

LE MANS AGONY FOR TOYOTA GAZOO RACING

Sunday 18 June 2017

TOYOTA GAZOO Racing endured a painful Le Mans 24 Hours in which two of its TS050 HYBRIDS did not reach the chequered flag while the remaining car finished ninth.

Hopes were high of a first TOYOTA win at Le Mans when the pole position-winning #7 TS050 HYBRID of Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi and Stéphane Sarrazin led for the opening 10 hours but it retired at 1.15am following a clutch problem.

The #8 of Sébastien Buemi, Anthony Davidson and Kazuki Nakajima had also been in contention for the victory for almost eight hours until an issue on the front motor cost it almost two hours in the pits. It rejoined and finished ninth, setting the fastest lap late in the race.

An accident put the #9 of Nicolas Lapierre, Yuji Kunimoto and José María López out just minutes after the #7 stopped, when it was hit from behind by an LMP2 car, causing a puncture and damaging the hydraulics. That left the car unable to shift gear and it retired on track just a few hundred metres from the pits at 1.35am.

The race, round three of the 2017 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), was won by the #2 Porsche from the #38 and #13 ORECA LMP2 cars, following a technical issue for the #1 Porsche, which retired from an 11-lap lead.

It represented a bitterly disappointing end to a race which the team had begun with strong hopes of a first TOYOTA victory at Le Mans in 19 appearances since its debut in 1985.

Thursday had seen Kamui Kobayashi set the fastest-ever lap of the Circuit de la Sarthe, beating the average speed record that had stood for 32 years. The team also went into the race as drivers' and manufacturers' World Championship leaders following victories in the first two WEC races of the season.

But Le Mans, which is a double-points race, has proved costly in World Championship terms too. Porsche has taken a 36.5-point lead in the manufacturers' standings, while the #8 drivers, the highest-placed TOYOTA crew, have dropped to second, 21 points away from the leading #2 Porsche drivers.

Le Mans regulations mean the retired cars are returned to teams only after the race, so work begins immediately to understand in precise detail the damage suffered by the #7 and #9 cars, while analysis is already underway on the #8 issue.

The team will regroup and return to WEC action more determined than ever when the series continues with the 6 Hours of Nürburgring on 16 July.

Toshio Sato, Team President: "The whole team is devastated by what happened here, after all the hard work and effort over the last months to come to Le Mans with such a competitive car. Our pace was very good all week and we were leading a tough fight with Porsche. The drivers, engineers and mechanics performed superbly this week and I would like to thank them. Of course, we sincerely congratulate Porsche on their victory because undoubtedly they deserved to win today. For TOYOTA, we must leave Le Mans again without the winner's trophy, despite the amazing support from the fans here. We will analyse what went wrong because we cannot accept a double retirement like that during the night. We will come back stronger and more determined than ever; our Le Mans challenge will continue."

TS050 HYBRID #7 (Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi, Stéphane Sarrazin)

Race: DNF, 154 laps, 12 pit stops. Grid: 1st. Fastest lap: 3min 18.694secs

Mike Conway: "The race started off well with good pace and we were controlling it from the front. Unfortunately we had the issue which took us out of the race very quickly; from having no hint of trouble to retiring so quickly was tough to see. It was a real pity and to see the other TOYOTAs have problems around the same time is just massively disappointing. We were hoping at least one of us would be on the top step of the podium today but it wasn't to be."

Kamui Kobayashi: "It is very disappointing because I thought it was going to be our day because we were quick and we felt we were controlling the race. Again we found out how hard it is to win Le Mans. Big thanks to the team who put so much effort into this race. It is not only about speed, because we had that but in the end we missed the win. We just have to come back and go for the win again next year."

Stéphane Sarrazin: "It's just incredible. We had such a good car; all week we were impressed by the balance and efficiency. The team did an amazing job in the winter, so here to have three cars out of the game is unbelievable; it doesn't seem possible. This race doesn't want to come to us for some reason. It is a very demanding race, as you saw with Porsche #1 stopping. We never give up and we will come back strong; and we need to believe we can do it."

