

Larbre Competition revels amid adversity in Le Mans Test Day

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LARBRE COMPETITION REVELS AMID ADVERSITY IN LE MANS TEST DAY

- #50 Corvette C7.R sets LMGTE Am pace at La Sarthe
- French GT experts adapt preparations after Ruberti's injury

Larbre Competition left last weekend's official Le Mans Test Day (June 5) with its #50 Corvette C7.R having set the fastest time in the LMGTE Am category. The French outfit's performance was all the more remarkable given the fact that it had to reshuffle its programme following team leader Paolo Ruberti's last-minute forfeit due to injury.

The Italian was driver coaching at Hockenheim, Germany when his car had a brake

issue, which resulted in a heavy crash at 200kph. While Paolo's student was only bruised, Larbre's pro racer ended up with a compound fracture to a lumbar vertebra that will prevent him from making a seventh career appearance at the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Despite a very tight schedule, team manager Jack Leconte could rely on Larbre's experience and reputation to draft a pair of talented drivers to assist regular pilots Pierre Ragues and Yutaka Yamagishi: they were Frenchman Jean-Philippe Belloc, who knows the Vigeant-based squad very well after racing three times under their flag at the French endurance classic, and Dutchman Nicky Catsburg, who was part of the 2015 24 Hours of Spa-winning trio.

As the final dress rehearsal before the 84th running of the twice-around-the-clock event, the official Le Mans Test Day gave Larbre the opportunity to get back in the groove around Circuit de la Sarthe. The French team was also able to fine-tune the setup of its second-year FIA World Endurance Championship-entered Corvette C7.R.

By clocking a 3:57.999 flyer, the #50 crew topped the timesheets and left their closest rivals nearly one second adrift. The quartet also amassed 39 laps of the 13.629km venue, which means Ragues, Yamagishi, Belloc, and Catsburg ranked amongst the most productive line-ups across the eight hours of running.

Larbre has thus secured valuable data, notably in terms of how the Michelin tyres behave, ahead of its 24th participation at Le Mans where the French squad already boasts five class wins (1993, 1994, 2010, 2011, and 2012).

Larbre Competition's promising Test Day outing bodes well for the Le Mans week, which gets underway with the administrative checking and scrutineering. Make sure to come to Place de la République in the city centre of Le Mans on Sunday 12 June, with Larbre Competition and its #50 Corvette C7.R scheduled to go through the traditional Pesage at 15:00, local time.

Pierre Ragues: "First of all, I would like to say a word to Paolo and wish him a speedy recovery.

"Then, I'm very happy with how our Le Mans Test Day went. We had a busy programme, including the integration of two new team-mates, but we ticked off all the items on our to-do list.

"We did a good job on the setup of our Corvette C7.R, as well as on understanding the degradation of the different Michelin tyre compounds. We have laid a solid groundwork ahead of the famous Le Mans week. I am now very much looking forward to celebrating my 10th participation in the event."

Yutaka Yamagishi: "Just like Pierre, I hope Paolo makes a swift and full recovery after his accident.

“I was delighted to return to Circuit de la Sarthe for the official Le Mans Test Day. I am feeling more and more comfortable in the Corvette C7.R, though there are still a few adjustments I need to make.

“Pierre continues to impress me, while Jean-Philippe and Nick are both extremely professional drivers too.

“It is a privilege to race under the Larbre Competition banner and drive for Jack Leconte in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. I can’t wait for the whole event to get under way next week!”

Nicky Catsburg: “I am so thankful to Jack Leconte and Larbre Competition for the opportunity to drive the team’s Corvette C7.R and experience the Le Mans circuit for the first time. I also wish Paolo a speedy recovery.

“Of course, I would love to be with the team for the 24 Hours of Le Mans itself, as they’re a great group of guys and I really enjoyed working with them, but I understand that this may not be possible on this occasion. If not, I hope to get another chance again in the future.”

Jean-Philippe Belloc: “My first thoughts are for Paolo and I wish him the best recovery possible. I also do a bit of driver coaching so I can relate when I see a fellow instructor getting hurt.

“Jack Leconte was a man in high demand to find a replacement and it was a nice show of trust from him to ask me to take part in this official Le Mans Test Day.

“I know Larbre Competition very well and it was great to see all the guys again. I took it easy at the start, finding my marks behind the wheel of the Corvette C7.R, before steadily upping the pace. On such a track, you cannot skip the stages.

“Jack knows very well the demands of the 24 Hours of Le Mans and his team looks primed to take on the challenge. If my services are required for the race, I’ll be delighted to contribute towards the collective effort.”

Jack Leconte, Team Manager: “With our team leader Paolo Ruberti sidelined, our Le Mans programme naturally had to be reshuffled, but the tremendous team spirit shown by the entire squad immediately dismissed any potential doubts.

“After sending Paolo our best wishes of a speedy recovery, we stayed in touch with him throughout our first preparatory weekend. By calling up Jean-Philippe Belloc and Nicky Catsburg, Larbre had both a seasoned racer who knows the team in and out, and a young talent that we could evaluate like we did in the past with Sébastien Bourdais, Manu Collard, Stéphane Ortelli and Ricky Taylor, who all made their Le Mans debut with us.

“What’s more, Pierre Ragues immediately stepped up to the plate and became the new leader to ensure the Corvette C7.R was properly prepared and setup. By setting the LMGTE Am pace, Larbre has shown once again that they can rise to the challenge on the biggest stages.

“We are now approaching our 24th Le Mans participation on the back of a premium five-year partnership with Corvette Racing USA and with a very experienced crew. Hopefully we’ll deliver a good result to cap our strong preparations.”

2016 Le Mans Test Day – LMGTE Am results:

1. **Larbre Competition/Corvette C7.R/Ragues-Yamagishi-Belloc-Catsburg:** 3:57.999
2. AF Corse/Ferrari 458 Italia/Cameron-Griffin-Scott: 3:58.869
3. Scuderia Corsa/Ferrari 458 Italia/Sweedler-Bell-Segal: 3:58.981
4. Clearwater Racing/Ferrari 458 Italia/Mok-Sawa-Bell: 3:59.300
5. AF Corse/Ferrari F458 Italia/Perrodo-Collard-Aguas: 3:59.313
6. Aston Martin Racing/Aston Martin V8 Vantage/Dalla Lana-Lamy-Lauda: 3:59.337
7. KCMG/Porsche 911 RSR/Ried-Henzler-Camathias-Bachler: 3:59.374
8. Gulf Racing/Porsche 911 RSR/Wainwright-Carroll-Barker: 3:59.433
9. Formula Racing/Ferrari 458 Italia/Laursen-Mac-Nielsen: 4:00.415
10. Proton Competition/Porsche 911 RSR/MacNeil-Keen-Miller-Jeannette: 4:01.258

Le Mans 24 Hours calendar of events:

Sunday 12th June: Scrutineering at Place de la République in Le Mans, Larbre Competition’s Pesage is at 15:00, local time.

Monday 13th June: Scrutineering

Tuesday 14th June: Official drivers photo, fan autograph session

Wednesday 15th June: Free practice, qualifying practice

Thursday 16th June: Qualifying practice

Friday 17th June: Drivers’ Parade

Saturday 18th June: Warm up, start of 84th Le Mans 24 Hours at 15:00, local time

Sunday 19th June: Finish of 84th Le Mans 24 Hours, podium celebrations





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