

ALPINE ELF ENDURANCE TEAM CUT SHORT AT SEBRING

18/03/2023

- Alpine Elf Endurance Team returned to the FIA World Endurance Championship LMP2 category this week at the 1000 Miles of Sebring.
- Eliminated from the battle for the podium by a puncture and an electrical issue, the team was able to show abnegation and pace to score its first points and clock the fastest lap of the race in its category.
- Eager to bounce back quickly, *Les Bleus* now look ahead to their next confrontation: the 6 Hours of Portimão (14-16 April).



Back in LMP2, Alpine Elf Endurance Team tackled the FIA World Endurance Championship opening round with humility and a determination to build on the momentum gained in the Prologue.

The team continued to work hard in free practice before qualifying at dusk on Thursday at Sebring International Raceway. Despite an increased challenge due to the ban on tyre blankets, the 15-minute drill saw André Negrão and Matthieu Vaxiviere gradually increase the pace in a hotly contested session. The Frenchman ended up fourth, just two-tenths of a second off the pace while André Negrão also improved his time but had to settle for twelfth place.

On Friday lunchtime, Alpine Elf Endurance Team entrusted the start of the race to its Silver drivers, Memo Rojas and Julien Canal. The Frenchman settled into fifth place while the Mexican immediately gained ground. Race incidents, unavoidable at the 1000 Miles of Sebring, opened up strategic opportunities after only a few minutes and the team took advantage of a safety car period after a GTE Am car crashed to anticipate the first stop of the n°36, followed shortly after by the n°35.

Eighth and twelfth on the restart, the Alpines climbed to second place in the game of offset strategies. In hour two, Memo Rojas handed over to Olli Caldwell, but their efforts were annihilated by a penalty for speeding in the pit lane. In the sister car, Julien Canal passed the baton to Charles Milesi, who established himself as the fastest LMP2 competitor on track. Although he dropped positions due to a right-front puncture, the Frenchman pushed hard to move up the order and even put his Alpine A470 in the lead of the category!

As half-distance neared, André Negrão and Matthieu Vaxiviere took over. Still in contention for the podium, both prototypes were challenged in the next two hours. The n°36 Alpine was solidly in the top five but suffered a loss of power and fell to tenth place after a quick ignition coil change in less than three minutes. Shortly after taking over in the n°35, Olli Caldwell also hit troubles, with a persistent electronic problem. Despite spending many minutes trying to solve the problem and bring the car back to the pits, the Briton returned to the box prematurely for an early bath.

Meanwhile, Matthieu Vaxiviere and Charles Milesi took turns to make up lost ground. Consistently the fastest on track in the last three hours, both drivers proved the team's full potential by setting the best lap in the LMP2 category. Their continued efforts in the fading light paid off as Charles Milesi took the chequered flag in ninth place.

With six points scored, the A-arrowed brand is determined to bounce back immediately and now looks ahead to the next FIA World Endurance Championship clash. The 6 Hours of Portimão on 16 April is a new addition to the championship calendar after the Algarve International Circuit made its maiden appearance in an eight-hour format in 2021.

QUOTES

André Negrão

"It was a disappointing end to the race. We had a good pace and were in contention for a top-five finish before that electronic problem with three and a quarter hours to go. Motorsport is like that sometimes, and I prefer to have an issue like that in our first race. It gives us time to understand what happened and solve it for the upcoming races. In any case, the team has worked very hard since the Prologue. We have definitely made a step forward with the car, so we can hold our heads high and look forward to Portimão."

Olli Caldwell

"We may be disappointed with how the race ended, but it was still a promising week. We managed to improve the car balance from the Prologue, and our pace was good even if we could have been a bit higher on the grid. Unfortunately, an electronic issue cut our race short when I was in the car. I tried everything I could, but that's one of these things happening sometimes in motorsport. The team were doing a great job and I know they will do everything to ensure it doesn't happen again. Now we can take everything we've learned here and put it to good use at the next race in Portimão."

