



24-hour race: Spa-Francorchamps

**An action-packed start to the 24-hour race – BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS is in leading pack after four hours of racing in Spa.**

Spa-Francorchamps (BE), 25<sup>th</sup> July 2015. The 24-hour race at the legendary Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium is underway – spectators have, so far, witnessed continuously changing weather conditions, a great deal of incidents and three Safety Car periods, all of which have mixed the field up well and truly. After the first nail-biting phase of the race, Maxime Martin (BE), Augusto Farfus (BR) and Dirk Werner (DE) from BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS are the best placed BMW drivers. Driving car number 45, a BMW Z4 GT3, they are currently placed third overall.

Due to a heavy downpour that had started at the Spa circuit early in the morning, conditions at the 7.004 kilometre track were exceedingly difficult. At the start Martin was able to demonstrate his sheer class once again. The BMW DTM driver played to his strengths in the wet conditions, put in quick lap-times, improved upon his starting position of tenth and advanced towards the sharp end of the field. However, through no fault of his own, he lost valuable time under the Safety Car – this is also exactly what happened to the second car entered by BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS, driven by starting driver Lucas Luhr (DE). Both BMW Z4 GT3s occupied the first two positions on lap 37 before they went into the pits simultaneously while the whole circuit was under yellow flag conditions. After four hours, car number 46, a BMW Z4 GT3 shared by Nick Catsburg (NL), Lucas Luhr (DE) and Markus Palttala (FI), had dropped back to 30<sup>th</sup> place.

After the turbulent beginning to the race, six BMW Z4 GT3s were positioned in the top 20. Things also looked promising in the race for Team Russia by Barwell. Leonid Machitski (RU), Jon Minshaw (GB), Phil Keen (GB) and starting driver Jonathan Cocker (GB) maintained fifth spot, equivalent to the lead in the Pro-Am Class, where they also compete. Alexander Sims (GB), Alasdair McCaig (GB), Devon Modell (GB) and Oliver Bryant (GB) from Ecurie Ecosse also showed an impressive performance at the start of the race. Sims, in car 79, had begun in 20<sup>th</sup> place, but after ten minutes of racing had fought his way up to 12<sup>th</sup>. The first appearance of the Safety Car came when a Ferrari left the track on lap eight and hit the barriers. Sims was able to jump to tenth at the restart. He pitted on lap 14 when the Safety Car, which stayed on track for a further 16 laps, appeared for the second time. After the second restart Sims was able to move temporarily into first place, but after four hours of racing car 79 was running in tenth.

In their first appearance together at a 24-hour race, Alessandro Zanardi (IT), Timo Glock (DE) and Bruno Spengler (CA) are showing a strong performance. Spengler in the number 9 BMW Z4 GT3 had topped the time sheets in the morning warm up. In the opening laps of the 24-hour race the starting driver showed kept his cool in tricky conditions and was fifth when he pitted during the second Safety Car phase. After four hours of racing car number 9 was running in 15<sup>th</sup>.

Also in the top 20 were Eric Dermont (FR), Henry Hassid (FR), Franck Perera (FR) and Mathias Beche (FR) from Team TDS Racing. The four drivers in the number 12 BMW Z4 GT3 were occupying 16<sup>th</sup> position four hours into the race. Two places



behind in 18<sup>th</sup> was the number 77 car of BMW Sports Trophy Team Brazil. Sergio Jimenez (BR), Felipe Fraga (BR) and Caca Bueno (BR), who started the race for the team, are the drivers of this BMW Z4 GT3.

Further back in the field is Triple Eight Racing, who received a drive-through penalty for breaching pit-lane regulations. Joe Osborne (GB), Ryan Ratcliffe (GB), Lee Mowle (GB) and starting driver Dirk Müller (DE) were holding 33<sup>rd</sup> place four hours into the race. Classic & Modern Racing, with Jean-Luc Blanchemain (FR), Pierre Hirschi (CH), Frederic Bouvy (BE) and starting driver Christian Kelders (BE) in the car, were in 46<sup>th</sup>.

Another BMW Z4 GT3, raced by legendary BMW drivers, has also completed its first stint of the race. The "Marc VDS & Friends Racing Against Cancer" car, which was taking part to benefit a Belgian cancer charity, completed the first 24 minutes of the race as planned. Jean-Michel Martin (BE) then brought the car back to the garage as he is competing along with Pascal Witmeur (BE), Eric van de Poele (BE) and Marc Duez (BE) in their own version of the 24-hour race. On Saturday evening, Sunday afternoon and at the end of the race they will complete a 24-minute stint in the number 240 BMW Z4 GT3.

On the other hand, Boutsen/Ginion's number 15 BMW Z4 GT3 had bad luck. On lap 14, start driver Karim Ojeh (SA) arrived at the same point where the Ferrari had run off shortly before and hit the barriers. This meant that for Ojeh, Olivier Grotz (LU), Jordan Grogor (AE) and Ralf Oeverhaus (DE), the race had come to a premature end after only half an hour of action.

Due to the accidents and the difficult weather conditions a total of 27 laps were completed behind the safety car.

#### **Reactions to the first four hours of racing.**

##### **Maxime Martin (car 45, BMW Z4 GT3, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS):**

"I had a good start and was able to make it through the difficult first phase of the race without incident. I was able to improve on my starting position, but, due to the rain and the resulting Safety Car periods, we lost half a lap. That's a bit strange, but it's just the way things go. The race is long, so we'll see how things pan out further."

##### **Alexander Sims (car 78, BMW Z4 GT3, Ecurie Ecosse):**

"The car was very strong in the wet. I had a good stint before the first Safety Car period and also had a good rhythm, as I was able to overtake quite a few cars. Luckily the team made the right decision as the track started to dry out, because we had already anticipated that it would start raining again. This was perhaps the most important decision regarding the positions I was able to gain."

##### **Bruno Spengler (car 9, BMW Z4 GT3, ROAL Motorsport):**

"The stint was difficult as we had a lot of Safety Car periods, and no free running other than in the first few laps. I had some cars ahead of me, which were slower, but I couldn't risk trying to overtake them. I was really careful in the first laps. I didn't want to take any unnecessary risks and damage the car. I managed to do that and so then we were placed really well. Unfortunately the pit lane lights were red after our first



stop, and as they changed to green the driver three cars ahead of me stalled his engine. The light went back to red and we had to wait, which cost us half a lap. That was bad luck. Otherwise we would have possibly made the top five. But we were able to get that lap back, and are back on the lead lap now. Now we just have to wait and see what we can do."

**Lucas Luhr (car 46, BMW Z4 GT3, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS):**

"That was a very tough first stint. We had the wrong tyre pressures and I couldn't get my rears up to temperature. Then the track started to dry out, and I could suddenly get going. When the rain came back luckily we changed tyres, and everything was alright. At times, the weather was so crazy that I couldn't go faster than 85kph for fear of aquaplaning. I hope we have no more rain for the rest of the race."

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