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Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Team Podiums in IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship Michelin GT Challenge at VIR

Press Information

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Mercedes-AMG Team Riley Motorsports Third-Place Finish at VIR Gives Mercedes-AMG IMSA GTD Manufacturer Championship Points Lead

Danville, VA. Mercedes-AMG took the lead in the GTD manufacturer championship point standings on the strength of a third-place finish by Mercedes-AMG Team Riley and co-drivers Jeroen Bleekemolen and Trent Hindman in Sunday's IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Challenge Michelin Grand Prix at VIRginia International Raceway (VIR). Calling on team strategy and great driving to beat primary title rival Ferrari to the finish line for the second race in a row, the third-place finish by the No. 33 Mercedes-AMG Team Riley Mercedes-AMG GT3 was the best race result for a Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing team since Bleekemolen and co-driver Ben Keating drove the same car to victory at Circuit of The Americas (COTA) in May.

Full-season teammates, Keating and Bleekemolen were scheduled to co-drive the No. 33 as usual this weekend at VIR but the Texas-based Keating left the track after Friday practice to return home ahead of Hurricane Harvey.

The team called on Hindman, a former IMSA Continental Tire SportsCar Challenge champion, to fill-in for Keating, a move which set in motion the No. 33's ultimately successful strategy for the two-hour and 40-minute race.

For the first time this season, Bleekemolen qualified the No. 33 Mercedes-AMG GT3 on Saturday and was the starting driver in Sunday's race. He quickly jumped from fourth on the grid to second on the opening race lap and stayed in the runner-up spot for nearly the full first hour of the race.

Hindman took over at the 55-minute mark and turned in an impressive performance in what was the 21-year-old's first time in a GT3-specification race car. He held third-place throughout his run before – in another strategy twist – handing the No. 33 back to Bleekemolen to close out the final hour of the race.

While two driver changes are rarely seen in IMSA WeatherTech Championship sprint races, the move worked perfectly for Mercedes-AMG Team Riley. The No. 33 didn't quite have the pace to close on the top-two leaders, but Bleekemolen held third-place to the checkered flag for the podium result.

Coming into the VIR race trailing by a single point, Mercedes-AMG now leads Ferrari in the IMSA GTD manufacturer championship standings by one point, 293 – 292, with two races remaining on the 2017 schedule.

Bleekemolen and the No. 33 team also closed to within 13 points of the class-leading Ferrari team and drivers, 282 – 269, atop the GTD championship standings with the third-place result.

Two other Mercedes-AMG customer teams also competed in Sunday's Michelin GT Challenge.

Dan Knox and Mike Skeen overcame a pair of pit-lane penalties and a broken wheel to finish 11th in the No. 80 Lone Star Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3.

The setbacks put the No. 80 team several laps down, taking away any chance at challenging for a higher finish, even though the Lone Star entry had the pace to race much further up the pack. Skeen turned the fastest race lap of the three competing Mercedes-AMG GT3 entries in the final 30 minutes of the race.

The No. 75 SunEnergy1 Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 team endured a tough day that end far too early. Starting driver Kenny Habul had difficulty steering and pulled into the pits only a few laps after the race start. The No. 75 was retired after completing only six laps with a power-steering system issue, taking away any chance Habul's teammate Tristan Vautier had to drive.

Next up for Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing and the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship is the Continental Tire Monterey Grand Prix at Laguna Seca Raceway, September 22 – 24. The race can be seen live on FOX Sports 1 (FS1) at 5 p.m. EDT on Sunday, September 24.

Jeroen Bleekemolen, Driver – No. 33 Mercedes-AMG Team Riley Motorsports

Mercedes-AMG GT3: “It was a perfect weekend for us and that really shows. We didn’t make a single mistake. Trent did a fantastic job and is one of the fastest guys out there. The pit stops were good, the strategy was good. Nothing could have gone any smoother. We made up a few points, not enough for the driver battle, but we won’t stop fighting until the end for sure in the championship. It was weird not having Ben here on the podium but he just showed what a great guy he is, supporting his family and businesses and going home. It’s totally understandable, and it just proves he’s a good guy.”

Trent Hindeman, Driver – No. 33 Mercedes-AMG Team Riley Motorsports

Mercedes-AMG GT3: “No amount of thank yous can be appropriate for this kind of situation for Ben, Jeroen, Bill Riley and the whole Riley Motorsports team. It’s just incredible. Of course, we all wish Ben was here for sure and that he is safe and doing well, but sometimes opportunities like this arise for young guys like myself. It was great to make the most of it and come away with some hardware. The Mercedes-AMG GT3 is so well tuned and so well sorted from the factory that a guy like me, who is used to driving mid-engine cars, can step in and be able to be relatively quick. It just goes to show the quality of the package that Mercedes-AMG has come up with, along with the proven Riley Motorsports program, to be able to plug a guy like me in with no experience and be able to get up and go.”

Mike Skeen, Driver – No. 80 Lone Star Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:

“I think we ended the race with top-five pace and were the fastest Mercedes-AMG GT3, but it’s unfortunate we had that pace outside the top 10. I think we had six trips down pit lane and we should have had no more than three. It was a tough day, we tried to make the most of it, but had some unfortunate penalties in the pit box. That makes for a long day and was not representative of what we could have done.”

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