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Mugello podium joy for both VSR crews

After a two month break the Italian GT Sprint Championship resumed with a double header event at Mugello this weekend. VSR entered an unchanged driver line-up for its two Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo cars with Danny Kroes and Leonardo Pulcini battling it out in the Pro class and Yuki Nemoto and Tuomas Tujula in Pro-Am.



Saturday's qualifying started on a damp but drying track after early morning rain and Nemoto and Kroes went out for the first session. Both drivers were quick in the tricky conditions and Nemoto returned to pit-lane when light rain began to fall again towards the end of the session. Pole position was his by less than a tenth of a second from team-mate Kroes, the pair making it an all VSR front row for race one.

Saturday's race started under uncertain skies and all the GT3 cars opted for wet weather tyres. A perfect start saw Nemoto and Kroes get cleanly away from the front row and storm off into the lead, pulling out a visible gap to the rest of the field by the end of lap one. By lap three the gap was over four seconds but third was held by Venturini, recovering from a poor qualifying. A lap later Kroes was the quickest man on track and, having closed right up to Nemoto, slipped past the other VSR car to take the lead of the race. On lap six Ferrari muscled his Mercedes past Venturini for third and started making serious inroads into the gap to Nemoto as a dry line began to appear. Venturini pitted on lap eight for slicks and was almost

immediately several seconds a lap quicker than everyone-else. The VSR cars stayed out until the pit window opened on lap eleven but on the same lap Kroes hit trouble when lapping a backmarker and was spun out, losing the lead and a huge chunk of time before he could get going again. Nemoto, holding off Ferrari's increasingly wild attempts to pass him, took the lead and immediately pitted. Tujula took over the car and rejoined the race in the lead with a new set of slicks on his Lamborghini. Two laps later Kroes pitted and Pulcini took over the 63 Lamborghini, exiting straight into a battle with Drudi's Audi. The pit window closed on lap fifteen just as the field was backed up behind the Safety Car whilst the debris from the number 44 Porsche's crash was cleared up. When racing resumed there were twelve minutes left on the clock, Tujula was leading and Pulcini was in sixth. Tujula kept the lead at the restart as Pulcini scrapped hard and made it up to fourth. The Italian was the quickest on track in the closing stages of the race, setting the fastest lap of the race as he chased down the three cars ahead. Tujula held the lead until the penultimate lap when he caught a gaggle of backmarkers which delayed him and allowed Drudi the chance to snatch the lead. On the final lap Pulcini disposed of Spinelli's Mercedes and the two VSR Lamborghinis took the chequered flag in second and third places, just six tenths behind the winner. For Nemoto and Tujula second overall was also a Pro-Am category victory for the second time this year.



After the race the winning Audi was given a five second penalty for a pit-stop infringement which promoted the VSR cars to first and second overall. Audi appealed the penalty so the results remain provisional until the hearing.

A wet Q2 was rendered farcical by a red flag followed by a virtual safety car. The session was stopped when only six cars had set a time and track conditions worsened considerably in the pause. The virtual safety car ended when there were less than three minutes left of the session

giving drivers the chance to do just one flying lap. The resulting topsy-turvy grid saw Tujula line up on the fifth row with Pulcini starting from the back. Tujula got past Demarchi at the start and Pulcini made up an impressive thirteen places over the course of a frenetic first lap. On lap two Tujula made up another place, passing Cressoni for eighth and Pulcini made it into the top ten. A lap later Tujula was past Hudspeth as well and began to chase down Roda and Marcucci as Pulcini sliced his way through the pack intent on catching up to his sister car. Lap six saw both VSR drivers overtake Roda and start to attack Marcucci. The Italian pushed Tujula wide, forcing him on to the grass, a move which allowed Pulcini to pass both cars and take fifth. A lap later Tujula got past Marcucci and the two VSR Lamborghinis, the fastest cars on track, began to close on the BMW of Zug in fourth place. The pit window opened on lap thirteen and Tujula pitted straightaway. After discounting a ten second success penalty Nemoto took the number 19 Lamborghini back out on track. Pulcini pitted two laps later, his speed such that Kroes was able to overtake the BMW when it too pitted, moving into third place. With twenty minutes left it started to spit with rain. Kroes was considerably faster than the two cars ahead of him and by the end of the race had closed to within half a second of Venturini in second. Nemoto fended off an attack by Agostini but then spent the rest of the race dicing with Rovera. The Ferrari driver got the better of him on the penultimate lap but sixth overall was still Pro-Am victory for the Japanese driver and his team-mate Tujula. With three class wins they now lead the Pro-Am standings.



The Sprint Championship continues at Monza in a fortnight's time.

Photos by Fotospeedy