



2014 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC)
6 Hours of Bahrain

The 2014 6 Hours of Bahrain: tyre strategies and world titles

The 2014 6 Hours of Bahrain turned out to be an emotional event where Michelin tyres played a fundamental role in the final outcome. The result settled a number of Drivers' titles, with Toyota Racing's Antony DAVIDSON and Sébastien BUEMI securing the top prize in LM P1, while the LM GTE Pro crown was sealed by AF Corse/Ferrari racers Gianmaria BRUNI and Toni VILANDER.

Tyre strategy key in qualifying

Qualifying practice for the 2014 6 Hours of Bahrain produced a contest in which tyre strategy helped Porsche Team to snatch pole position from Toyota Racing by mere tenths of a second.

The German squad chose MICHELIN's 'soft high temperature' compound, while Audi Sport Team Joest – which was represented by a single R18 e-tron quattro in qualifying – and Toyota Racing both opted for the French firm's 'medium high temperature' alternative.

The fastest lap was eventually posted by the N°14 Porsche 919 Hybrid in the hands of DUMAS/JANI who recorded a best time of 1m41.897s round the 5.412km Sakhir International Circuit, and an average lap of 1m43.145s. The N°8 Toyota TS040 Hybrid (DAVIDSON/BUEMI) was second fastest (+0.265s), followed by the N°20 Porsche 919 Hybrid (BERNHARD/HARTLEY, +1.046s).

While Porsche's choice proved judicious for qualifying, the question was whether it would be suitable for the start of the 6 Hours of Bahrain which took place with track temperatures standing at around 40°C, since the tyres used for qualifying had to be fitted for the first stint of the race? Romain DUMAS wasn't sure... "I've been nominated to start the race in the N°14 Porsche and I think I will put on a good show for the spectators on soft compound tyres. After that, we'll see," smiled the Frenchman during Friday evening's post-qualifying press conference.

Tyre strategies during the race, too

The 6 Hours of Bahrain started at 3pm local time Saturday, with the Porsches running on soft rubber and most of the other hybrid prototypes on medium tyres! The N°1 Audi faced the task of having to fight its way back up the field after being forced to start from the back of the LM P1 grid because of its absence from the previous day's qualifying session. Brazil's Lucas DI GRASSI consequently started from 12th place with his R18 e-tron quattro running on fresh tyres, which gave Audi Sport Team Joest an opportunity to fit 'softs'.

The performance difference was easy to see, while the consistency of the 'soft high temperature' solution over a full stint proved to be sufficient to make them the most efficient option over the 'mediums'.

After the first round of pit stops, Audi and Porsche decided to continue with the same solution on their respective cars. Only Toyota, whose N°7 TS 040 Hybrid (WURZ/SARRAZIN/CONWAY) had emerged in front, chose to continue on the harder tyres until the finish.



Double stints for Rebellion Racing

The circuits designed by German architect Hermann Tilke tend to be tough on tyres, and Sakhir is no different. Meanwhile, the hot weather that prevails in this part of the Middle East all year round obviously adds to the challenge they face. Successfully double stinting in Bahrain is consequently something of an achievement, but one which Rebellion Racing managed to pull off! The Swiss team, whose conventionally-engined car delivers torque more progressively than the hybrid power units, decided to take full advantage of the consistency of its Michelin tyres to double stint during the second half of the race.

On the podium in LM P1

The 6 Hours of Bahrain saw Toyota Racing claim its third straight victory, this time with the N°7 car (WURZ/SARRAZIN/CONWAY), while its N°8 prototype was slowed by an alternator issue. Even so, although the TS 040 Hybrid of DAVIDSON/BUEMI only finished 11th overall, that was enough for the Anglo-Swiss pair to seal the 2014 Drivers' crown. The other two cars on the podium were the N°14 Porsche 919 Hybrid (DUMAS/JANI/LIEB) and its N°20 sister machine (BERNHARD/WEBBER/HARTLEY) after the team had got its weekend off to a flying start by winning qualifying on Friday.

Gianmaria BRUNI and Toni VILANDER clinch the 2014 LM GTE Pro Drivers' title

The two Ferrari drivers overcame their setback in Shanghai, where Gianmaria BRUNI collided with a car that suddenly slowed in front of him, to secure this season's LM GTE Pro Drivers' honours. The AF Corse pair made sure of the title thanks to their class win in Bahrain after a particularly polished performance, aided by the fact that the Italian team was able to make one less pit stop than its rivals. Gianmaria BRUNI: "We did a great job with Michelin before the start of the season to develop a range of tyres that were perfectly suited to the Ferrari 458 GTE and to our respective driving styles. Throughout the year, our Michelin tyres have performed impeccably. You only have to look at Toni's [Vilander] last stint when he completed 30 laps on the same set of tyres without the slightest problem. Michelin means 'victory'!"

The last round of the 2014 FIA World Endurance Championship will take teams to Interlagos, Sao Paulo, Brazil, on November 30.