



Minassian proud of team on debut at Le Mans

Nicolas Minassian and Creation Autosportif finished the 2005 Le Mans 24 Hours in 15th position on the team's debut at the classic event, and just to finish is quite an achievement, but the story could have been so different.

With temperatures soaring at La Sarthe, fans and competitors alike sought any available shade, but there were no shadows in which to hide on track. The team chose to run the new hard compound tyres throughout the race, which were able to deal with the heat and punishment for stints of over two hours at a time.

"These new Michelin tyres are fantastic, so consistent throughout the stint and the car feels really well balanced with them. It was definitely the right decision to run them here," said Minassian. "This track is so punishing, but so exciting to drive, it's so fast you know."

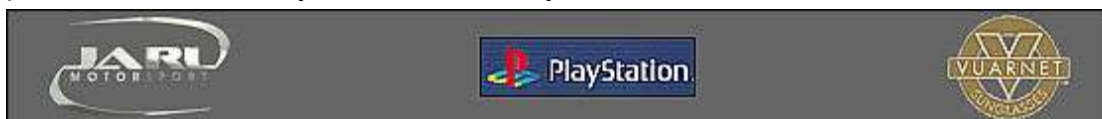
The talented Frenchman started the race in seventh position and despite dropping a couple of spots in the early laps, once the tyres came up to temperature he fought his way back to where he started and maintained his position, keeping in contention with the front runners until the pitstop.

Everything was looking very positive for the new team until, with Jamie Campbell-Walter in the car, the first of many small, but time-consuming problems began to materialise. At the two hour mark there was a mechanical glitch with the connection between the paddle-shift and the gearbox, shortly followed by a water pump seal failure. Small problems that cost the team dearly with lengthy pitstops to cure the DBA ailments.

All three drivers Minassian, Campbell-Walter and Wallace worked hard, pushing themselves and the car as hard as they dare, with Minassian setting an early time of 3:39.073, just two tenths of a second off his qualifying time and their efforts paid off. The Frenchman was really flying, making light work of back markers with his aggressive style and the speed he carried through the corners, an awesome sight for the many fans as darkness fell.

During the night the drivers all ran triple stints behind the wheel and had pulled themselves back to seventh position when a small radiator leak caused Campbell-Walter to pit again losing around 20 minutes whilst a replacement was fitted. Back on track and in 11th place, Minassian pulled an incredible lap out of the bag with a 3:38.543, four tenths quicker than his qualifying time, it was clear that in his hands the DBA had the speed to contend.

With the drivers giving everything they had and the mechanics working hard to fix the little problems the DBA threw at them, it seemed the gremlins had left, but the bad luck remained with the British driver [JCW]. Having had his penultimate run delayed due to a faulty starter motor, once on track





Campbell-Walter locked up the front wheels under braking on cold tyres and slid in to the tyres at the Ford Chicane.

"Since I last drove in the night the chicanes are covered in gravel," explained Campbell-Walter. "If you get a centimeter off line it is like ice out there and I ran too wide because I locked up going into the corner. A silly mistake really."

A return to the track after an hour of repairs to the damaged front right panels and suspension, a right rear puncture sent him scurrying back to the pits for more speedy repairs. Full credit has to be given to the team Mechanics who worked tirelessly to repair the DBA in unbearable heat and the drivers that continued to give 100% throughout the 24 hours regardless of misfortune.

"This has to be the best track, it is certainly my favourite," exclaimed Minassian. "Despite our problems during the race, we were quick and the car was handling perfectly throughout. Yes we were not blessed how we would have liked to have been, but this is the team's first 24 hour race and we were still there at the end, that is down to the whole team who worked tirelessly to keep us running in unbearable heat. It was good to work with Jamie [Campbell-Walter and Andy [Wallace], I think we had a good team and we never gave up, which is the important thing. There is absolutely no question I will be back here next year."

For the time being though, the team and Minassian pack up and return to the UK to prepare for the next LMES race in Monza on 9th-10th July 2005. They have proved they are quick in the past and now they have proved they can stay the course in the toughest of conditions, Monza should be just like a walk in the park.

Congratulations to Tom Kristensen on his historic seventh victory at Le Mans, making him the most successful driver in the history of the event.

Editorial Notes

Nicolas Minassian, 32, 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 took the LMES Championship by storm in the inaugural four-round series in 2004 and stays with the team for 2005.

Jane Darke
JARL Motorsport / Minassian PR
jane@jarlmotorsport.co.uk
www.nicolaminassian.com
Cell: (+44) 7811 876574
Fax: (+44) 7092 841723
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