



Blancpain GT Series Sprint Cup

NÜRBURGRING (Germany) – 14/ 15 September – Final round

Victory and 2018 Drivers Title for Marciello and Meadows: full marks for AKKA–ASP!

Suspense until the very end... it wasn't until the final five minutes of the last race of the season that the winner of the 2018 Blancpain GT Series Sprint Cup was determined. But it was well worth the wait, as the drivers of the #88 AKKA-ASP car, Raffaele Marciello and Michael Meadows, claimed the 2018 Drivers title as well as victory in the weekend's second race. Full marks for Jérôme Policand's team, whose pairing of Nico Bastian with Jack Manchester had already secured the Sprint Cup Silver Cup last week in Hungary. A perfect score, to which should be added the results of the Team's other cars, Nico Jamin and Adam Christodoulou in the #87 but also Alexey Korneev and Vladimir Atoev, vice-champions of the Sprint Cup Silver Cup in the #35 SMP Racing by AKKA-ASP. A brilliant result for the whole team, who showed great perseverance and never gave up hope. Now, for Raffaele Marciello, the aim is the Blancpain GT Series, including both the Sprint and Endurance Cups, where the Italian driver is leading by 18.5 points. The final meeting of the Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup, in two weeks' time in Barcelona, will be the season highlight, as Team AKKA-ASP and its driver crews will still be competing for the titles...



The Nürburgring circuit is not quite like any other, both technical and testing, and, like its close 'neighbour' the other side of the Eifel – the circuit of Spa-Francorchamps – notorious for its changeable weather.

This weekend, there were no bad surprises as far as the weather was concerned, although temperatures were rather chilly. There were some changes in the AKKA-ASP clan, as Nico Jamin had a new team-mate. Having shared the cockpit of his Mercedes-AMG GT3 with Denis Bulatov, it was the turn of Adam Christodoulou to share the #87. Adam is hardly a newcomer to the French team, having driven in Silverstone with Tristan Vautier and Raffaele Marciello, and then in

the 1000 km of the Circuit Paul Ricard with Raffaele Marciello and Thomas Jäger.

For the pair of Marciello and Meadows, this final round of the Sprint Cup was a case of double or nothing. Having set the last two pole positions and scored points in every race, nothing was settled for the joint Championship leaders. It was the same for the team title. With a deficit of 10.5 points, AKKA-ASP was still in the race but had some tough opponents.



Free practice set the tone for the weekend. Nico Jamin was the Team's fastest driver in the first session, setting the 5th time, while Raffaele Marciello set the best time in the second. Qualifying did not overturn this tendency. Nico Bastian claimed the Silver Cup pole for the first race (5th fastest overall). Nico Jamin was 9th, just ahead of his team-mate Michael Meadows, struggling with the balance of his Mercedes-AMG GT3 throughout the session. Placed 4th in the Silver Cup, Vladimir Atoev set the 16th time in the #35 SMP Racing by AKKA-ASP car.



In the second qualifying session, things were slightly different... except for the #35 as his team-mate Alexey Korneev was also 16th, 3rd in the Silver Cup. But Lello Marciello was on form and was fastest on track until the end of the session, when, just before the chequered flag, the Italian driver lost out on pole to another Mercedes-AMG. However, he kept his front row spot (P2). Adam Christodoulou placed the #87 in the Top 10 while no fewer than 13 cars were in the same second...



The weekend's first race started like thunder. Nico Bastian made a convincing start from 4th and was soon fighting for third. After 15 minutes the race was neutralised further to an accident. At the restart, Nico Jamin began his attack and



undertook a fine battle to gain 8th position. Michael Meadows was in the Top 10. At the driver change, Lello Marciello rejoined in 13th position while Nico Jamin, in P5, handed over to Adam Christodoulou who rejoined in P8. Nico Bastian found himself in the lead and stayed out on track until the very end of the pit window. The German driver pitted from the lead while Jack Manchester took over, leader for a lap before dropping to P3. As far as Lello was concerned, he switched over to 'attack mode', making the most of his car and his skills.



Lap after lap, the driver of the #88 climbed up the field in majestic style, finishing up in the Top 5 by the chequered flag. As for Jack Manchester, he showed fine resistance up against some serious rivals. Dropping down to 8th position, the British driver was caught up in a contact, which was not at all his fault, but which meant he had to return to the pits to change the splitter. A shame, as a fine finish and serious points were in perspective, as after winning the Sprint Cup Silver Cup title, the crew of the #90 is now aiming for the overall Blancpain GT Series Silver Cup title... Having shown great consistency, Adam Christodoulou took the flag in eighth position while the young Russian drivers, Vladimir Atoev and Alexey Korneev, took another Silver Cup podium, finishing third.



