



24h Spa-Francorchamps

**BMW claims 22<sup>nd</sup> overall victory at the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps – BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS wins home race – Three BMW Z4 GT3s in the top ten.**

Spa-Francorchamps (BE), 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015. BMW has added another chapter to its success story at Spa-Francorchamps (BE): 50 years after its first win at the 24-hour classic, Nick Catsburg (NL), Lucas Luhr (DE) and Markus Palttala (FI) of BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS claimed the manufacturer's 22<sup>nd</sup> overall victory at this race. After 536 laps of the "Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps", the number 46 BMW Z4 GT3 recovered from a drive-through penalty to cross the finish line first at the end of the 67<sup>th</sup> running of the Ardennes marathon. Victory was a fitting farewell for the BMW Z4 GT3, which was making its final appearance at one of the most important endurance races in the world.

BMW's maiden success at Spa-Francorchamps came exactly 50 years ago in 1965, when local heroes Pascal Ickx (BE) and Gérard Langlois (BE) won with a BMW 1800 TI/SA. The most recent win came courtesy of Alain Cudini (FR), Marc Duez (BE) and Eric van de Poele (BE) in a BMW 320i in 1998. In recent years, BMW drivers have landed on the podium with the BMW Z4 GT3 on several occasions: in 2011, Claudia Hürtgen (DE), Edward Sandström (SE) and BMW works driver Dirk Werner (DE) were runners-up for Schubert Motorsport. This was followed in 2012 by third place for Frank Kechele (DE), Greg Franchi (BE) and Mathias Lauda (AT) of the Vita4One Racing team. Last year, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS missed out on victory by just 7.077 seconds in one of the closest finishes in the history of this classic race. After 527 laps of racing, Luhr, Palttala and Dirk Werner came home second in the number 77 BMW Z4 GT3 to claim the first podium for BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS at its home race in the Ardennes. The circuit is just 140 kilometres from the team headquarters in Gosselies (BE).

The second BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS car was very unlucky. The number 45 BMW Z4 GT3 held a comfortable lead for long stretches of the race. It looked destined for overall victory until a technical problem resulted in engine damage on lap 399, dashing any hopes of success at its home event. Right from the word go, Dirk Werner, Maxime Martin (BE) and Augusto Farfus (BR) had produced a dazzling display of driving. The many heavy showers that descended upon Spa-Francorchamps on Saturday made for extremely difficult conditions at the 7.004-kilometre circuit. Despite this, start driver Martin wasted little time in making up ground from his start position of tenth and was soon in touch with the leaders. He was then unable to avoid losing valuable time as the result of Safety Car periods. On lap 37, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS was actually running first and second, until both cars came into the pits at the same time. The race calmed down a bit in the night. By dawn, Martin, Farfus and Werner held a lead of over 50 seconds over the rest of the field, until they were struck by the technical fault.



The remaining BMW teams also impressed with strong performances at the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. Three BMW Z4 GT3s ended the race in the top ten. Ecurie Ecosse, with drivers Alexander Sims (GB), Alasdair McCaig (GB), Devon Modell (GB) and Oliver Bryant (GB) produced a remarkable fightback. Sims started the race from 20<sup>th</sup> place in the number 79 car. By ten minutes into the race he had climbed to 12<sup>th</sup>. The team made it through the night unscathed, worked its way into the top ten, and was able to defend its position in the final third of the race. Ecurie Ecosse eventually finished seventh overall, which meant third place in the fiercely-competitive Pro-Am class. They were followed home one place back by Team Russia by Barwell, who also fought back brilliantly. Leonid Machitski (RU), Jon Minshaw (GB), Jonathan Cocker (GB) and Phil Keen (GB) started the Ardennes marathon from 30<sup>th</sup> place. A flawless race saw them climb 22 places to cross the finish line in eighth place.

