



24h Spa-Francorchamps

BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS in contention at Spa-Francorchamps – Six BMW Z4 GT3s in the top 20.

Spa-Francorchamps (BE), 26th July 2015. Two thirds of the way into the Ardennes marathon, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS remains in contention with both its BMW Z4 GT3s at the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps (BE). Despite a drive-through penalty for contact with another car, Maxime Martin, Augusto Farfus (BR) and Dirk Werner (DE) in the number 45 car led the endurance classic after 16 hours.

After an eventful start to the 67th running of the Ardennes marathon, the night was relatively quiet at "Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps". The sometimes torrential rain had stopped by the evening and the track had started to dry out. At just five degrees Celsius, it was a cold night, with fog descending on isolated sections of the circuit. The second BMW Team Marc VDS car, the number 46 BMW Z4 GT3, which had dropped as far back as 30th as a result of early Safety Car periods, fought its way back into the leading group during the night. Nick Catsburg (NL), Lucas Luhr (DE) and Markus Palttala (FI) were also handed a drive-through penalty for overtaking under a yellow flag, but are within striking distance in fourth after 16 hours.

In total, six BMW Z4 GT3s find themselves in the top 20 after two thirds of the 24-hour classic. As well as the two BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS cars, Ecurie Ecosse is also well-placed with the number 79 BMW Z4 GT3: Alexander Sims (GB), Alasdair McCaig (GB), Devon Modell (GB) and Oliver Bryant (GB) are ninth after 16 hours of racing. Team Russia by Barwell has also produced an impressive display so far: Leonid Machitski (RU), Jon Minshaw (GB), Phil Keen (GB) and start driver Jonathan Cocker (GB) are 12th.

The BMW works trio of Alessandro Zanardi (IT), Timo Glock (DE) and Bruno Spengler (CA) also made it through the night safely at their first 24-hour race together. At times they were running as high as fifth place in the modified number 9 BMW Z4 GT3, but lost a number of positions due to a broken suspension at about 07:30 this morning. The ROAL Motorsport team fixed the problem, allowing the car to resume. After 16 hours, the number 9 BMW Z4 GT3 is 14th overall.

The TDS Racing team, with Eric Dermont (FR), Henry Hassid (FR), Franck Perera (FR) and Mathias Beche (FR) at the wheel, is 13th. The number 77 car, run by BMW Sports Trophy Team Brazil, is just outside the top 20. Sergio Jimenez (BR), Felipe Fraga (BR) and Caca Bueno (BR) are alternating at the wheel of the BMW Z4 GT3. The Brazilian team is currently 27th.



The 24-hour marathon came to a premature end for three BMW teams. The BMW Z4 GT3 of Boutsen/Ginion retired during the eventful early stages. Triple Eight Racing driver Ryan Ratcliffe (GB) was involved in a crash late in the evening, during which the number 888 car was so severely damaged that he and team-mates Joe Osborne (GB), Lee Mowle (GB) and Dirk Müller (DE) were unable to continue. Müller had added his considerable experience to the Triple Eight Racing team at this endurance classic. The BMW Z4 GT3 fielded by Classic & Modern Racing also retired following a crash in the early morning.

Quotes after 16 hours of racing.

Dirk Werner (number 45 BMW Z4 GT3, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS):

"It was very difficult to find a good rhythm, as there were so many yellow flags and Safety Car periods, and the track conditions were changing all the time. You were free to drive for a bit, then came another yellow flag and the tyres cooled down again. All in all, our plan is to stick in there and get through safely – then we will see where we are and what we can aim for."

Markus Palttala (number 46 BMW Z4 GT3, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS):

"I have mixed feelings. It was a topsy-turvy start for everyone, and we lost a lot of time in the Safety Car periods. However, since then it has gone very well for us. We have had super pit stops, the drivers have been strong and the car is running like clockwork. We are quick and up there among the leaders. It's looking good!"

Timo Glock (number 9 BMW Z4 GT3, ROAL Motorsport):

"All the traffic made life difficult. Despite this, I was able to find a good rhythm. To make matters even more complicated, there was suddenly a lot of fog in the second sector and the track became slower and more slippery. Generally speaking, it is a completely different experience to drive in the night. But it was awesome fun. We had good pace at the end, so I am happy."

Alessandro Zanardi (number 9 BMW Z4 GT3, ROAL Motorsport):

"It is going superbly. I am giving it my all and we have been doing very well so far. Our performance is good. We were nowhere to be seen a few hours ago, and now we are back. We have the speed to continue to improve our position. It is more difficult to be consistent when you are driving at night, because it is not as easy to judge the braking point correctly and hit the axis perfectly. However, as soon as you are used to that it is okay. It is really fun then – I like it!"

Dirk Müller (number 888 BMW Z4 GT3, Triple Eight Racing):

"I was made to feel very welcome by the Triple Eight Racing team. The whole team did an outstanding job all week and prepared the BMW Z4 GT3 very well. We were a little unlucky with traffic and red flags in qualifying, otherwise we could definitely have been in the top 20. I drove first and had a big grin on my face the entire time. It was great fun. Our BMW Z4 GT3 was really good and our times were extremely competitive. We were on course to do well until the crash. However, that is part and parcel of motorsport. The most important thing is that Ryan is okay."



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