



www.andysoucek.com   prensa@andysoucek.com

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Bentley Boys' spectacular comeback fight ends unrewarded for car #8 at Paul Ricard

The Bentley Boys arrived at Paul Ricard (France) with high hopes for the 1000km race, after fighting for victory until the very last pitstop in 2016 and amending this mishap climbing onto the top spot of the podium in 2017. They hoped to be able to fight with the leaders again, this being the debut race for the 2018 spec Continental GT3 at Paul Ricard.

All doubts were cleared up from the very first Free Practice, as the pace shown by both Continental GT3 cars was very promising at all times. Qualifying ended with car #8 P15 on the grid, a spot which left all options open especially taking into account this is a six-hour race during which all sorts of things are set to happen.

Vince Abril made an exceptional start in the #8 car, climbing into the Top Ten during the first few moments of the race. However, in a decision yet to be explained, Race Direction decided to abort the start and restart the race. In this restart, an opponent forced Abril into the dirty part of the track, which decreased the adhesion of his tyres and therefore the car's performance dramatically for several laps. He lost around 20 positions in a short period of time and had to quickly re-focus to be prepared for the huge comeback battle ahead, which he faced bravely. His hopes remained quite intact however, as there was still almost six hours left in the race. From that point on, Abril carried an impressive double stint climbing up the filed to P19 and scoring the fastest lap of the race, which again confirmed the Bentley's enormous potential, and that there was more room for improvement especially if a safety car was deployed or a strategy different from their immediate opponents could be worked out.

Soucek took over the car for the third and fourth hour of the race, and thanks to his great pace he was quickly chasing a long line of cars fighting for the top spots, including the podium. It was a spectacular battle that lasted almost an hour and a half, which included several risky and spectacular manoeuvres on a track which is particularly encourages overtaking. He ended his double stint handing over the car to his colleague Soulet in P6, the Belgian having the task to bring the car to the checkered flag.

Soulet did not have an easy start into his stint, but he soon was chasing the top group again and running P5. With only one pit stop ahead, the safety car was deployed, which cut down all margins between the leaders, and increasing the options of the #8 car even more, as they still had their pit stop "joker" to pull, which lifted the mandatory minimum pit stop time set by the Organization for one single time.. That pit stop should be done in a minimum time, without a tyre change, which would give them a sizeable benefit over their opponents and increasing their now very real options for the podium. With the later retirement of Ferrari #72 and the lack of pace of McLaren #58 in the final stages, even a victory would have been viable.

Unfortunately, in a stroke of bad luck and due to causes still being looked into, Soulet had to retire the car with only 40 minutes to the finish line. Not getting any final reward for the immense comeback display made by the Bentley Boys in the #8 car was a huge disappointment to them.

Soucek reflects on the Paul Ricard event:

"It's been a bittersweet weekend for us. The car's performance lived up to the expectations at all time, as the final podium spot for our colleagues in the #7 car shows very well. I congratulate them for their great result. We were able to overcome the initial problems after the restart and from there on everything went as planned, thanks to our impressive pace. I would point out the fact that we came back from P35 to touching the podium spots, and that Vince Abril scored the fastest lap of the race during his stint, which was not beaten afterwards.

I am very thankful to Bentley and M-Sport for their impressive work all along the weekend, and their tactical decisions were so good we almost made it to the podium.

The next race is the highlight of the Season, the Spa 24 Hours, and we hope to have luck on our side this time to be among the top performers again at that event".

Before their European highlight, Soucek will be traveling to the US once more to take part in the SprintX Series event at Portland (Oregon), on July 14 and 15.



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Miguel A. Moreno

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