



Minassian full throttle at Laguna

The second ALMS round for the Creation Autosportif team ended in disappointment yet again for Nicolas Minassian as he ran strongly in third position. A throttle sticking wide open meant that it was impossible for the Frenchman to drive the DBA around the curves of Laguna Seca. The team tried very hard to fix the problem but the cause was more sinister, an overheating engine due to water pump failure, which meant retirement from the event at the 2 hour 22 minute mark.

"It is very frustrating you know, the car is just so good, but it is impossible to drive around here with a throttle open like this," commented a philosophical Minassian.

Until this point everything had gone to plan. Minassian came to California confident of a good result, he captured pole ahead of the dominant Championship Audis and lead by example from the front. A great start allowed him to take control of the race and he began trying to pull out just a few tenths of a second a lap on the Audi R8 of Lehto, vital to ensure he maintained his lead following the first pitstops.

It couldn't last though, as when he began to hit traffic in the early stages Lehto was able to close the gap, making it impossible to take your eyes off the leaders as they battled their way through the slower cars. Lehto took the lead on a couple of occasions coming out of the corkscrew onto the pit-straight, but equally consistent, Minassian was quick to strike back while the iron was hot and took back the reins coming out of the Andretti hairpin.

Minassian soaked up this constant pressure for 33 laps, over three quarters of an hour in very hot conditions before the Audi finally made the pass stick, aided by a Porsche back marker. The Creation Autosportif team had to settle for second position on track for the time being.

"The battle with JJ (Lehto) was a great fight, hard but fair and it's always good to fight for the lead," said Minassian. "And that's what I did lap after lap, I loved every minute of it."

Both Lehto and Minassian took their first pitstops at the one hour mark... fuel and front tyres only for the Audi driver, all four for the Creation pilot, some light damage to the offside front of the DBA, but not significant enough to require attention. Following these first stops it was only a matter of time before Herbert in the second Audi was able to close down the DBA-Zytek of Minassian and the Frenchman was once again under continuous, immense pressure, this time for second place.





A podium position was all but certain until disaster struck at the two hour mark, Minassian pitted for a standard driver change over and the engine cover came off, the engineers worked to free the throttle linkage, as the flying Frenchman had been driving with a sticking throttle for the last few laps.

Team-mate Jamie Campbell-Walter took over driving duties but he was soon to return to the pits with the same problem. The car was pushed behind the pitwall into the garage, but despite valiant efforts by the team to return to the fray, it was sadly the end of their maiden ALMS race at Laguna Seca.

"The car can win races, I can win races, it is difficult to understand why we can finish six hour races in Europe but not here," shrugged Minassian. ""This team works so hard! We are right there with the Audis on speed, we show that in qualifying time after time, we just need to make the car bullet proof like theirs, then they will have a race on their hands! It's tough but that's life, I'm not the sort of guy to stay on a low, now we just need to turn the page, sit down, resolve the problems and make plans for the future."

Editorial Notes

Nicolas Minassian, 31, lives in England with his wife Jayne. Minassian was runner up in the French F3 Championship in 1995, British F3 in 1997 and the FIA F3000 Championship in 2000. He has tested with both Williams and Honda in Formula One and competed in the Champ Car World Series with Ganassi Racing before taking the 2002 ASCAR title with RML. With Creation Autosportif, Minassian is a front-runner in the inaugural four-round LMES Championship and will contest the final two rounds of ALMS at Road Atlanta and Laguna Seca with the team.

Jane Darke
JARL Motorsport / Minassian PR
jane@jarlmotorsport.co.uk
www.nicolasminassian.com
(+44) 7811 876574

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