

ROUNDS 7 & 8 RACE REPORT

Weather: sunny and very hot, with a dry track

Crowd: 22,000.

DIRK MÜLLER STRETCHES HIS CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD

On a very hot day – in both air temperature and action on the track – Fabrizio Giovanardi for Alfa Romeo and Dirk Müller for BMW, claimed victories in rounds 7 and 8.

All considered, it was an advantageous weekend for the German driver, who managed to stretch his championship lead to 6 points, and BMW, because Andy Priaulx (two podiums for him today) moved up to second in the classification.

With Gabriele Tarquini and Jörg Müller out of the points, Giovanardi climbed to 4th in the championship.

However, Alessandro Zanardi was the man of the day. Starting from pole position on the reverse grid for the second race, the Italian driver took the lead and for three laps resisted the pressure from Dirk, Priaulx and Thompson. A little mistake caused him to drop behind his fellow BMW colleagues, but he managed to defend the third position until a few corners to the end, when Farfus punted him into a spin at the Acque Minerali, depriving him of his first podium result since his comeback to racing. Despite this Zanardi finished sixth, topping the classification of the Italian Championship like he had done in the first race.

Inquiries after the races resulted in the following decisions: Colciago will lose ten grid position for the next race due to his incident with Gené in Race 1; Plato received a similar penalty due to his collision with Thompson in Race 2; as for the incident between Farfus and Zanardi in Race 2, the Brazilian youngster will also lose ten positions on the grid of the next race, but furthermore if he is involved in a similar incident during one of the two following events, he will also be excluded from that race.

The FIA WTCC will now take a one month break, before hitting the track again for Rounds 9 and 10 on 26th of June in Puebla, Mexico.

RACE 1 – GIOVANARDI CLAIMS HIS FIRST WIN

An engine change resulted in Terting dropped by ten position on the grid. Tarquini also was demoted to 14th despite qualifying 5th due to the implementation of the suspended penalty he incurred at Silverstone.

The start of the race saw García overtake Giovanardi off the line and in quick succession Priaulx also overtook the Alfa on the inside of the first corner. Within the first lap Giovanardi claimed back second position from the BMW UK driver. Jörg Müller and Tarquini made contact at Tamburello. The latter rejoined the race behind the pack, the former went to the pits before rejoining, one lap behind.

In lap 2, Colciago braked extremely late and sent Gené's SEAT into the barriers at Tosa. Giovanardi claimed the lead from García for good, while fellow BMW drivers Priaulx and Dirk Müller both had the final podium position in their sights.

Lap 6 saw Plöderl rolling his Ford Focus car, but escaping uninjured.

In the final laps, Dirk was closing the gap on Priaulx. The difference was reduced from over one second in lap eight to half a second and then just four tenths in



laps nine and ten. Priaulx managed to hold on to third spot. Farfus finished fifth and Colciago was sixth, therefore scoring Honda's first points. Chevrolet's Larini and Menu were classified 13th and 14th, while Ford's Klenke was 17th. His teammate Jäger had a puncture on the last lap.

Balzan had maintained his 12th position for the entire race to be the best of the Independent drivers. Zanardi finished a brilliant 8th position overall and therefore won the Italian Superturismo race and also pole position for the second race.

RACE 2 – ZANARDI SHINES BUT DIRK WINS

Alessandro Zanardi started from pole on the reversed grid. Jörg Müller began the race from the pit lane. Dirk Müller and Andy Priaulx had a great start as they both jumped from fifth and sixth positions to second and third respectively while Zanardi held on to the top spot. Antonio García also gained two places off the start, he went into the first corner in fifth position while Alfa Romeo man Augusto Farfus, and Roberto Colciago made contact. Robert Huff and Stefano Valli collided at the Tosa, and neither were able to continue.

A pack of four, consisting of the top three BMWs and the Alfa of James Thompson, edged away over the opening laps. On lap 2, Fabrizio Giovanardi overtook teammate Farfus for sixth place. The leading pack had been caught by lap three due to the battle between the BMWs. Dirk made his move on Zanardi on the final corner of the lap and was successful in gaining the lead. The race was so close at this point that the first 12 drivers crossed the line within three seconds.

Zanardi lost another place in lap 4 as Priaulx demoted him to third. García and Giovanardi clashed, meaning the Spaniard fell from fifth to 11th. Giovanardi was overtaken by Farfus two laps later, while Jörg Muller continued to make great progress (having started from the pit lane) by overtaking Alain Menu and Jordi Gené to claim 14th place. He eventually finished 12th overall, one place behind Nicola Larini. The latter for the whole race was able to in touch with the leading pack, and claimed the best result so far for Chevrolet in the FIA WTCC.

Thompson came under siege from the SEATs on lap 7. Rickard Rydell passed him which forced the Briton off his line and as a result Plato pushed him off the track. He rejoined in 14th place but damage to his car meant he finished in 22nd. Lap 7 contained more breathtaking moments as Priaulx chased Dirk for his first race win of the season. As they began lap 8, the gap was just 0.323 of a second.

