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Soucek finishes the Bathurst 12 Hours in P7 after leading the race for several laps

The Bathurst 12 Hours have left a bittersweet taste for Andy Soucek and his colleagues at Bentley Team M-Sport. Due to some incidents suffered by Australian David Russell they were denied the chance of fighting for the victory when they had been leading the race comfortably at the end of its first four hours.

Already during the free practice sessions on Friday it became obvious that car #31 had a better pace than last year, even without having made any significant setup adjustments. Soucek and his colleagues knew that the race pace was very good and they hoped to be competitive, but facing a 12-hour endurance race there are more factors to be considered.

During Qualifying Maxime Soulet, Soucek's colleague, finished on P8 which meant a great starting point for the race and kept all possibilities open for the Bentley Boys.

It was Russell who took the start at 05:45 local time in pitch-dark night, and he had a first stint with a couple of incidents. Even though he had to visit the boxes to get some damage repaired, he was able to retain P6 and to remain within the leading lap before handing the car over to Soucek after the first two hours (Lap 52).

The Austro-Spaniard had an impeccable stint in which he left no-one indifferent and where he made an incredible chase from P7 up to becoming the first Spaniard ever to lead the Bathurst 12 Hours when he was 45 minutes into his stint. Afterwards, Soucek displayed an overwhelming pace and in only eight laps he built up a lead of above 15 seconds to the rest of the field. After some exhausting 75 minutes, Soucek handed the Bentley Continental GT3 over to Maxime Soulet (Lap 83).

Soulet managed to retain the lead all along the hour he was behind the wheel, and in lap 107 the car was back in the hands of David Russell for his last two-hour stint. Bad luck had it that a car suffered a gearbox failure just in front of Russell and he was left with nowhere to go, damaging the right front of his Bentley in the crash. The damage seemed irreparable at first sight, but relying on their experience in Rally sport they were able to get the car back on track, albeit after having lost four laps to the leader.

Soucek took over for the last hour of the race (Lap 265) when running in P8 and still four laps behind the leader, but he managed to win back the only position possible, as all other cars were three laps ahead. Car #31 crossed the finish line in P7, but at least for Bentley Motorsport there was a positive note with the third-place finish of M-Sport's sister car.

Soucek summarizes his weekend:

"It's been a pretty intense weekend for the whole Team. We knew that our race pace and tyre wear would be good, but after the incident with the McLaren we did not even think that we would manage to lead the race. On a personal level, I am very happy with all of my stints, during which I was always on par with the race leaders. Fighting back from P7 to the lead was an amazing highlight.

The Continental GT3 worked great all weekend long, and I'd like to thank the Team and my co-drivers for all the hard work they put into it."



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Miguel A. Moreno

Press Relations
www.andysoucek.com

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www.andysoucek.com
prensa@andysoucek.com