



### Elusive win escapes Minassian at Silverstone

Nicolas Minassian drove in horrendous conditions to lead the action packed and exciting 1000km of Silverstone for the whole of his three and a half hour stint with team-mate, Jamie Campbell-Walter, holding onto that lead to the five hours and 23 minutes mark.

The Oreca Audi Playstation entry driven by Allen McNish took over the lead at this point, handing over to team-mate Stephane Ortelli, but the battle was not over as Creation Autosportif took the fight right to the finish line. Campbell-Walter put in his fastest lap of the race of 1:54.184 and fought tooth and nail to regain the lead, but it was not to be their day for the victory.

It was typical British racing conditions at Silverstone this afternoon as heavy rain hit the Northamptonshire circuit for an hour prior to the start of the scheduled 1000KM third round of the LMES Championship. The treacherous conditions played right into the hands of the Frenchman, a master in the wet as he drove offline seeking grip, keeping his cool while all those around him lost theirs.

Minassian played it safe at the start, losing the lead into turn one, but was soon back in control as Jean-Christophe Bouillon spun out in the Pescarolo machine, rejoining behind the Creation Autosportif DBA and began the chase. It was obvious that Bouillon was continuing to use the racing line and it was only a matter of time before he would once again visit the boundaries of the track. This time rear end damage impacted heavily on his track position, taking the team out of contention for the race win.

Allan McNish in the Oreca Audi Playstation team, now in second spot began to catch Minassian by almost a second a lap, the Scot was flying and a 28 second lead on lap nine became only eight seconds by lap 23. This would be the battle of the race and for the race win... The two traded personal best lap times between them, but for a time it appeared that McNish had the upper hand, until the rain began to fall harder.

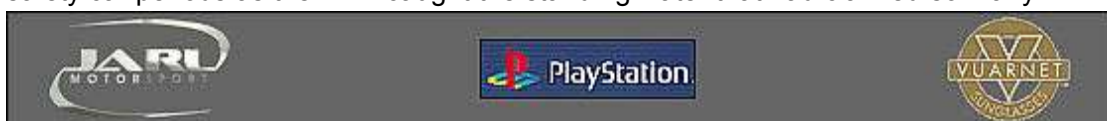
The rain soon became torrential, standing water meant that cars were aquaplaning on the straights and required exceptional throttle control on the exit of corners. The DBA was on the harder wet Michelins which the team admitted was not an ideal choice given the conditions and gave the DBA excessive understeer. Some incredible driving from both Minassian and McNish, the two continued the fight for the race lead.

However, the DBA driver proved more than a match for the Audi as conditions worsened, drawing on all the nerve and skill he possessed, the gap widening again.

Strategy is everything and Minassian dove for the pits under green flag conditions giving up the lead to his rival. This would soon play into his hands as the Audi stopped under the safety car and as is so common in the series, was held at the end of the pitlane and lost a lap in the process.

**"We made a mistake in our first choice of tyres, going for the hard wets, which meant the car was undriveable in these conditions, lots of understeer," Minassian explained. "When we pitted we put the softer wets on and felt the difference straight away, but the conditions out there are unbelievable."**

For the Creation Autosportif team that was all but the race in the bag, Ortelli and McNish changed over again and Minassian had an uncharacteristic spin behind one of the many safety car periods as the DBA caught the standing water that had claimed so many.





Fortunately Minassian escaped contact and still had nearly a lap lead over the Oreca Audi entry before handing over to team-mate Campbell-Walter after a mammoth three and a half hour stint.

**"It was crazy out there," said a very wet Minassian. "There is no visibility at all. I even backed off on the straights sometimes because I had no idea what was in front of me. I was in the lead and didn't want to take a chance and make a silly mistake, it was dangerous, aquaplaning so badly, you can't control the car on the straight, you can't control the car anywhere. We also had a problem with the paddle shift and had to use the clutch to change gear, which just added to the driving difficulties out there, but we're doing a good job and we're going to keep going and try and stay there"**

With the weather now improving, Campbell-Walter began to attack the circuit setting the team's fastest lap at the time of 1:58.440 early in his stint.

With just two and a half hours left to race it was up to the British driver to bring it home, but the ever-present McNish was not going to let that be a walk in the park. Campbell-Walter would not make it to the chequered flag without coming under pressure from the Audi driver and as the clock ticked down on race distance, so did the gap to McNish in the Audi, who was catching the DBA rapidly - destined to be a grandstand finish.

Campbell-Walter continued to put in fast laps consistently in the low 1:57s and high 1:56s but it was not enough to hold off the charging Oreca Audi. After five hours and 23 minutes in the lead of the race, the Creation Autosportif team took the checkered flag in second place after six hours of some of the most difficult racing conditions seen in LMES.

**"Of course this is going to be disappointing because I always want to win and to come second is the first loser but Jamie and I did a great job out there and at least we fight to the end - some time you win some time you're second. Next time!" Minassian concluded.**

The team now take this positive result onto the next race, the infamous Nurburgring, where they got a podium result last year, but will be looking to go one better than here this weekend and take the maiden victory for Creation Autosportif.

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## 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 was a front-runner in the inaugural four-round LMES Championship and will contest the series once again in 2005 for the team as well as driving in their Le Mans 24 hrs debut.

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