After the end of this first race, the winning #63 Lamborghini was given a 30 second penalty before finally being disqualified, handing victory to the Audi #1, the #88 car's sole remaining rival for the title. This meant that the final positions had also changed. The #88 inherited fourth, and was second in the overall classification of the championship with a deficit of nine points on the leaders and winners of race 1, Audi #1. The #87 was P7 while the #35 moved up to second in the Silver Cup after a penalty of 30 seconds for the winning Mercedes-AMG.

The next day, the second race and the final Sprint race of the season, was to be decisive. A few minutes before the start, the tension among the AKKA ASP clan was clear, especially as the #90 Mercedes-AMG GT3 was stuck in its garage with a gear box problem (which was eventually changed in just 45 minutes ...).



On the first row of the grid, Lello Marciello made a good start and kept hold of second, before contact with another car, luckily without any consequences. The pace was high, but Lello kept up with the leading car. Adam Christodoulou was 8th in the #87 while Korneev was 16th. Eventually, Jack Manchester was able to join the race in the #90 five laps into the race.

At the driver change, Michael Meadows took the lead while his only rival for the title, the #1 l'Audi was fifth, which would give the AKKA ASP crew the title if the Audi was not able to improve on its position. This second part of the race promised to be frantic... Nicolas Jamin was 7th with the #87 and Vladimir Atoev 14th (P3 Silver). As for Nico Bastian in the #90, he continued to lap at an excellent pace (4th Silver).



Michael Meadows was in command of the race and the positions appeared to have stabilized. However, five minutes from the end, everything started to happen. The #1 Audi began to attack the #66 Audi for fourth place, which would have given them the Drivers title. But it was not as easy as that, as the #66 Audi fought to keep its position (which would give it third place in the Championship) and put up an incredible display of resistance. Contact, overtaking, another overtaking manoeuvre, and finally the #1 made a mistake and ended up returning to the pits. In the AKKA-ASP clan, everyone visibly relaxed. As long as Michael Meadows took the flag, the title was theirs. At long last, the crew of the #88 claimed a magnificent win and the 2018 Drivers title in the Blancpain GT Series Sprint Cup. Nicolas Jamin finished the race in 6th position in the #87 (which is also his position in the Sprint Cup) and Nico Bastian finished 4th in the Silver Cup in the #90. The #35 SMP Racing by AKKA-ASP driven by the all-Russian crew of Korneev-Atoev claimed second place in the Silver Cup in this race, as well as the title of vice-champion of the Sprint Silver Cup 2018, just behind Nico Bastian and Jack Manchester, who already secured the title at the Hungaroring. The only slight shadow was that they lost out on the Team title by just four points...



For Jérôme Policand, this win and title come as the culmination of much hard work and effort.

« We did it ! Although the weekend didn't start off well, with 10th fastest in the first qualifying session... and then the disqualification of the Lamborghini from the first race was not really in our favour, as it allowed the #1 Audi to score the points for the win. The ideal scenario became rather complicated. Today, for the second race, there were no more questions. We didn't have the fastest car, but we had an extra-terrestrial at the wheel... throughout the season, even if we missed out on some big point-scoring opportunities, Lello was always there. He is really an exceptional driver. Congratulations also to Michel who always does his very best to finish the work. He never makes mistakes and proved that again today.





I would like to thank the team for a top performance. Even if the season has not been perfect, they managed to win titles. I can only be proud of my team. Especially as our main rivals, Team WRT, are quite simple THE reference in this form of racing.

I didn't want to have any regrets when I left the Nürburgring, that was the objective, even if we had lost by one point. We have no regrets – and we did it! »

Now, all eyes turn towards Barcelona, in two weeks' time, a particularly busy weekend for Team AKKA-ASP as it includes the finale of the Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup, the Blancpain GT Series title, and the penultimate round of the FFSA French GT4 Championship. Team AKKA-ASP can still hope to claim a few titles. Raffaele Marciello is leading the Endurance Drivers classification (by one point) and the overall Blancpain GT Series (with a lead of 18.5 points). The duo of Bastian-Manchester is also leading the Blancpain GT Series Silver Cup, by 4.5 points. As far as the Team title is concerned, AKKA-ASP is the joint leader of the Blancpain GT Series and second in the Endurance Cup, four points behind. There should be plenty of adrenalin flowing in Catalonia ...



Blancpain GT Series Sprint Cup - NÜRBURGRING

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