurance title...

Raffaele Marciello did the first stint. He made a good start and gained a position on the second lap. Nico Bastian and Fabien Barthez were already leading the Silver Cup and the AM category, while Nico Jamin had already gained nine positions! At the front and in the pack, the pace was frantic.





Battle for second position was furious. Lello Marciello kept attacking the second-placed Aston Martin, but to no avail. After the driver change, Daniel Juncadella took over the car and was faced by the same problem. Still in command of the Silver Cup, Jack Manchester took over from Nico Bastian in the #90. The young British driver kept ahead of his rivals in P12. Mauro Ricci also proved to be very apt at defending his position and was not intimidated by some worthy adversaries.

As far as the AM category was concerned, Eric Debard took over the #89 and retained a provisional podium position. Alexey Korneev took the #35 up into the Top 20.



Just before the final hour of the race began, things began to happen. Having played cat and mouse for a while, Mauro Ricci's #87 collided with a Ferrari. The Mercedes-AMG first landed in a gravel trap, and then the gearbox gave up. A similar misadventure (or nearly) befell Jack Manchester, who received a drive-through penalty for a collision. The #90 lost a few positions and when Jules Szymkowiak took over, it had dropped to P4 in the Silver Cup.



Tristan Vautier finished the work begun by his team-mates, now in second position. The Aston Martin Vantage AM-23 finished fourth.



Their rival Mercedes-AMG, both for the win and for the Championship, entered by Black Falcon, was in their sights. The Frenchman used all his talent to attempt to take control, but all attempts were in vain. The last part of the race was marked by yet another Full Course Yellow, followed by a Safety car intervention. The restart, with just five minutes of the race remaining, was tense.



Eventually, Tristan Vautier crossed the line in second place after a race with no regrets. Denis Bulatov took 14th place in the #35 SMP Racing by AKKA-ASP while Jules Szymkowiak rescued a last-minute Silver Cup podium, as did Fabien Barthez in the AM Cup.



More podiums but more importantly, Team AKKA-ASP became the 2018 Champion of the Blancpain GT Series while Raffaele Marciello claimed the Drivers' title. Michael Meadows finished 3rd. After the Silver Cup Sprint Cup, the pair of Bastian and Manchester secured the overall title as Champions of the Blancpain GT Series Silver Cup (endurance+sprint). Fabien Barthez and Eric Debard took the third place in the Blancpain GT Series AM Cup.



In the Endurance category of the Blancpain GT Series, AKKA-ASP is the team vice-champion, as is Raffaele Marciello among the drivers, followed by Tristan Vautier.



Plenty of emotion for Jérôme Policand who could not hide his joy.

"I am relieved this evening, even if it is true that I have not fully realized it yet. Today's race was very skilled, a mature team and mature drivers, I have no regrets. We fought well this season while never losing sight of the fundamentals. Each member of the team was fully committed in this adventure and everyone outdid themselves to get where we are today. We may not be the best organised team, or the most disciplined, but our way to live the race allowed us to overcome all that. This evening I am proud of what we have achieved together."

Even if the Blancpain GT Series is over for 2018, the season is not yet over for AKKA-ASP... most

notably the final round of the FFSA French GT4 Championship, in two weeks' time at the Paul Ricard circuit.

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CHAMPIONSHIPS Classifications



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