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Action Express, Audi Of America, Conquest Racing

Highlight Opening Day Of Rolex Series Daytona Test

Barbosa, Biela Lead Charts In Preparation for Rolex 24 And Beyond

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (Nov. 13, 2012) – While 20 GRAND-AM Rolex Series teams were preparing for 2013 competition Tuesday at Daytona International Speedway, an American Le Mans Series presented by Tequila Patrón team was on hand providing valuable data looking ahead to 2014 competition.

Joao Barbosa ran the fastest unofficial Daytona Prototype lap of the day, running 1:41.334 (126.473 mph) in the No. 9 Action Express Racing Corvette DP also driven by Christian Fittipaldi and brothers Burt and Brian Frisselle.

“We spent today trying different chassis setups,” said Barbosa, winner of the 2010 Rolex 24 for Action Express. “We definitely have a lot of work to do, but we improved with every session and it’s definitely working better than it did here last January. We’ve got plenty of room to improve, but we’re heading in the right direction.”

Wednesday’s conclusion of testing will be the final official GRAND-AM activity prior to the Roar Before the Rolex 24, Jan. 4-6. The 2013 season opens with the 51st Rolex 24 At Daytona on Jan. 26-27.

Defending Rolex 24 winner Ozz Negri was second with a lap of 1:41.544 (126.211 mph) in the No. 60 Michael Shank Racing Ford/Riley, followed by Alex Gurney in the No. 99 GAINSCO Auto Insurance Corvette DP co-driven by Jon Fogarty, Memo Gidley and Darren Law, 1:41.726 (125.985 mph).

Faced with a steep learning curve on his first visit to Daytona Beach, Frank Biela was up to the task. The five-time overall winner of the 24 Hours of Le Mans ran a quick lap of 1:48.953 (117.629 mph) in the No. 52 Audi of America Audi R8 to lead the GT competitors.

“Very impressive,” Biela said of Daytona. “It was a strange feeling with the banking at first, but I quickly started enjoying it. We’re still in discussion about our plans for 2013, but I’d like to do not only the Rolex 24, but we’re talking about doing the whole season.”

Boris Said was second in the No. 31 Whelen Engineering Corvette co-driven by Eric Curran, 1:49.160 (117.406 mph), followed by Patrick Long in the No. 73 Park Place Motorsports Porsche GT3 co-driven by Patrick Lindsey and Jason Hart, 1:49.782 (116.740 mph).

Joining the test for Tuesday only was Martin Plowman, driving the No. 37 Conquest Endurance Morgan/Nissan. The American Le Mans Series regular took advantage of the prime opportunity to gather data, which will be analyzed as a first step towards a merger of the two sanctioning bodies into one organization for 2014 competition.

"We knew coming into the test that today was not about comparisons, it was purely to give the tire guys some indication of how our cars work, in the exact same conditions as the Rolex Series cars on track," Plowman said. "It was a brand new tire for us, and we had to work very hard to get the setup right. I was very happy with how they worked. By the end of the morning, we were very happy with it. During the afternoon, we did a full race stint simulation. We were hoping for a qualifying simulation, but miscalculated our fuel. Other than that, we ticked every box that we wanted to do.

"Daytona is one of the iconic tracks, and just to be out there is a huge honor – especially on the road course," added the 25-year-old Englishman. "The chicane is very fast, and it takes a lot of commitment to be fast through there. With this car, you can really go deep through the corner there and challenge it."

Richard Buck, GRAND-AM's managing director of competition, was pleased with the session.

"Today was a very successful day for data gathering," Buck said. "It will help us to move even quicker to find solutions moving forward for the 2014 season. We will take the next few days to mine and analyze data very carefully. Today was a major step verifying our simulation programs and verifying our path moving forward."

The test concludes Wednesday, with three sessions beginning at 9 a.m. and running through 5 p.m. A section of the Oldfield Grandstands will be open free to the public with access available through the lobby of the Daytona International Speedway ticket office. Sports car fans will also be able to watch the testing action through a Daytona International Speedway Track Tour.