



Winning start to the season for Koller, Mauro & Toni

28th April, 2019 – GT Cup Open Europe, Paul Ricard

Hans-Peter Koller raced to overall victory on Saturday in the first race of the new GT Cup Open Europe Championship. A great weekend for the VSR team saw JP Mauro and Rodolfo Toni finish second overall in both races, win the Am class on Saturday and finish second on Sunday.



GT Sport's brand new Championship got underway at Paul Ricard this weekend with seventeen cars present for the opening round. VSR fielded two Lamborghini Huracan Super Trofeo Evos; a Pro-Am entry for Hans-Peter Koller and Edoardo Liberati and an Am entry for the Brazilian pair of JP Mauro and Rodolfo Toni.

Both crews were quick to show their form with Koller taking the overall pole for race one and Mauro qualifying second in Am, third overall. Before the race it quickly became an all VSR front row when a penalty for Solieri pushed him down to the third row. At the start Koller held on to the lead despite a challenge into the first corner from Mauro who then lost out to Leutwiler's Porsche. By lap three Mauro had retaken second place from the Swiss driver and set about chasing Koller who he passed for the lead at the last corner two laps later. The two VSR drivers then pulled away and had established a healthy lead by the time the pit window opened. Mauro came in at the end of lap thirteen and Toni took over the race leading car. Koller stopped a lap later and with Liberati side-lined by illness continued the race himself and exited just ahead of Toni, reclaiming first place. When the pit window closed the VSR cars were seven seconds ahead but behind them Solieri was flying as he fought back from a poor opening lap and Salas, who had taken over the Sports and You Mercedes, was the fastest man on track. At the head of the field Toni closed up to within a handful of tenths of his team-mate but after a few aborted attacks settled for second place overall and the Am class win as Koller took the chequered flag to score a fine victory.



Liberati was well enough to take part in Sunday morning's qualifying session and came out on top after a tense, session long battle with the Mercedes of Salas. Toni, at the wheel of the VSR Am entry, qualified second in class. They maintained position at the start of the race but on the opening lap Fortes squeezed past Toni to steal third. Two laps later Toni reclaimed the place and set about closing the seven second gap the leading Am driver, Solieri, had pulled out. Just before the pit window opened Liberati entered the pits from the lead. Forced to retire due to a mechanical problem he had to content himself with setting fastest lap of the race and reducing his victory handicap for the next round. On lap eleven the pit window opened and Toni stopped to handover his Lambo to Mauro. The Brazilian pair had a ten second handicap

following their class victory on Saturday and when the pit window closed Mauro was twenty seconds behind the race leader Basso and nine seconds behind the Am class leader Solieri. By lap twenty both Mauro and Solieri had passed Basso's Mercedes and over the remaining laps the VSR driver did his best to catch up to Solieri. He took the flag just over four seconds behind the Italian claiming second overall, second in class and the lead of both the overall standings and the Am Championship.

The GT Cup Open Europe now takes a break until June when the drivers will take on the unique challenge of the Spa-Francorchamps circuit.

Photos by Fotospeedy

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