



Le Mans 24H - 3 hours to go

Published: June 13, 2015 By: Virtual Motorpix

Online version: <https://www.virtualmotorpixblog.com/le-mans-24h-3-hours-to-go/>



#7 Audi R18 e-tron quattro, Audi Sport Team Joest, Marcel Fassler, Andre Lotterer, Benoit Treluyer, Le Mans 24H, 2015

The qualifying sessions of the Le Mans 24H race week are behind us now, and what a story they tell. After both qualifying sessions, the LMP1 Porsches are literally flying at the front, occupying positions 1-2-3, with the three Audis right behind, followed by the two Toyotas. One would expect the three works Nissans to be somewhere in that mix, but the two Rebellions are next, then it is the Team ByKolles car followed by the three Nissans.



#22, Nissan GT-R LM Nismo, Nissan Motorsports, Alex Buncombe, Michael Krumm, Harry Tincknell, Le Mans 24H 2015

No doubt this is causing the Nissan engineers some headaches while many spectators were left scratching their heads too, as the Nissans should have been further up the leader board. Speaking to one manufacturer PR, the Toyotas were not expected to be fastest, but for the Nissans to be around 22 seconds behind the leader is quite some margin. Mind you, Neel Jani did set the quickest lap time in the #18 Porsche (3:16.887) on the Le Mans circuit in its current form, beating the record set by Peugeot in 2008. The quickest time on the old circuit layout (pre-chicanes down the Mulsanne Straight) is held by Hans Stuck driving in a 962C back in 1985, and on the current track layout, a lap time of 3:14.843 would be necessary to break that record.



#18 Porsche 919 Hybrid, Porsche Team, Romain Dumas, Neel Jani, Marc Lieb, Le Mans 24H, 2015

Interesting though is the different configuration of power sources amongst the top manufacturer teams. Audi have opted for the 4-litre V6 diesel with a 4 MJ setup, Porsche have a 2-litre V4 petrol engine with an 8 MJ arrangement, the Toyotas are powered by a V8 petrol engine with a 6 MJ hybrid system, while the Nissan twin-turbo 3-litre V6 is coupled to a 2 MJ system. All very different!



#1 Toyota TS040 Hybrid, Toyota Gazoo Racing, Sebastien Buemi, Anthony Davidson, Kazuki Nakajima, Le Mans 24H, 2015

Toyota is the only manufacturer in the top class with a two-car team, and the reason for this is quite simple, budget. They have adopted the attitude that they would rather spend their finite budget perfecting the performance of two cars, than to stretch this to include a third car. The effect of spreading the same budget across three cars would mean that the performance of all three would be less, as there would be less money available to develop each car to its full potential.



#40 Ligier JS P2, Judd, Krohn Racing, Joao Barbosa, Niclas Jonsson, Tracy Krohn, Le Mans 24H, 2015

Krohn Racing is participating in the LMP2 class at Le Mans 24H for the first time. Although Krohn is racing in the ELMS series for the whole season in 2015, they have done the Le Mans 24H many times before, competing in the GTE Am class. Between the three drivers, Joao Barbosa/Niclas Jonsson/Tracy Krohn, they have 25 combined starts in the famous French endurance race. Speaking with Tracy Krohn, he said he finds there is more downforce driving a LMP2 car as opposed to a GTE Am car, and it is important to drive faster to make use of the increased grip - in the LMP2 car the added grip is attributable to aero downforce, whereas in the GTE Am car it was mostly mechanical grip. Krohn prefers the increased pace of the Judd-engined Ligier JS P2 racer. Just to give an idea of the fierce competition in the class, there are 19 cars in LMP2, a third of the field.



91, Porsche 911 RSR, Porsche Team Manthey, Jorg Bergmeister, Michael Christensen, Richard Lietz, Le Mans 24H 2015

It seems that the GTE Pro contingent of the Porsche onslaught is down on performance, but this is not actually the case. Granted, the #91 and #92 RSRs are down in seventh and eighth places in class for the start of the race, but 911 veterans, Patrick Pilet and Joerg Bergmeister, are confident of a good result because of their car's reliability and excellent pit stop efficiency. The reason for their disappointing performance is down to Balance of Performance, the subjective mechanism used to equalise the cars in a class.



#63 Corvette C7.R, Corvette Racing, Ryan Briscoe, Antonio Garcia, Jan Magnussen, Le Mans 24H 2015

In practical terms, both Porsches will have one less car ahead of them for the start, as the #63 Corvette was withdrawn following Thursday evening's qualifying accident with Jan Magnussen at the wheel. And the Corvette Racing press office announced that he was 'fine.' After being checked by the circuit medical staff, he was released so all should be fine for him, but it is a great disappointment for the team and for the spectators. Details of the incident are that a stone became lodged in the throttle return linkage while negotiating the Porsche Curves, just where throttle control is arguably more important than at any part of the circuit. The car's chassis was damaged both front and rear as Magnussen impacted the barrier twice, damaging both ends of the Corvette. A Corvette PR spokesman said that the chassis was not reparable at the circuit, and with the team's third chassis already in use, a replacement, although legal, would not be practically possible. This is only the second time in the team's history that they have lost a car prior to the start of the race.



#98, Aston Martin Vantage V8, Aston Martin Racing, Paul Dalla Lana, Pedro Lamy, Mahias Lauda, Le Mans 24H, 2015

So who is going to win? The favoured car in LMP1 is the #7 Audi (Fassler/Lotterer/Treluyer), and although they are languishing in fifth place on the grid, they have multiple Le Mans 24H wins under their belt. The other ones to watch are without doubt the Porsches, and in particular the #18 pole car of Dumas/Jani/Lieb. In LMP2, the class is so competitive but to stick one's neck out, you would have to put money on the #47 KCMG car or the #38 Jota car. In GTE Pro, the class pole #99 Aston Martin of (Rees/MacDowell/Stanaway) is the obvious choice, while the #51 Ferrari of Bruni/Vilander/Fisichella is a strong contender. Having just crowed about the Porsches, they cannot be ruled out because the Stuttgart brand has decades of experience at the Le Mans 24H. Last, and by no means least, the GTE Am class has a very strong contender on pole, the #98 Aston Martin of Dalla Lana/Lamy/Lauda, its qualifying time being strong enough to have placed it third in the Pro class.



#51, Ferrari 458 Italia, AF Corse, Gianmaria Bruni, Giancarlo Fisichella, Tony Vilander, Le Mans 24H, 2015

STOP PRESS: It has been revealed last night that the three Nissans will start the race at the back of the LMP1 and LMP2 classes for failing to qualify within 110% of the pole time. The #71 Ferrari is to start second from last on the grid, in 54th place, as Olivier Beretta did not qualify within 120% of the #18 Porsche pole car.



#12 Rebellion R-One, Rebellion Racing, Mathias Beche, Nick Heidfeld, Nicolas Prost, Le Mans 24H 2015

LET THE RACE BEGIN!

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