

Round 4: 6 Hours of Circuit of the Americas

Sunshine, searing heat and torrential rain... MICHELIN's endurance tyres deliver in challenging conditions

The difficult weather conditions encountered in Texas at this time of year (high temperatures humidity, heavy showers) did not spare the 2014 FIA World Endurance Championship which visited the Circuit of the America's in Austin this weekend. Saturday's race ran from 5pm to 11pm local time and produced a cocktail of searing heat, which led some drivers to the verge of fainting, plus the effects of a nearby hurricane which swamped the recently built track (inaugurated in 2012).

MICHELIN's LM P1 partners lined up for the sunny start on the French firm's 'medium' (Audi and Toyota) or 'soft' (Porsche) compounds. In LM-P2, SMP RACING's ORECA 03 R-Nissan began the race on Michelin's new 'medium+' 'high temperature' slick.

Audi's strategy was to double stint on the same tyres, while Toyota chose to swap during each pit stop, the reverse of their respective strategies here in 2013 when Audi claimed the top prize. After the first hour-and-a-half, the N°8 TOYOTA TS 040 Hybrid led in the hands of Nicolas LAPIERRE, more than 30 seconds clear of the N°2 AUDI R18 e-tron quattro (André LOTTERER).

A sudden downpour

That is when the first drops of rain were reported, initially at Turns 10 and 11. The drivers didn't take much notice to begin with and they decided it was insufficient to switch to wet weather tyres. Almost immediately, however, the heavens opened and covered the entire track in water, leading to a high number of off-track excursions before the cars pitted at last and the safety car was dispatched.

First victim was the N°8 TOYOTA (LAPIERRE) which got stuck in the gravel at Turn 12 where it was soon joined by several GT cars and the N°20 PORSCHE (Timo BERNHARD) which narrowly avoided hitting the Toyota and an AF CORSE Ferrari. Soon afterwards, Race Control decided to interrupt the race.

Action resumed 50 minutes later, this time with all the cars on rain tyres (except the N°14 Porsche: see Jérôme MONDAIN quote below) and, initially, lined up behind the safety car.

The Michelin hybrid tyre performs its magic

When the rain eased off at last, the teams switched to MICHELIN's 'HYBRID' tyre, a slick which features a compound developed especially for high grip and performance in wet and drying conditions, enabling it to cover a wide spectrum of situations. It contributed to Toyota's victory at the 6 Hours of Silverstone earlier this year, for example, when the TS 040 Hybrid of Alexander WURZ lapped five seconds faster than the sister Toyota in the hands of Sébastien BUEMI who had remained on rain tyres on a drying track, while Audi and Porsche found themselves in trouble when they stayed on 'low temperature' slicks in heavy rain.

The race at Austin provide another eloquent illustration of the Michelin Hybrid's versatility, as underlined by **Jérôme MONDAIN**, manager of MICHELIN Motorsport's Endurance racing programmes: "The variety of conditions encountered in Texas highlighted the fact that MICHELIN has a wide range of solutions to ensure optimal performance in all types of weather. In LM P1, the N°14 Porsche 919 Hybrid re-started on the Hybrid tyre after the interruption when the circuit was still very damp. Its versatility allowed the car to lead for the next two stints, during which time the track became practically entirely dry. That's a performance that's important to underline."

The next round of the 2014 FIA Endurance World Championship will take teams to the Fuji Speedway, Japan, for Round 5 on Sunday, October 12, when competitors will race with the famous mountain as backdrop.

6 Hours of Circuit of the Americas – class by class:

LM P1: Victory for the N°2 AUDI R18 e-tron quattro (FASSLER / LOTTERER / TRELUYER), ahead of the N°1 Audi R18 e-tron quattro (DI GRASSI / DUVAL / KRISTENSEN and the N°8 TOYOTA TS 040 Hybrid (WURZ / SARRAZIN / CONWAY). All three cars were on Michelin tyres.

LM P2: Class win for the N°74 ORECA 03 R-Nissan (KCMG, HOWSON / BRADLEY / MATSUDA), ahead of the N°27 ORECA 03 R-Nissan/Michelin (SMP Racing, ZLOBIN / MINASSIAN /MEDIANI) and the N°30 HPD ARX-HONDA (EXTREME SPEED MOTORSPORT, SHARP / DALZIEL / BROWN).

LM GTE Pro: The GTE Pro winner was the N°97 ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE (TURNER / MÜCKE), ahead of the N°92 Porsche 911 RSR (MANTHEY, MAKOWIECKI / PILET) and the N°51 FERRARI 458 ITALIA (AF CORSE, BRUNI / VILANDER). All three cars were on Michelin tyres.

LM GTE AM: GTE Am victory for the N°98 ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE (DALLA LANA / LAMY / NYGAARD), ahead of the similar N°95 car (POULSEN / HEINEMEIER-HANSON / STANAWAY) and the N°88 PORSCHE 911 RSR (RIED/ BACHLER / AL QUBAISI). All three cars were on Michelin tyres.