



FIA World Endurance Championship Round 2: 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps

Double stints at Spa with the 2014 Le Mans 24 Mans looming fast

After last month's 6 Hours of Silverstone (April 20), the 2014 FIA World Endurance Championship continued with today's visit to the legendary rollercoaster ride at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium's Ardennes Mountains, home of the 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. Just as it does every year, the Belgian classic provided teams with a valuable opportunity to fine-tune their preparations for next month's Le Mans 24 Hours. Indeed, the unique profile of the circuit at Silverstone called for a specific set-up and a high downforce configuration. That meant it was impossible to come to any definitive conclusions concerning the cars or tyres inasmuch as Le Mans is very much a low-downforce track. The speeds reached in La Sarthe are higher, too, and the braking is much fiercer.

The demands made of the cars and tyres are far more similar to Le Mans at Spa, which always makes the Belgian race a fundamental part of the teams' build-up to the French 24-hour race.

In endurance racing, tyres play an active part in the cars' efficiency as they work in harmony with the suspensions and aerodynamic configurations. In the case of the LM P1 prototypes, the forces at play are colossal, since the additional loads involved can be up to three times the actual weight of the car. The lateral and longitudinal G-forces are also extreme and frequently exceed 3G.

The work of MICHELIN's engineers is to optimise the way the French firm's tyres work with the cars of its different partner teams. This work is even more critical this year since MICHELIN has introduced a brand new range of endurance racing tyres, notably for the LMP1 cars.

Audi, Toyota and Porsche: a battle based on double-stint strategies

The tyres developed for the latest-generation LMP1 prototypes have been completely redesigned in order to function with cars that themselves have undergone big changes compared with recent seasons. Michelin's new tyres are even more efficient despite being between five and six centimetres narrower and eight kilos lighter (per set of four) than last season's solutions, while they are expected to deliver the same level of performance in terms of speed, consistency and longevity as they did in 2013.

At Spa, these new Michelin tyres made a real contribution to the outstanding show provided to the 46,000 spectators by Audi, Toyota and Porsche.

To begin with, Friday evening's qualifying shootout took place in drying conditions which saw the team's use MICHELIN's 'Hybrid' intermediate to begin with. All the teams then switched to the 'high temperature' SOFT-compound slick which proved increasingly faster as the track surface dried out completely.

The race was even more interesting as the teams adopted double-stint strategies very early on. Audi Sport Team Joest double-stinted from the start and the N°1 (DI GRASSI / DUVAL / KRISTENSEN) and N°2 (FÄSSLER / LOTTERER / TRÉLUYER) Audi R18 e-tron quattros both benefited from the consistency of their 'high temperature' SOFT-compound Michelin slicks to close the gap to the Toyota TS 040 Hybrids and the N°14 Porsche 919 Hybrid thanks to the 20-second saving they made by not changing tyres during their first pit stops.



The same strategy was then adopted by Toyota Racing and Porsche Team as the three makes continued to battle on the track and in the pits. Toyota Racing ended up winning this thrilling contest thanks to its N°8 TS 040 Hybrid which finished on the highest step of the podium, flanked by Audi Sport Team Joest's N°1 R18 e-tron quattro in which Loïc DUVAL successfully defended second spot, despite pressure from Toyota's Stéphane SARRAZIN (3rd). Porsche Team came fourth with the N°14 919 Hybrid of DUMAS / JANI / LIEB).

"We were very pleased with the performance of our LMP1 tyres at Spa," underlined MICHELIN Motorsport's Technical Director **Nicolas GOUBERT**. "Our partners provided a first class show, and we believe our tyres contributed to that. We are very confident ahead of the Le Mans 24 Hours where we think our new 31/71-18 tyres will be capable of completing quadruple stints, which will be necessary if our partners want to have a chance of winning the MICHELIN Total Performance Award."

Ferrari on form at Spa

The LM GTE Pro and Am classes were both won by AF Corse-run Ferrari F458 Italias. Gianmaria BRUNI and Toni VILANDER enjoyed a faultless weekend in the N°51 car (Pro) which emerged in front from the start, while a fascinating scrap for second place developed between Aston Martin, Porsche and the Ferrari of RIGON / CALADO.

In GTE Pro, Aston Martin was the first team to double stint on the same tyres with its two Vantage V8s. After seeing the value of this tactic, Porsche did likewise, while the N°71 Ferrari successfully double-stinted towards the end of the race. Second place finally went to the N°19 Porsche 911 RSR of PILET / BERGMEISTER, which was joined on the podium by the Ferrari F458 Italia of RIGON / CALADO (3rd).

The LMGTE AM class was won by the N°61 Ferrari F458 Italia (PEREZ-COMPANC / CIOCI / VENTURI) after figuring at the front of the field for much of the six-hour race.

"In LMGTE Pro, we exceeded our own expectations and those of our partners," observed **Jérôme MONDAIN**, manager of MICHELIN Motorsport's endurance racing programme. "Double stinting at Spa was by no means a foregone conclusion."

The next round of the 2014 FIA WEC is the Le Mans 24 Hours (June 14-15) which will be preceded by the official pre-Le Mans test day on June 1.