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#ELMS #4HPORTIMAO - Media Info - 29 october 2018

ANOTHER PODIUM FOR PANIS-BARTHEZ COMPETITION !

From its arrival on Wednesday at the circuit of Portimao, a day dedicated to private testing, the French team is at the forefront by finishing 2 of the 3 sessions at the top of the rankings. The two free practice sessions on Friday and Saturday were dedicated to tweaking the settings for the qualifications. The job was rewarded with the second place of Will Stevens only 60 thousandths behind the pole man.

Placed on the 1st row this Sunday, Timothé Buret had a great start and took the first position in the 1st corner and kept it during the first 6 laps. At the restart, following the 1st FCY, he conceded his place to Pierre Ragues (Duqueine Engineering). The first pit-stop of the young driver from Montpellier, happened at the 25th lap, after 45 minutes of racing. After this first stop, he still is behind the No. 29, which has adopted the same strategy. After 1 hour of racing, Timothé has been logically passed by Nasr who had new tires. Julien Canal then took over after 48 laps and following the pit-stops of other competitors the Ligier JS P217 # 23 regained its second place. Subsequently, the driver from Le Mans overtook the No. 47 to take the first position that was lost a few laps later to Hanson (United Autosports). Julien returned to the pits a few laps later during a FCY and was now in 3rd position behind the two cars of the United Autosports team. Later, Jean-Eric Vergne (G-Drive Racing) overtook Julien Canal, who was then relegated to the 4th place before handing the car to Will Stevens who made his first laps under safety car for the last part of the race, with 1h20 to go. The former Formula 1 driver quickly managed to overtake Owen and chasing the two cars in front. 40 minutes from the end of the race, the Briton went back to the pits for the last refueling and rejoined in second position behind Albuquerque (United Autosports) to whom he never stopped putting pressure. After a breathtaking end, it was on the second step that the brilliant trio Buret-Canal-Stevens came on the podium!



Olivier Panis - Team-Principal : " This second podium is a reflection of the work and talent of each persons of the team. This year the team had a real step in terms of performance, the team Panis-Barthez Competition managed by Sarah and Simon Abadie did a fantastic job and all the engineers and mechanics knew how to perfectly manage all the situations and never gave up even in the difficult moments at the beginning of the season and after the immense disappointment of coming really close to the victory at Le Mans. It's a close-knit team like never before and our three drivers have been irreproachable all year round. Will's expertise was very important for the technical team and his teammates. Julien is a driver with whom we can always count on his experience in endurance and Timothé showed incredible maturity and achieved real feats on the track, especially during the last race.

Even if the results were not there at the beginning of the year, we can say that Panis-Barthez Compétition is now fighting with the fastest teams and I thank everyone for their involvement. Michelin did a great job and was very committed with us. Thank to Total who has renewed their trust to us, to Ligier for their collaboration and to all our partners for their loyalty since the creation of the team. A big thank you to our ambassador and friend Fabien Barthez as well as Stéphane Dilouya, our partner, for their unfailing support this season. We will start the adventure of the Asian Le Mans Series in a few days with a lot of conviction to be well represented in this championship and we are already looking towards 2019 with the same passion for endurance."



Will Stevens - Driver Ligier JS P217 n° 23:"From the tests on Wednesday, the car was really fast and especially very pleasant to drive. In the wake of Spa, I knew we could fight for pole position and victory. And that was the case. In qualifying, it was very tight and we were beaten for only 6 hundredths of a second. It is clear that my lap was not perfect and that I lost a few hundredths here and there. Not enough to make us lose confidence for the race.

In the race, Timothé had a great start and led the race in a solid way. We then had some more difficult stints, as the competitors also had more new tires than we did. When I took the track, we were fourth and I was able to go back little by little, until I came back to second place. It was really tight. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to try to overtake the leader. If I had one, I would have tried everything because we had nothing to lose. I am also a bit disappointed because I was held up a few times on the track, especially when a competitor spun and came back right in front of me. I lost several big seconds which, at the end, were expensive.

In the end, I am very proud of this 2018 season. Especially when I see how, at the end of this long journey, we are a much stronger team than at the beginning. Panis-Barthez Compétition has trusted me to be a team leader and I am satisfied if I have been able to bring something to the team and help them to be a stronger team. I also learned a lot with them, with Olivier Panis and my teammates Timothé and Julien. I really think we missed a bit of luck. Like at Le Mans where we should have finished second. And when we see that the G-Drive was disqualified, we could have won the 24 Hours of Le Mans. On other ELMS races, victory was possible too. With two podiums and one pole position however, we proved that we were able to play the leading roles."

Julien Canal - Driver Ligier JS P217 n° 23: "This final round was a bit difficult for me, during my stint the wind force increased, unsettling the car and despite a good strategy, I suffered to control our Ligier. This is still a great race and I am very proud of Timothé who, from the start, made a great overtaking on the leader and then made an impressive and high class stint and thereafter Will fought as hard as he can until the chequered flag to finish a few tenth behind the winner.

This year 2018 was a succession of beautiful surprises. It was a big bet for me to ride with Michelin and to return to a Ligier after winning the World Championship last season on an Oreca. I discovered a very professional team, very attentive and who knew how to evolve despite the lack of driving before the season and very few private tests. We showed a good level of performance in the first race, not to mention the 24 Hours of Le Mans where only a clutch problem prevented us from winning the race. I really enjoyed working with this team and, my two teammates and I, were really complementary. We have lived beautiful moments together, is not that the essential? "

Timothé Buret - Driver Ligier JS P217 n° 23: "After the excellent work of the team before the race and the super qualification of Will, I had to be up to the confidence renewed by the staff to let me start the race. I took off from the first seconds and forced the first corner while being careful to stay outside and respect the track limits. It was dangerous but I managed to pass the pole-man and claim the first position. This position during several laps allowed me, with a free field of view, to take my marks for the rest of my stint. I had a good pace but for all of us, the powerful and changeable wind made it difficult for us and made the car suffer oversteer. Having never driven in this type of conditions, I made some small mistakes allowing, in fact, my pursuer Pierre Ragues to catch me during a full course yellow. I am happy to have been congratulated by the team for having made a solid run with such a weather and then Julien's track work and the rage and the experience of Will have confirmed that we deserve this new podium.

The record of my 3rd season in LMP2 is mixed and positive. Mixed, because we showed beautiful things on the track from the beginning and that the technical staff has regularly given us a car with the good set-up but we have not been rewarded for our collective work with expected results. I still do not realize we missed out on the victory of the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans race for a tiny technical problem that ruined our race. But I'm ending this season with the satisfaction of having finally shown our "real" level on the last two races with these 2 podiums in a row. It's important for the team and myself to finish on this positive note because we knew it had to be a year with results, but the misfortune of the beginning of the season did not bode well to allow us to make a good impression. I particularly appreciated the cohesion with my two teammates, our differences were our strength, our harmony was exceptional both in good and bad times. I'm leaving grown up from this human and sporty adventure with the whole team and I'm more motivated than ever to continue my career in endurance."

4HPORTIMAO - RESULTS

Qualifying : P2

Race : P2

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