

## Victory At The Spa 24 For Audi

Written by Gavin Crouch  
Monday, 28 July 2014 16:22

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Audi has won the world's toughest GT3 race at Spa. In the battle of eleven marques and 60 participants, the R8 LMS ultra prevailed for the third time in four years. The Belgian Audi Club Team WRT took victory in its home round with the driver trio of Laurens Vanthoor/René Rast/Markus Winkelhock (B/D/D).

Rast and Winkelhock had previously achieved victory with Audi

at the Nürburgring together with two other team-mates. Audi has enjoyed a hugely successful endurance racing season, so far in 2014.

In June, the Audi R18 e-tron quattro hybrid sports car won the Le Mans 24 Hours for an amazing 13th time. Only a week later, the brand celebrated its next 24-hour race win at the Nürburgring with the R8 LMS ultra. Now, the third endurance race victory within six weeks was scored at Spa. With that, Audi, just like in 2012, has won three major international motorsport classics in the same year. Laurens Vanthoor/René Rast/Markus Winkelhock had started the race from pole position and had been leading it for the first two hours.

A turbulent phase of the race, with numerous accidents, was followed by four long safety car periods on Saturday night, which reshuffled the classification. The eventual winners had dropped to sixth place during this phase. It wasn't until the seventh hour of the race that Laurens Vanthoor took the top spot again. Due to the different pit stop strategies, the lead kept changing. In the morning, the BMW team Marc VDS Racing had an advantage, which the three Audi drivers gradually reduced. In the 21st hour, René Rast took the lead, which he briefly lost again due to a change of the brake pads.

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Afterwards, the Audi driver battled and went on to re-capture first place a little over an hour before the end of the race. In the end, Audi celebrated its third victory at Spa after 2011 and 2012. Laurens Vanthoor is also the new leader of the Blancpain Endurance Series standings, before the finale to be held at the Nürburgring on September 21. Christopher Mies/James Nash/Frank Stippler (D/GB/D), who competed for the Belgian Audi Club Team WRT as well, completed the podium in third place.

On Saturday, the squad had lost valuable time due to a drive-through penalty. Another Audi team followed in fourth place overall. Saintéloc Racing, with a consistently fast drive by Grégory Guilvert/Stéphane Ortelli/Edward Sandström (F/MC/S), in third place, secured a strong position in the standings of the Blancpain Endurance Series, which includes the Spa 24 Hours. In contrast, two other Audi squads suffered misfortune.

The Le Mans winners Marcel Fässler/André Lotterer/Benoît Tréluyer were headed for a podium finish five hours before the end of the race when a rival collided with the car of the Belgian Audi Club Team WRT. The subsequent penalty imposed on the opponent in the crash was not much consolation, as the change of the left front suspension and the splitter caused the Audi squad to drop to eleventh place. Jean-Paul Buffin/Claude-Yves Gosselin/Philippe Haezebrouck/Marc Rostan (F/F/F/F) with Saintéloc Racing were running in 35th place when they were forced to retire due to an accident in the 17th hour of the race. "Sincere congratulations to our winners and to our other teams, as well as to our challengers, who made maximum demands on us," said Romolo Liebchen, Head of Audi Sport customer racing.

"The anniversary race in the event's 90th year was an absolute classic, in which the outcome was open to the very end and that will go down in history. All eight Audi R8 LMS ultra cars impressed due to their high reliability and good pace. In addition to the victory by the Belgian Audi Club Team WRT, we're happy about Laurens Vanthoor taking the lead of the standings because now we've got perfect chances of winning the title in the Blancpain Endurance Series as well."

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