



World Class

SHARP, BRABHAM LEAD ACURA'S ST. PETE SWEEP

David Brabham and Scott Sharp scored an overall victory for Acura at the aptly named Acura Sports Car Challenge of St. Petersburg on Saturday as the auto manufacturer swept both prototype classes in the second round of the 2009 American Le Mans Series.

Brabham and his Acura ARX-02a finished 32.150 seconds ahead of Adrian Fernandez as Acura took the top two overall positions. Fernandez was the LMP2 winner for the second straight race with Luis Diaz in Lowe's Fernandez Racing's Acura ARX-01b.

Saturday's victory was the first for the new ARX-02a entry for LMP1.

"I can't say enough about the whole job HPD (Honda Performance Development) and Wirth Research have done with this car," Sharp said. "I stepped into the P2 car last year and it was pretty much sorted. Everything on this car is new, and we've come a long way in three or four months. We all feel that this car has tremendous promise and will only get stronger and faster and better."

Sharp ran second to de Ferran Motorsports' Acura and Gil de Ferran for much of his stint. After an early spin, Sharp took massive chunks per lap out of de Ferran's lead in the closing minutes of the opening stint. He pitted under caution - the only one of the day that came out when Joel Feinberg crashed his Dodge Viper Competition Coupe at the 53-minute mark - and handed off to Brabham, who passed Fernandez eight minutes after the restart.

The Patrón Highcroft Acura went on without a hitch while the de Ferran Acura struggled with electrical and fuel pump issues that sidelined Simon Pagenaud with about 15 minutes remaining. With a comfortable margin over Fernandez, Brabham still had to cope with a dangerous first turn every lap, one that was especially greasy.

"Scott had a very strong car and did a very good job of pressuring de Ferran which I think caused him to pit early I think," Brabham said. "If you pit early like that it puts you in danger if a yellow comes out, and that worked in our favor. I had to push but not push too hard; I went into Turn 1 sliding a few times. It may have looked easy but it really was not."

Acura became the first auto manufacturer to win both prototype classes in the same race. Brabham and Sharp won their second overall event together, the first coming last July at Lime Rock Park. They have five class victories together with four in LMP2 together last year.

Fernandez and Diaz were a lap clear of Dyson Racing's Guy Smith and Chris Dyson in the team's first Mazda-powered Lola B09/86. The second entry of Butch Leitzinger and Marino Franchitti were third after a mid-race stop to replace a punctured right-front tire.

"The team has done a great job preparing this car," said Diaz, who teamed with Fernandez to win in class at the 57th Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring two weeks ago. "We haven't had any problems, even in practice. Everyone wants to win so badly. We worked very hard to be physically ready for this season. Michelin also gave us great tires even with the tough conditions out there."

The Lowe's Fernandez entry never trailed Saturday, a picture of efficiency. It was the same story as Sebring where the team didn't miss a beat. Diaz qualified on the class pole Friday to follow Fernandez's class pole run at Sebring. It is a stark contrast to last season where everything that could go wrong - more often than not - did.

"This is a race we should have won two years ago," Fernandez said. "Luis was leading the race and was trying to lap another car, and then we were penalized. Last year we had a fantastic race at Sebring, at Laguna Seca, at Road America, at Lime Rock...it was amazing to see how badly things went last year. This proves that we are tough competitors. We can see the Mazdas getting stronger, and we know Dyson will catch up because they have so much experience."

Intersport Racing's Clint Field, Jon Field and Chapman Ducote were second in P1 driving their AER-powered Lola B06/10. They finished ahead of the pole-sitting de Ferran Motorsports Acura ARX-02a, which finished the race stranded on course with electrical problems.

Patrick Long and Jörg Bergmeister won in GT2 by two laps in their Flying Lizard Motorsports Porsche 911 GT3 RSR. The pairing, class champions together in 2005, gave Porsche its first victory at St. Petersburg after wins by Ferrari in 2007 and 2008.

Long drove the opening stint and was one of the last drivers to pit, coming in to bring out the race's lone caution period. He had gained a lap over the rest of the field and increased that advantage when he went around the safety car as it picked up overall leader Fernandez prior to the restart.

"We expected more yellows, and when that didn't happen strategies got a little different," Long said. "At one point when I was behind some slower cars I called in a question to our strategist (Thomas Blam) about diving down at one point to avoid being in traffic. He said to stay out, and Thomas' call did pay off."

