

HEARTBREAK FOR TOYOTA GAZOO RACING AT LE MANS

Sunday 19 June 2016

TOYOTA GAZOO Racing finished second in the 84th edition of Le Mans 24 Hours but had the victory taken from its grasp in a cruel late twist.

Both TS050 HYBRIDs took turns to lead the race as part of an exciting battle with the #2 Porsche and was poised to win with the #5 crew of Anthony Davidson, Sébastien Buemi and Kazuki Nakajima before incredible late drama.

Starting what would have been the penultimate lap, with Kazuki at the wheel, the #5 suffered a sudden loss of power. Despite strenuous efforts to restore drive, the car struggled round the lap and stopped on the start-finish line. It was eventually restarted and completed the final lap too slowly to be classified.

The #6 of Stéphane Sarrazin, Mike Conway and Kamui Kobayashi, a long-time leader of the race which suffered its own troubles late in the race, finished second, behind the winning #1 Porsche.

That marked TOYOTA's sixth podium finish, its fifth second place, in its 18th Le Mans since a debut entry in 1985.

The race was one of the closest fights in Le Mans history, with three cars locked in an intense battle for the entire 24 hours.

As a new car for 2016, the TS050 HYBRID, with its powerful 2.4litre turbo engine, 8MJ hybrid system and redesigned chassis, did not start the race as favourite but demonstrated its potential by setting the pace throughout.

Better fuel efficiency from the TS050 HYBRID allowed it to complete 14 laps per stint, while its rivals pitted one lap earlier. That reduced the number of stops required and contributed to a fascinating battle for the win.

Prior to the late drama, the TS050 HYBRID had suffered few issues. The #5 needed an additional pit stop early in the race due to severe tyre vibrations, while the #6 lost 30secs to repair minor bodywork damage following contact with a lapped car.

After 20 hours of flat-out racing, the top three were covered by less than 30 seconds, but soon the #6 dropped out of the battle for second, spending nine minutes in the garage to repair bodywork. Nevertheless, it resumed in a comfortable third place.

There was no respite for the team in a nervous finale as the #5 held off its rival until, with the race seemingly heading TOYOTA's way, 260,000 stunned fans witnessed one of the most dramatic finales in the history of Le Mans.

The team will analyse the cause of the problem as part of its preparations for the 2017 Le Mans 24 Hours, which begin immediately.

Toshio Sato, Team President: "I am incredibly proud of our team effort, not just today but since Le Mans last year. Thank you to the team in Higashi-Fuji and Cologne, as well as our partners Oreca. The way we have responded to the pain of our 2015 disappointment, by developing an all-new chassis and powertrain in a short timeframe, has been impressive and the performance of the TS050 HYBRID was strong. We worked as one team and took part in an amazing Le Mans 24 Hours. Congratulations to Porsche on its victory. I have no words to describe our emotions today. It is simply heartbreaking but we will return stronger and more determined to win."

TS050 HYBRID #5 (Anthony Davidson, Sébastien Buemi, Kazuki Nakajima)
Race: Not classified, 384 laps, 28 pit stops. Fastest lap: 3min 22.495secs
Grid: 4th

Anthony Davidson: "That was an unbelievable end to such a difficult race. You couldn't have written the way it ended; no-one would ever have believed a movie if it ended like this. So to actually live through the experience is pretty hard to take, but it will make us stronger and we'll be back."

Sébastien Buemi: "It's hard to find the words for what has happened today. We were in control of the race and were so close to the win that we all want. This is the biggest race of the year so it's even tougher to accept. It is so disappointing for the whole team; we did the right preparation and we had the car to win. So we already look to next year when the target will be clear."

Kazuki Nakajima: "First of all thank you to all the team members; we did everything right. The car was great to drive. It was tough to have Porsche #2 only 30 seconds behind me towards the end but we had the pace and we managed it very well. It was only two laps missing and it's a pity we didn't get the trophy; the team deserved to win. When I was doing my last lap to the chequered flag, all the marshals and fans were really kind to me and that was very emotional. I want to say thank you for that. Let's come back stronger and grab that trophy."

TS050 HYBRID #6 (Stéphane Sarrazin, Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi)
Race: 2nd (+3 laps), 381 laps, 28 pit stops. Fastest lap: 3min 21.445secs
Grid: 3rd

Stéphane Sarrazin: "It was amazing; to lose the lead right at the end is just incredible. Even in your worst nightmares you don't think about that. The team did a great job. Car #6 was fast and fighting for the lead for 20 hours. We showed we have a strong car with good pace and a strong team. But it was incredible to finish like that."

Mike Conway: "I have mixed feelings. Second is okay but we are all gutted for car #5. They drove a great race and were controlling it. You could see how upset everyone was; I really feel for them. We were fighting up there all race at the front so it was a good race in terms of the performance of the car. It's okay to get one car on the podium but we wanted more."

Kamui Kobayashi: "Unfortunately our second position was not what we wanted. We are here to win so I am not really happy. We showed the car has strong performance and our car set the fastest lap of the race. I feel really sorry for car #5, all the crew, drivers and engineers. They did a great race. They fought back through difficult moments and deserved to win."

Race Result

1st	#2 Porsche (Dumas/Jani/ Lieb)	384 laps
2nd	#6 TOYOTA GAZOO Racing	+3 laps
3rd	#8 Audi (di Grassi/Duval/Jarvis)	+12 laps
4th	#7 Audi (Fässler/Lotterer/Tréluyer)	+17 laps
5th	#36 Alpine (Menezes/Lapierre/Richelmi)	+27 laps
6th	#26 G-Drive (Rusinov/Stevens/Rast)	+27 laps

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RAISING THE EXCITEMENT
TOYOTA HYBRID

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 and including the 2016 edition, TOYOTA cars have raced in 18 Le Mans 24 Hours races, achieving a best result of second place on five occasions (1992, 1994, 1999, 2013 and 2016). 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 10 pole positions and won 10 races, finishing on the podium a total of 25 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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