

Dominant performance from VSR at Imola

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VSR kicked off their **Italian Super GT** title defence with a dominant performance at **Imola** this weekend in the opening round of the Championship. **Sospiri's** team entered three **Lamborghini Huracans** with an international driver line up – **Jia Tong Liang** from China shared the 101 car with **Felipe Ortiz** from Brazil while the 116 Huracan was shared by Italians **Riccardo Cazzaniga** and **Antonio D'Amico**. The 106 Lamborghini was driven by **Tuomas Tujula** and **Aaro Vainio** from Finland. For both drivers the Imola weekend was their first experience of GT racing and their first time behind the wheel of the Lamborghini Huracan.

Their on-track performances quickly belied their lack of experience and it was Tujula who held pole in Q1 until the very last second when his time was beaten by Basz who went just 0.192 seconds quicker than the Finn. Right behind him was Liang who qualified 3rd alongside D'Amico, ensuring all three VSR cars would start on the front two rows of the grid for Saturday's race.



Brazil's Felipe Ortiz took pole for race two. Both qualifying sessions were dominated by the VSR cars, none of which qualified below 4th for either race.
(photo by Fotospeedy)

Pole-sitter Basz anticipated the start of race one and in the chaos that followed Tujula slipped down to 6th and was passed by both Liang and D'Amico. The Chinese driver kept pace with Basz until the Pole pulled in to serve his jump-start penalty, handing over the lead of the race. D'Amico stayed close to the leading VSR car, maintaining a gap of no more than two seconds, whilst behind them Tujula was being held up by Negra and De Marchi. On lap six he made it past De Marchi but could do nothing to get by Negra. When the pit window opened he came in to hand over to Vainio, and a lap later was followed by D'Amico who gave his Huracan to Cazzaniga. The final VSR car to stop was Liang who had been confidently leading the race since lap eight. His team-mate Ortiz was slow away and their lead was further damaged when the Safety Car was called out just as the Pit Window was closing. When racing went green again there were twelve minutes left and light rain was starting to fall on parts of the circuit. Cazzaniga had taken advantage of Ortiz's slow pit-stop and was leading from the Brazilian with Vainio hot on his heels. Ortiz kept Cazzaniga honest and the two were separated by just 0.3 seconds before Deodati crashed and the race was red-flagged with one lap to go. Cazzaniga/D'Amico were confirmed as the victors, with second going to Liang/Ortiz and Tujula/Vainio completing an all VSR podium.



A great start to the season saw all three VSR cars finish on the podium in race 1.
(photo by Fotospeed)

Ortiz took pole for race two, ousting fellow VSR driver Vainio in the dying seconds of Q2 and creating an all VSR front row for Sunday afternoon's race - the pair were split by just 0.117 seconds. A handful of tenths further back was Cazzaniga who qualified on row two alongside Desideri. When the lights went green it was Ortiz's turn to catch the eye of the stewards and he was awarded a drive through penalty for a jump start which he served on lap six. Vainio who had been tailing him from the beginning of the race took over the lead and Cazzaniga moved into 3rd with Desideri sandwiched between them. Ortiz rejoined in 9th place, over half a minute behind the leaders, but by the time the pit window opened the Brazilian was already back to 5th place. Vainio was the first to stop, handing over to Tujula. A lap later Liang took over from Ortiz while Cazzaniga stayed out the longest, bringing his Lamborghini in for D'Amico on lap fifteen and also picking up a drive through penalty for overtaking under yellows. When the pit window closed Tujula was in 2nd chasing down an eight second gap to Negra out front. D'Amico, the fastest man on the track in the second half of the race, was just behind him until forced to serve the drive through penalty which lost him half a minute. As the race entered the final five minutes Tujula had caught Negra and a thrilling battle ensued between the two as Tujula tried everything to find a way past his rival. After four laps of gripping action Tujula conceded defeat when the chequered flag fell, leaving Negra to take the win by just 0.2 seconds. D'Amico, who set the fastest lap of the race, finished 4th and Liang 5th.



In their GT racing debut Tujula and Vainio finished 3rd in race 1 and 2nd in race 2. (photo by Fotospeed)

A successful opening round leaves the VSR drivers firmly in the lead of the Driver's Championship with Cazzaniga/D'Amico on 28 points, Tujula/Vainio on 27 points and Liang/Ortiz on 22 points in joint third place with Desideri/Negra.

The next round of the Italian GT Championship will be at Misano at the beginning of June.

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