Dirk Müller and Tommy Milner were second in GT2 class as Müller picked up two positions in the final 15 minutes driving one of BMW Rahal Letterman Racing Team's BMW M3s. He was more than 15 seconds ahead of Panoz Team PTG's Dominik Farnbacher, who drove the Panoz Esperante GTLM with Ian James. The pairing finished third for the second straight race.

Although it wasn't clearly evident after qualifying (Long was fourth fastest Friday in class), the team's tire choice proved beneficial once the race rolled around. The track was considerably warmer and more slippery Saturday, ideal conditions for a softer compound from Michelin.

"We were pretty conservative on the tire choice in qualifying, and that paid off for us in the long runs during the race (the cars must start on at least three of its four qualifying tires)," Bergmeister said. "I think choosing other compounds gave some of our competitors trouble. As far as I know, we were on the same compound (the entire race) and we were hoping it would stay green because our car is very consistent on long runs."

Fernandez and Diaz also were prototype winners in the MICHELIN® Green X® Challenge, which goes to the fastest and most energy efficient entry who has the least environmental impact. Hand and Milner were GT winners in their BMW. Both manufacturers won their first MICHELIN® Green X® Challenge trophies.

The Tequila Patrón American Le Mans Series at Long Beach is the next round of the 2009 American Le Mans Series. The race is set for 4:15 p.m. PT on Saturday, April 18 from the famed Long Beach street circuit in southern California. The race will be televised from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. ET on Sunday, April 19 on ABC. Qualifying is scheduled for 4 p.m. PT on Friday, April 17. American Le Mans Radio and Live Timing and Scoring will be available at americanlemans.com.

The race also will mark the next round for the MICHELIN® Green X® Challenge. For tickets, visit americanlemans.com or gplb.com.

**Acura Sports Car Challenge of St. Petersburg
St. Petersburg street circuit, St. Petersburg, Fla.**

Saturday's results

1. (2) Scott Sharp, Jupiter, FL; David Brabham, Australia; Acura ARX-02a (1, P1), 93.
2. (3) Luis Diaz, Mexico; Adrian Fernandez, Mexico; Acura ARX-01B (1, P2), 93.
3. (4) Chris Dyson, Pleasant Valley, NY; Guy Smith, England; Lola B09 86 Mazda (2, P2), 92.
4. (5) Marino Franchitti, Scotland; Butch Leitzinger, State College, PA; Lola B09 86 Mazda (3, P2), 91.
5. (11) Patrick Long, Oak Park, CA; Jörg Bergmeister, Germany; Porsche 911 GT3 RSR (1, GT2), 88.
6. (6) Chapman Ducote, Miami, FL; Jon Field, Dublin, OH; Clint Field, Dublin, OH; Lola B06/10 AER (2, P1), 88.
7. (10) Tom Milner, Leesburg, VA; Dirk Mueller, Germany; BMW E92 M3 (2, GT2), 86.
8. (12) Ian James, England; Dominik Farnbacher, Germany; Panoz Esperante GTLM Ford (3, GT2), 86.
9. (14) Lou Gigliotti, Dallas, TX; Eric Curran, Easthampton, MA; Chevrolet Riley Corvette C6 (4, GT2), 85.

10. (17) Seth Neiman, Burlingame, CA; Darren Law, Phoenix, AZ; Porsche 911 GT3 RSR (5, GT2), 84.
11. (13) David Murry, Cumming, GA; Andrea Robertson, Ray, MI; Doran Ford GT MK 7 (6, GT2), 83.
12. (8) Wolf Henzler, Germany; Dirk Werner, Germany; Porsche 911 GT3 RSR (7, GT2), 74.
13. (1) Gil de Ferran, Brazil; Simon Pagenaud, France; Acura ARX-02a (3, P1), 66.
14. (15) Chris Hall, Daytona, FL; Joel Feinberg, Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Dodge Viper Comp Coupe (8, GT2), 38, Accident.
15. (16) Tom Sutherland, Los Gatos, CA; Ryan Phinney, Carmel, CA; Panoz Esperante GTLM Ford (9, GT2), 38, Gearbox.
16. (9) Bill Auberlen, Hermosa Beach, CA; Joey Hand, Sacramento, CA; BMW E92 M3 (10, GT2), 28, Mechanical.
17. (7) Pierre Kaffer, Germany; Jaime Melo, Brazil; Ferrari F430 GT (11, GT2), 27, Mechanical.