Memo Rojas

"It was a very encouraging race. With the team's strategy, we were out of sync with the majority of the field, and it looked pretty promising as we were in a position to aim for a top-five result. We had good speed, but an electronic issue ended our efforts with three hours to go. It's a shame to end the opening race like this, but we did a great job this week challenging teams that have been racing non-stop in the category for two years or more. Even though there is a lot of work to do, we will fight to be on top form in the next round."

Matthieu Vaxiviere

"We must remember the positives from this long week in Sebring. Since the Prologue, we have seen a dynamic which bodes well for the future. We raised our game session by session and were clearly in the hunt for qualifying. The pace and strategy were also there in the race, even if the hazards of motor racing did not spare us. I think third place, at least, was within our grasp, so it's frustrating because we are competitors, and we wanted to keep moving up the order. It's a shame, but we will draw the necessary conclusions before the next race."

Charles Milesi

"We made a big step forward in performance between the Prologue and the race, so there are many positives in Alpine's return to LMP2 at Sebring. If it wasn't for the technical issue during the race, I think we could have had at least a podium finish. It was a genuinely positive race, and we can be satisfied with the fastest race lap, which shows that the performance is there for sure. However, we need to keep working to come back even stronger at Portimão."

Julien Canal

"I was really grateful the team put me in the driver's seat to start the race amongst many professional drivers. It's a great sign of strength after everything we've achieved this week. The whole team was locked in deep in work to improve the car set-up and it paid off as the car was genuinely competitive. I kept up with my rivals by being fifth for most of my stint. Charles and Matthieu were impressively fast, but we were unlucky with a puncture and a mechanical problem when we were running second. I want to remember our momentum and

upwards curve as we were legitimately in a position to compete for a podium finish. I think this bodes well for the rest of the season."

Philippe Sinault, Alpine Elf Endurance Team Principal

"Races where cars and drivers achieve such a high level of performance are rare, and that was our case today. For the n°36, Julien had the difficult task of starting the race, but he held his ground and set an excellent pace. Charles then did a great job to move to the front quickly, but a puncture disturbed our ascent. It was all the more regrettable as he had to complete almost a full lap before returning to the pits. We knew we could make up for the time lost with Charles and Matthieu, but a technical issue took away all hope. As the n°35 car started further down the grid, we planned a different strategy, hence our anticipated stop in the first safety car period. The top-five was clearly in sight for Memo, Olli and André before an electronic problem beyond the team's control, like the one with the n°36. Despite the frustration, the superb dynamic since the Prologue in terms of set-up, technical discussions and interaction among the drivers and engineers must be praised. This has produced two excellent cars, with the fastest lap in the race, which was not a target, and excellent averages on a stint achieved when it was still rather warm. Beyond being out in front in our return to LMP2, we showed good and satisfying things, and it bodes well for the rest of the season."

STANDINGS

1000 Miles of Sebring – LMP2

1. Hertz Team JOTA n°48 230 laps
2. United Autosports n°22 +2.863s
3. Prema Racing n°63 +31.998s

9. Alpine Elf Endurance Team n°36

Ret. Alpine Elf Endurance Team n°35

FIA Endurance LMP2 Trophy

1. Hertz Team JOTA n°48 – 38 points
2. United Autosports n°22 – 27 points
3. Prema Racing n°63 – 23 points
- 9. Alpine Elf Endurance Team n°36 – 6 points**
- 11. Alpine Elf Endurance Team n°35 – 0 point**



ABOUT ALPINE

Founded in 1955 by Jean Rédélé, the brand has set itself apart with its French-style sports cars. In 2018, the brand presented the new A110, a sports car faithful to Alpine's timeless principles of compactness, lightness, agility and driving pleasure. The Alpine Business Unit was created in 2021 and thus became the brand dedicated to innovative, authentic, exclusive sportscars of the Renault Group, benefiting from the heritage and craftsmanship of its historic plant in Dieppe and the Alpine Racing and Alpine Cars teams engineering mastery.

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