



ROUNDS 1 & 2 RACE REPORT

Weather: overcast with a dry track

Crowd: more than 40,000 on Sunday

BMW AND ALFA ROMEO SHARE WINS IN FIA WTCC PREMIERE

Dirk Müller for BMW and James Thompson for Alfa Romeo claimed one win apiece in the opening FIA World Touring Car Championship event. Rounds 1 and 2 of the season took place today in Monza, in front of a big crowd.

Both races were breathtaking. The German driver had the edge over the Alfa cars of Tarquini and Farfus in the first race. The second race was even more dramatic, resulting in a number of position changes and clashes. Thompson came home first ahead of the BMW cars of Dirk and García, whilst Tarquini went off.

After the end of the race, the Stewards decided to impose a drop of ten grid positions for the first race of the next event to both, Thompson (cutting a chicane) and Dirk (colliding with Tarquini). The penalties, however, are suspended depending on the sporting behaviour of the drivers in the next event for Thompson and in the next two events for Dirk.

SEAT had mixed fortunes. Rydell scored in Race 1, also claiming the pole for Race 2, but his hopes of glory were banished by a race incident. However his team-mate Gené managed to score more points for the Spanish Manufacturer.

Newcomers Chevrolet and Ford had a troubled weekend, but the former managed to score points in the Manufacturers' Championship.

The FIA WTCC will now head to Magny-Cours, for Rounds 3 and 4 on 1st of May.

WARM-UP – TROUBLES ON TRICKY TARMAc

The warm-up took place in the early morning, when the tarmac was tricky, with some wet spots. García lost his BMW 320i at the first chicane, spun on the wet grass and crashed against the barriers. A few minutes later De Micheli missed the braking point and hit Rosenblad. This forced the latter to withdraw from the race, his BMW not repairable.

RACE 1 – DIRK MÜLLER MAKES HISTORY

Dirk Müller made history today in Monza, capitalising on his pole position and claiming the first race win of the new FIA World Touring Car Championship. With a dry track and confidence in his car, Dirk drove a solid race.

While the BMW Team Deutschland competitor edged away from the rest of the pack, there was a riveting battle for third place. Andy Priaulx made several attempts to overtake Farfus, creating some nail biting moments. But strong defensive driving from the Brazilian ensured that the 2004 FIA ETCC champion couldn't find a gap that would have given him a spot on the podium. Team Alfa Romeo took both second and third place in front of an enthusiastic Italian crowd of more than 40,000, with Tarquini finishing 2.465 seconds behind Dirk. García, who started second on the grid, had a bad start to the day. He damaged his car during the warm up session this morning but the BMW Team Italy-Spain ensured the car was repaired in time for the green lights. Lap



Rounds 1 & 2 – Autodromo Nazionale di Monza – 9 / 10 April 2005

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three saw more difficulties for the Spaniard as Farfus nudged him off the track during an overtaking manoeuvre. García skilfully kept the car under control, rejoined the race and kept on the pace to finish in a positive fifth position. Throughout the whole race the three SEAT Sport drivers were in a close fight with Alfa Romeo's men Giovanardi and Thompson, and eventually Rydell finished eighth, just ahead of Gené, to claim the final point. The Ford Hotfiel Sport team have had a challenging weekend with engine problems and difficulty finding the pace. Klenke retired on lap 5 again with engine problems, while his team-mate Jäger was involved in a collision with Menu's Chevrolet. Chevrolet are also a team that have work to do to make it to the podium but all three cars finished the race, with Huff as their fastest driver. Marc Hennerici, the Wiechers-Sport man, claimed maximum points for the Michelin Independent Drivers' Trophy crossing the line a superb 13th overall. Zanardi who was in great demand by the Italian fans at an autographing session earlier in the day took tenth overall, making him the winner of the Italian Superturismo, his first win after returning to competition after a horrific accident in Champ Cars.

RACE 2 – THOMPSON SCORES FOR ALFA ROMEO

Alfa Romeo driver James Thompson took command of a spectacular race in front of a huge crowd and crossed the finish line ahead of his FIA World Touring Car Championship rivals. Thompson, who started the second race in second place, overtook Rydell (who was on pole on the top-eight reverse grid) at the start and managed to hold on to the lead for the duration. However, it was by no means an easy ride to success – with winner of race one, Dirk Müller edging closer and closer as the laps were counted down. Thompson finished 0.530 seconds ahead of Dirk's BMW 320i.

At the start Giovanardi stalled the engine from the second row. Rydell started on pole but was swiftly overtaken by the eventual race winner, García and Dirk, before crashing during lap two after Farfus hit him from behind. This was clearly a disappointment for the SEAT Sport Team but their Spanish driver, Gené, gained valuable points by finishing in 6th place. The fight for the win turned into a war halfway through the race. After Rydell went off, Colciago crashed at Lesmo on lap 5. One lap later another collision eliminated De Lorenzi and Huff.

