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Soucek forced to retire from the Spa 24 Hours after fighting for victory during the initial third of the race

Once again, it's been a rollercoaster of emotions for the Bentley Boys in the #8 car at the Spa 24 Hours. After a very encouraging start, and an exceptional performance during the six initial hours of the race, bad luck struck them hard.

Expectations were high for the 70th edition of this prestigious event, as the previous test days, the Bentley Continental had shown great performance and reliability on the Belgian circuit.

From the Free Practice session on Thursday the expected performance became very evident, finishing P7. The same streak continued during Qualifying, where the average of the three drivers was good enough for P6.

Car #8 was therefore qualified for the "superpole", a top 20 shootout with two flying laps to determine grid positions.

This was duty of Belgian driver Maxime Soulet, who ended up P9, a very good starting position for such a long race.

Soulet took the start and had a great initial stint for the first two hours on his home track, and managed to run P4 thanks to a great and consistent pace of the Bentley. After him, Vincent Abril continued the comeback until he took the lead of the race. The strategic decisions taken by Bentley Team M-Sport at this point proved to be perfect, as they decided to pit very late during a Full Course Yellow period.

Abril made an impressive second half of his two-hour stint, extending the lead by a certain margin before handing the car over to Soucek for hours five and six. The first hour was comfortable for Andy, who kept his head down and continued opening the gap to P2. During his stints, another Full Course Yellow happened just after his pit stop, an opportunity that the number 29 Audi used to gain track position and took over the lead. Andy recovered from P4 to P2 and handed the car over to Max in a very good position to keep fighting for the lead. After six hours, time in which championship points were awarded, they scored points for running P3.

However, when Soulet was back in the car for the seventh hour, he got caught in an incident with an AM Ferrari car who didn't see him coming and both collided. Max had to pit immediately due to heavy damage.

Even though M-Sport's mechanics did a spectacular job in a very short time, car #8 ended up losing five laps. The performance was still very good, and soon they were climbing up the order again for the next few hours, just until bad luck hit back for a second time: Laurens Vanthoor and a lapped car collided, and Soucek's Bentley got hit in the process, suffering substantial damage at the front.

Once again, a frenetic job by the mechanics had the car back on track in a short period of time, but after only one outlap Soucek was forced to stop the car due to a mechanical problem caused by the accident and retired the car with only seven hours remaining having completed 349 laps.

Andy Soucek reflects on his experience at the Spa 24 hours:

"We had done all our homework before this race, the most important one of the Season for us. We were highly prepared physically, technically and psychologically and we knew the importance of getting past the 20-hour-mark without suffering any incidents. We lead the race for an important part of the first seven hours, and our pace was very encouraging when looking towards the final stages. The Team strategy worked out perfectly and everything went as desired until Max had an encounter with an Amateur driver that drove into him, which wiped out all our hopes to fight for Victory. In the end it was frustrating, taking into account the huge effort the Team put into giving us a real chance of winning here. The GT3 was fast and reliable, which is not easy for a completely new car. We will be back to win this race, I hope it to happen sooner better than later, because we are hungry for victory at this mythical track ! I would like to thank Bentley Team M-Sport for a perfect car and strategy during the entire race with both cars. "

Soucek's next race will see him traveling to the US again, to compete in the SprintX Series in Utah on August 11 and 12.



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