TS050 HYBRID #8 (Sébastien Buemi, Anthony Davidson, Kazuki Nakajima)

Race: 9th, 358 laps, 27 pit stops. Grid: 2nd. Fastest lap: 3min 18.604secs

Sébastien Buemi: "I don't know where to start. We lost a lot of points for the championship and that's what you think of when the victory is out of reach. Hopefully we still have a chance to fight for the World Championship. I would like to say thank you to the team, especially the mechanics who worked very hard. I feel sorry for everyone. The only thing we can do now is focus on the rest of the season."

Anthony Davidson: "It's so disappointing to drive so many laps in such a great car for no meaningful reward. That's all I was thinking later in the race when I was setting fast laps and closing down the other cars but the gap was too big after the problem. Once again Porsche did a great job. We won't give up; we've proved that by coming here with such a good car this year which gives me faith in the team that we will do it one day."

Kazuki Nakajima: "It was a tough race for the whole team as it always seems to be here. I have no words really; we just need to try again next year. We had the car and the speed but we missed something else. So many things happened to us despite all the hard work and preparation; it was not enough I guess. Next year we have to try even harder, prepare better and fight harder."

TS050 HYBRID #9 (Nicolas Lapierre, Yuji Kunimoto, José María López)

Race: DNF, 160 laps, 13 pit stops. Grid: 5th. Fastest lap: 3min 19.321secs

Nicolas Lapierre: "It was a very hard race for us with a lot of misfortunate. We had a few smaller issues earlier in the race which cost some time but we were running a strong second and back in the fight. In turn one I was hit by an LMP2 who hit the back of me due to the normal fuel cut; there was nothing we could do about it. It was the beginning of the track so it was impossible to get back to the pits. It was very, very disappointing."

Yuji Kunimoto: "My first Le Mans was a tough and frustrating race. I was really enjoying the experience and we looked quite strong until the problem. When I saw the car had stopped I was so disappointed because the whole crew worked so hard to be ready for this. The team and my co-drivers did a good job; thank you to them. I wanted



to get a good result for them but it was a very difficult race. Now I just want to come back and race again at Le Mans.”

José María López: “We knew when we came here that it is a cruel race. There is a lot of work goes into this and we came here with a lot of strength. At this moment I only think about coming back next year stronger. We will fight this race and show we are strong enough. I am proud of everyone in the team, the mechanics, engineers and my team-mates. They did a fantastic job. I have no regrets.”

Le Mans 24 Hours results:

1st	#2 Porsche (Bernhard/Bamber/Hartley)	367 laps
2nd	#38 Jackie Chan DC (Tung/Laurent/Jarvis)	+1 laps
3rd	#13 Rebellion (Piquet/Heinemeier Hansson/Beche)	+3 laps
4th	#37 Jackie Chan DC (Cheng/Gommendy/Brundle)	+4 laps
5th	#35 Alpine (Panciatici/Ragues/Negrao)	+5 laps
6th	#32 United Autosports (Owen/De Sadeleer/Albuquerque)	+5 laps
9th	#9 TOYOTA GAZOO Racing	+9 laps

A German translation of this press release is available on www.RacingByTMG.com. High-resolution copyright-free photos are available for editorial use at www.toyota-motorsport-photos.com.

About TOYOTA GAZOO Racing in the World Endurance Championship:

TOYOTA first competed in the World Endurance Championship (WEC) in 1983, marking the start of a long period of participation in endurance racing. Since 1985, TOYOTA cars have raced in 19 Le Mans 24 Hours races, achieving a best result of second place on five occasions. TOYOTA entered the revived WEC in 2012, combining the expertise from TOYOTA Higashi-Fuji Technical Centre, where the hybrid powertrain is developed, with TOYOTA Motorsport GmbH’s support and facilities for chassis development. The multi-national team is based in Cologne, Germany and includes engineers from TOYOTA’s motorsport and hybrid department, who deliver technology and know-how back into road car development. Since 2012, TOYOTA has earned 12 pole positions and won 13 races, finishing on the podium a total of 34 times. In 2014, the team won the drivers’ and manufacturers’ World Championships with the TS040 HYBRID while a year later TOYOTA celebrated 30 years since its first Le Mans entry. TOYOTA Motorsport GmbH combines its role in the WEC project with its other activities, such as the supply of a World Rally Championship engine for TOYOTA’s return to the category in 2017, as well as its engineering services business and customer motorsport activities.

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