

Horag Racing Gets LMP2 Podium Finish in Sunday's 1000 Km of Monza

by Linda K. Mansfield

MONZA, Italy, April 27 - Switzerland's Horag Racing completed a LMP2 podium sweep for the Porsche RS Spyder by finishing third in class in the 1,000 Kilometers of Monza Sunday with its Lista Office No. 27.

Horag Racing's Jan Lammers held off Tommy Erdos's RML Lola MG by 24 seconds after more than five hours of torrid competition to seal the deal for Porsche in the Le Mans Series race.

Team Essex won the class and Van Merksteijn Motorsport finished second. The top seven finishers in the 15-car LMP2 class finished in a row on the scoreboard in eighth through 14th place overall. In addition to the class podium position, Horag Racing finished tenth overall, completing 164 laps of the historic, 10-turn road course. It was a wild event for the team, the defending class winner of this race, and its drivers.



Lammers qualified second, drove at the beginning and the end of the race, and set the team's fastest two laps in both of his sessions. Lammers qualified with a 1:37.845, which was just off Jos Verstappen's new track record of 1:36.842 in the Van Merksteijn Motorsport Porsche RS Spyder. Lammers' fastest race lap was a 1:38.805 at the end of the day, the third-fastest lap recorded in the race by any LMP2 driver.

At the beginning of the race Lammers ran between second and fifth in class. He was third when he turned the car over to Lienhard for his stint. When the Quifel-ASM Lola pitted Lienhard moved up to second, and he was still in that spot, albeit one lap down, when he turned the car over to Theys.

The pit stop dropped the car to third but Theys got the lap back and charged back into second with about 2 hours and 50 minutes gone. The top six LMP2 drivers were running in eighth through 13th overall at that point and Theys was fastest of all of them as he tried to run down the leader, Team Essex's John Nielsen, who was about 8 seconds ahead, while holding off Pierre Ragues in the Saulnier Pescarolo Judd.

About six minutes later Nielsen got called into the pits to serve a penalty. Theys was just about to take the class lead, but unfortunately he spun in the Lesmo Turn and ended up in a gravel trap. He got the car going again, but at the three-hour mark the No. 27 had dropped to seventh in class, two laps down, and was now playing catch-up.

The good news was that the third, fourth and fifth-place LMP2 cars were on the same lap as the Horag car at the end of the four-hour mark, so a podium was still a possibility. Theys was in fifth, about six seconds behind the fourth-place driver, Erdos, at that point. He was faster than Erdos and the driver of the second-place Saulnier car, but not quite as fast as the class leader or the third-place Van Merksteijn car driven by Verstappen.

Theys was still in fifth when he pitted at the four-hour and 13-minute mark for Lammers to take over. The entry dropped one more spot due to the pitstop. Five minutes later a full-course caution waved for a spectacular crash in the first chicane by Stephane Oretelli in the Oreca-Matmut Courage Judd LMP1 car, which barrel-rolled numerous times and even flipped over Alan McNish's car before coming to a rest, according to radio reports. The broadcasters said Oretelli was moving in the car before the emergency crews assisted him from the wreckage.

Some of the LMP2 cars ahead of Lammers pitted under that extended yellow, but since Lammers had just gotten in team owner Markus Hotz had him sit tight. That moved the entry up to third place for the restart with about 20 minutes remaining.

Lammers' remaining drive was a defensive one, as the top two LMP2 cars were one lap ahead of him but he had to hold off Erdos to maintain the podium position. He did just that, giving the team its best finish to date with its brand-new Porsche RS Spyder, and that car's first podium in only its third race ever.

Horag Racing is now fourth in the LMP2 point standings following the race at Monza. The next race is coming right up on May 9-11 at Spa, Belgium.

Post-race quotes follow:

Didier Theys: "I feel really bad because I locked up the rear wheels under braking in the Lesmo Turn and hit the curb. I almost saved it, but I spun off into a gravel trap. The tractor driver pulled me out right away. Then he unhooked me, but he had to rehook me up and pull me out a little further before I could get going again.

There was gravel all through the car, but it was fine. Afterwards the pace was back to normal. But the damage was done; we couldn't make up the time in this very competitive field. I think the class winner was stronger than we were today, but without the spin we might have gotten second."

Fredy Lienhard: "I had a very good race; one of the best ever for me personally; I had no problems and my lap times were good. We could have gotten second or maybe won this one, but Didier had an incident, which can happen to anyone in any race.

It was very competitive; there were 15 LMP2 cars on the starting grid. The team did an excellent job, and I'm happy with the outcome. When I got out of the car it was second, so I think it's not time to retire yet!"

Jan Lammers: "We weren't quite happy with the balance of the car on Friday, but every session we improved. We're happy with the third place we got today because a lot of Lista Office people were here to see us get on the podium.

Yes, I had to keep Tommy [Erdos] behind me at the end. He is obviously a very good driver, but I think I had a better car than he had.

We are learning more and more the longer we have our new car, and we're pleased with the podium."