Alessandro Zanardi (IT), Timo Glock (DE) and Bruno Spengler (CA) also produced an impressive display on their first outing together at a 24-hour race. Despite heavy rain, Spengler clocked the fastest time of the pre-race warm-up in the number 9 BMW Z4 GT3, which was fielded by ROAL Motorsport. During the night, the car was placed as high as fifth at times. Zanardi, Glock and Spengler were the focal point of a very special motorsport project at Spa-Francorchamps: this was the first time double amputee Zanardi had shared the cockpit with other drivers. The BMW Motorsport engineers had come up with innovative technical solutions to modify the BMW Z4 GT3 for this extraordinary first. With one hour of the race remaining, the trio was running in the top ten until Glock was forced to retire with a technical fault on lap 500.

BMW Sports Trophy Team Brazil completed the outstanding overall result for BMW at Spa-Francorchamps. The number 77 car, with Sergio Jimenez (BR), Felipe Fraga (BR) and Cacá Bueno (BR) sharing the driving duties, finished 13<sup>th</sup>. The 24-hour marathon came to a premature end for six BMW teams in total, including the number 45 BMW Z4 GT3 of BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS and the ROAL Motorsport car. The Boutsen/Ginion BMW Z4 GT3 retired during an eventful start phase. Late in the evening, Triple Eight Racing driver Ryan Ratcliffe (GB) was involved in a crash, in which his car was so severely damaged that he and teammates Joe Osborne (GB), Lee Mowle (GB) and Dirk Müller (DE) were unable to continue. Müller had added his considerable wealth of experience to the Triple Eight Racing team at this endurance classic. Early in the morning, the BMW Z4 GT3 run by Classic & Modern Racing also crashed out. The TDS Racing team, which was in touch with the top ten for many hours, also retired before the end of the race.

Another BMW Z4 GT3 was in action at the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. The "Marc VDS & Friends Racing Against Cancer" car was raising money for the "Belgian Foundation Against Cancer". However, Jean-Michel Martin (BE), Pascal Witmeur (BE), Eric van de Poele (BE) and Marc Duez (BE) held their very own version of the 24-hour race – with four 24-minute stints. In total, the number 240 BMW Z4 GT3 completed 42 laps for the good cause.



## **Reactions after the 24 Hours of Spa.**

### **Jens Marquardt (BMW Motorsport Director):**

“This is a fantastic result for Marc VDS Racing, the BMW Z4 GT3 and BMW Motorsport. Congratulations to the team of Marc van der Straten and Bas Leinders on this long-awaited, richly-deserved victory. To win the home race at Spa-Francorchamps has been the main goal of the entire team for several years. Marc VDS has performed brilliantly for years and has always been capable of competing for top results. The only thing they had missed out on – sometimes by a whisker – was victory. I am extraordinarily pleased that we have now achieved this goal together – and on the BMW Z4 GT3’s last big endurance race.

It was once again an extremely exciting, extremely hard-fought race at this wonderful circuit – from the first lap to the last. Markus Palttala, Nick Catsburg and Lukas Luhr were flawless and made the most of the potential of the BMW Z4 GT3 in every phase of the race. If everything comes together, you have a chance of winning – even in such a tough race. The other BMW Sports Trophy teams also impressed in Spa. For a while we had five BMW Z4 GT3s in the top ten. That shows how competitive our car still is as it reaches the end of its life cycle.

It was a very special race for us, in many regards. Firstly, it is 50 years since a BMW 1800 claimed the first of what is now 22 overall victories for BMW here. Secondly, the appearance of Alex Zanardi, who shared a BMW Z4 GT3 with Bruno Spengler and Timo Glock, was an absolute highlight for us and many fans. It was a real crowd-puller. Unfortunately a technical problem in the final hour of the race meant the car was unable to finish. However, the trio had been very strong until then. Everyone involved did a fantastic job, with a lot of passion and commitment. Although the retirement is obviously a great shame, the project was still a great success. We have had a lot of very positive feedback. I am very proud of the entire team. The outing of the third Marc VDS car for charity was also very successful. The fans had to wait a while for a BMW win at this event. Now it is time to celebrate.”