On the final lap, Farfus tried to overtake Zanardi for third place but was unable to do so cleanly. Contact was made at the Acque Minerali and after re-gaining control, Farfus finished fifth with Zanardi crossing the line sixth overall and first in the Italian Superturismo race – his second of the day. Priaulx made a final attempt to take race victory but went wide and therefore had to settle for second. Balzan repeated the Independent victory he had in race 1. Thomas Klenke of Ford achieved exactly the same result as in race 1 by crossing the chequered flag 17th.

ROUNDS 7 & 8 RACE QUOTES

Dirk MÜLLER, BMW Team Deutschland – 4th in Race 1 and 1st in Race 2

“I did not expect such good results today considering my qualifying position of 9th. My team made a change to my car between the races and it certainly paid off. In both races the front row were slow off the line so Andy (Priaulx) and I responded and got a great start. In the first race I was trying to chase Andy and it was a good fight between him and me. In the second race it was very difficult to overtake Zanardi because he was defending almost perfectly. It is good to still be the Championship leader and I am looking forward to the next rounds.”

Fabrizio GIOVANARDI, Alfa Romeo Racing Team – 1st in Race 1 and 3rd in Race 2

“In the first race I managed to re-claim the lead by overtaking García and Priaulx so I got the result I was hoping for and I am extremely happy about that. In the second race I was not as lucky as I was in the first. I started behind everybody and unfortunately there was a lot of fighting in front of me so I lost some time. My tyres were getting worse so I could not push too hard. I was lucky in the last lap as Zanardi and Farfus went off.”

Andy PRIAULX, BMW Team UK – 3rd in Race 1 and 2nd in Race 2

“I don’t think I was strong enough to win today to be honest. If had got a perfect start and a good lead with my new tyres in the second race then maybe I could have had the win. On the last lap I went wide because I made my last push and the grip was just not there on my tyres. Even if had not gone wide, I don’t think I would have taken the win. There has been a turn around in my competitiveness this weekend from qualifying to the race results. We are improving and things need to keep moving in that direction and hopefully the championship title will come to me at the end.”

Antonio GARCÍA, BMW Team Italy-Spain – 2nd in Race 1 and 9th in Race 2

“The first race was as I expected. I knew I needed a good start and I achieved it. I saw Andy behind me so I pushed to try and make a gap but within two laps Giovanardi had overtaken me. I was waiting for him to make a mistake but it didn’t happen. In the second race I had a really great start. I caught Thompson after a few laps but Giovanardi was also there and when we came to Rivazza he was a little too late on braking and hit me on the front wheels. From that point my steering was 90° out so it was incredibly tough to drive.”

Alessandro ZANARDI, BMW Team Italy-Spain – 8th in Race 1 and 6th in Race 2

“I have learned this weekend that my car is very competitive. I achieved good results in my own right, not through the misfortunes of others. I lost track of Dirk and Andy in the middle of the second race because I made a mistake but towards the end I was catching them again. At this point I had a flat spot on my tyres and my car was gone so I concentrated on keeping Farfus behind me. However, four



turns to the end my chance for a podium place was taken away. I am certain that it was not intentional on his part but is it unfortunate that I missed out due to someone else's mistake. In a way it is a positive result but at the same time it feels like a defeat."

Rickard RYDELL, SEAT Sport – 9th in Race 1 and 4th in Race 2

"We made a change to the set-up for Race 2 and it helped a lot; in fact, I wish Race 2 had been Race 1! This time I got a very good start and I passed quite a few people during the race before Farfus made a silly move on Zanardi right at the end, which meant I could finish fourth. I'm happy, especially after such a hot weekend, and I'm also pleased that the success ballast system seems to be working."

Nicola LARINI, Chevrolet - 13th in Race 1 and 11th in Race 2

"Better would have been difficult. It were two good races without any problems, which is nice. I'm very happy with the 11th position in Race 2, our best result so far in the season."

Hans HOTFIEL, Ford Hotfiel Sport Team Principal

"We are understanding the car more and more, and it shows in the improvements we make every time we take to the track after some set-up changes. We will now continue our extensive development work, and I'm sure we'll make further progress in the next couple of weeks."

LATEST NEWS

BALZAN EXCLUDED FROM RACE 2

Alessandro Balzan has been excluded from Round 8 of the FIA WTCC that took place at Imola today. Post-race scrutineering discovered his car was underweight. The decision means that he loses the 10 points he gained by winning the independent category and drops from a would-have-been third, to sixth position in the title bid. The result means that runner-up Stefano D'Aste of Proteam Motorsport claims the maximum points and he now sits in ninth place. Marc Hennerici still holds the lead of the Independent's competition despite having a disappointing weekend. He has 54 points, 19 ahead of second placed Carl Rosenblad while Tom Coronel, Valle Mäkelä and Salvatore Tavano all have 27 points a piece.