García was chasing Thompson, but he made a mistake and lost three positions. At the beginning of the 6th lap, the leading pack arrived at the first chicane and all six drivers – Thompson, Dirk, Farfus, Tarquini, García and Priaulx – tried to brake as late as possible. Thompson cut across the grass, Farfus ran wide, while Dirk and Tarquini clashed; the Italian brunted the worst of it and crashed. In the final lap García managed to keep third place despite a final assault from Jörg Müller, who had recovered from 29th on the grid. It was another excellent performance from the independent driver, Mark Hennerici. He took 10th position in his BMW, an improvement of 3 places from his finish in the first race. Chevrolet too made progress in the second of the races with Nicola Larini claiming a very encouraging 15th place.

Zanardi was again the quickest of the Italian Superturismo drivers and is clearly also a presence in the FIA WTCC as he finished seventh overall.

ROUNDS 1 & 2 RACE QUOTES

Dirk MÜLLER, BMW Team Deutschland – 1st in Race 1 and 2nd in Race 2

“I am really happy, I cannot believe it. My perfect weekend started with the practice session on Saturday. We went out and managed to find the braking points. In the first race I was able to break away on the second lap and that resulted in a win for me. In the second one I was just aiming to get points but I got a perfect start and jumped one row, I thought ‘this is going to be a good race.’ Then the slipstreaming game started and the gap between me and the cars behind closed. That’s when the top racing started.”

James THOMPSON, Alfa Romeo Racing Team – 7th in Race 1 and 1st in Race 2

“The first race was disappointing. It was one of those occasions when qualifying didn’t go our way. Being 9th or 10th on the grid is always difficult but you have to go out with caution and score points for the championship. The second race was fantastic. I was disappointed with the first one but I knew the car was good and I wanted to benefit from the reverse grid for the second. Finishing 7th in the first race was not necessarily a bad thing. I planned to concentrate hard and get a good start which I did. It was very important that I passed Rydell early on and got a bit of a gap but it didn’t go quite according to plan as Dirk was behind me for most of the race. I think it was a fantastic show and I’m sure everyone will agree.”

Antonio GARCÍA, BMW Team Italy-Spain – 5th in Race 1 and 3rd in Race 2

“It was a really tough day for me. In the warm up one of my brake disks broke and I crashed. The team managed to restore the car so I was able to compete in the races. In Race 2 I was trying to get away from James Thompson but I made a mistake at Ascari and dropped 3 places.”

Gabriele TARQUINI, Alfa Romeo Racing Team – 2nd in Race 1, DNF in Race 2

“In the first race Dirk was too quick for us and we did not manage to keep his pace. The second race looked promising, despite that I did not have a good start. I was moving up, but when I tried to overtake Dirk at Lesmo he pushed me off.”

Augusto FARFUS, Alfa Romeo Racing Team – 3rd in Race 1 and 9th in Race 2

“In the first race it was difficult to keep close to the BMW cars. In the second race I made a mistake and lost track on the first corner. The championship is long. We have a good car and a good team. I’m sure that like last year it will be decided in the last race of the last round.”



Alessandro ZANARDI, BMW Team Italy-Spain – 10th in Race 1 and 7th in Race 2

“It’s nice to hear my national anthem and to taste the champagne again. But despite nationality or what cars are being driven, my aim is to beat as many drivers as I can. I would like to congratulate the podium drivers because they had a superb battle. From my seat it was like being in a theatre. It is a pity that I didn’t have that extra tenth of a second to enhance my performance but am very satisfied that I was able to keep up with the cars in front of me for almost the entire race. With a few improvements and a little luck we could have a day even better than this one. Let’s say, I started on the right foot!”

Marc HENNERICI, Wiechers-Sport – 13th in Race 1 and 10th in Race 2

“I never expected to take two wins in the Independents’ Trophy. The main aim was to come here and take part in this world championship. I’m proud to be here. The car was so good, Wiechers-Sport did a great job.”

Rickard RYDELL, SEAT Sport – 8th in Race 1, DNF in Race 2

“It was really nice to get my first point of the year in the very first race, but we really couldn’t do anything about some of the others on the straights here. In Race 2 Farfus made what was a really bad move. He wasn’t even close to overtaking me, but he hit the back of my car and spun me into the barrier. I’m very disappointed”

Hardy SPRANGER, Executive in charge of Chevrolet Europe

“I think that’s quite good for a first race. Rob Huff did a tremendous job in the first race, despite the fact that he’s the youngest of the team. Of course this weekend has been more about experience gathering than anything else, and despite Rob’s off and Alain’s gearbox problem I’m very much looking forward to the next race.”

Jost CAPITO, head of Ford TeamRS

“The first event of the WTCC proved that this is a fantastic and very competitive championship and it’s good for a privateer Ford team to be involved. We knew we would experience a difficult start because of our tight development schedule. But we saw that almost every step we took with the car marked an improvement. We have gained some valuable experience through the course of the weekend, and I’m sure the team will be in much better shape come the next round in Magny-Cours.”