### **Bas Leinders (Team Principal, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS):**

“I am extremely proud that we can finally celebrate this victory. We have competed at this race with BMW since 2011 and have so often come close. However, for various reasons we have never won until today. We are very happy. We have grown as a team over the years, and have always remained true to our values. Eighty per cent of those involved have been part of our team for five years. We all know each other very well and are like a family. That was one of the keys to this success. We also had an outstanding driver line-up – a strong mixture of BMW works drivers, together with Markus Palttala and Nick Catsburg. They all did an excellent job and we were a really good team. It is 50 years since BMW claimed its first victory at this race, and our triumph now brings us full circle. It has been a fantastic week, and I would like to thank every single person in the team. Everyone contributed to making this possible.”



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

"I am overjoyed. BMW has come very close to winning in so many races here. And we were just pipped at the Nürburgring this year. This time it was our turn, though. I am extremely proud of the entire team and BMW Motorsport. It is fantastic to drive the BMW Z4 GT3. A huge compliment goes to the entire team and, of course, to my fellow drivers Markus Palttala and Nicky Catsburg. Everyone did a fantastic job here."

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

"I am totally delighted although, being Finnish, I may not look it,. The entire team worked hard to finally win this race. This is my sixth time in Spa with Marc VDS. I have led the race three times, but never been able to finish the job. The 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps is something of a home race for me – I live just 20 minutes from here. Therefore, I am overjoyed to stand on the top step of the podium here. The race was far from a stroll in the park for us. We had a number of problems, but things ran more smoothly after dawn. We threw everything into the race, and came out on top. I think we more than deserve this success."

**Nick Catsburg (#46 BMW Z4 GT3, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS):**

"That was an emotional rollercoaster. During the night I was ready to throw in the towel, we were so far off the lead. But we pushed like crazy and suddenly found ourselves leading the race. I am totally happy. The team has been trying everything to win here for years. The fact that it achieved that goal on the last big outing for the BMW Z4 GT3 is just fantastic. Let the celebrating begin!"

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

"That was quite an exciting 24-hour race and a great experience for me. It is a shame that we had to retire with one hour remaining, but that kind of thing can happen in such a long race. As far as the performance is concerned, we were the fastest car on the track at times. I would like to thank BMW Motorsport and the guys at ROAL. I have made two new friends in Timo Glock and Bruno Spengler, who are extraordinary racing drivers. The BMW Z4 GT3 is a fantastic car. We will miss it. Its successor, the BMW M6 GT3, will undoubtedly be even better, otherwise BMW would not send it into action."

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

"It was tough. We just missed out by one hour. Everyone in the team did an awesome job. Everything was actually running smoothly – we just had one minor technical problem in the morning, which we were soon able to solve. The car sounded odd before the retirement – but I could do nothing about it. I feel particularly bad for Alex Zanardi. He deserved to finish the race. I think it has been a fantastic experience for us all. I can still remember how we all met for the first time at the roll-out. It feels as though we have been working together for ten years. Everything worked wonderfully."



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

"It was great fun to share a car with Alex Zanardi and Timo Glock. I would like to thank BMW Motorsport for giving me that opportunity. The livery was also fantastic. I feel sorry for the mechanics, who worked day and night. They really deserved to see us finish the race. As racing drivers, we are obviously disappointed not to have finished. However, we still have the experience we have gained and the memories we all share."

**Augusto Farfus (#45 BMW Z4 GT3, BMW Sports Trophy Team Marc VDS):**

"I won the first 24-hour race with the BMW Z4 GT3 in Dubai in 2011, and would have liked to have ended as the winner on the car's final outing. It looked good for us for long stretches. We had the pace. We then started to push at the crack of dawn, in order to open a lead over the second-placed car. Everything was going to plan. However, then came the shock retirement. After the victory for Lucas, Nick and Markus, everyone at Marc VDS has every reason to celebrate today. Congratulations guys, well done!"

**Media contact:**

Jörg Kottmeier, Tel.: +49 (0) 170 566 6112, [joerg.kottmeier@bmw.de](mailto:joerg.kottmeier@bmw.de)

Ingo Lehbrink, Tel.: +49 (0) 176 203 40224, [ingo.lehbrink@bmw.de](mailto:ingo.lehbrink@bmw.de)

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