



## **LARBRE COMPETITION BATTLES TO SEASON-BEST FIA WEC RESULT IN FUJI**

- *French squad fights back to fourth after being stripped of pole*

Larbre Competition showed grit and determination by claiming a strong fourth place in the LMGTE class at the 6 Hours of Fuji last weekend (October 9-11). Having been stripped of pole position and forced to start from the back of the field, the #50 Corvette C7.R crew drove an inspired recovery race in mixed-weather conditions to record their season-best FIA World Endurance Championship result.

Keen to emulate their 2012 win at Fuji International Speedway, Larbre arrived at round six of this year's FIA WEC campaign aiming for a return to the podium. The French squad also welcomed a new driver to their line-up in Japan, with 18-year-old Nicolai Sylvest replacing fellow Dane Kristian Poulsen alongside Paolo Ruberti and Gianluca Roda.

The #50 trio wasted little time in showing their hand by topping Friday's opening free practice. Saturday's qualifying shootout saw Ruberti and Roda – the two drivers for the session – capitalise on Larbre's great preparation work by converting that promise into a superb maiden pole position of the year.

Unfortunately their joy was short-lived, as the Corvette C7.R failed post-qualifying scrutineering due to a fuel cell violation after the ventilation valve was deemed to fall outside of the FIA's technical regulations. The Corvette uses a US-standard depression-operated system, which differs slightly to the stipulated gravity-feed design. Nevertheless, the exclusion came as a surprise to the French team, who had been using the same ventilation valve since the start of the season without incurring any technical infringements.

Larbre were not only forced to go through scrutineering again but also crucially stripped of their pole position, thus resulting in a back-of-the-grid start for Sunday's event.

Heavy rain came sweeping across the circuit on race day, leading to a Safety Car-supervised start. After

45 minutes of neutralisation, proceedings got underway and Larbre quickly elected to make their first driver change, with Roda taking over from Ruberti. Their strategy ultimately paid off as the C7.R moved up to second as other competitors made their stops.

Roda battled treacherous conditions to deliver a flawless and consistent first stint, which allowed him to stay in podium contention. Based on their Michelin technician's advice and data, Larbre chose not to change Roda's full wets when he pitted ahead of his second consecutive spell behind the wheel. The decision turned out to be a mistake, as the increasing pace quickly triggered high tyre degradation and put the #50 Corvette in a perilous situation, especially when the Italian had to brake hard on a damp track.

Despite going over a kerb on the edge of the track as a result of the tyre wear, Roda put in a tremendous performance over the final six laps of his double stint before handing the car back to Ruberti. Having rejoined on intermediate tyres he duly turned up the heat to chase down the front-runners, before Sylvest made his competitive debut for Larbre. Despite dealing with mixed track conditions on a drying circuit, the young Dane kept his composure and was equally competitive on inters and slicks over a trouble-free double stint, posting several quick lap times throughout.

When Team SARD Morand's #43 Morgan LMP2 Evo triggered a late full course yellow by going off the track, Larbre decided to bring their final fuel stop forward. Unfortunately the caution period did not last long enough for the gamble to work, pushing the Corvette out of podium contention just as Ruberti climbed back aboard.

The Italian delivered a perfect final stint to keep SMP Racing's LMGTE Am championship-leading #72 Ferrari at bay and cement Larbre's fourth place, which earned the French squad 12 more valuable points.

**Paolo Ruberti:** "The floor of our Corvette was actually damaged when Gianluca went off track because his tyres were simply gone. In such difficult conditions, he was simply a passenger.

"After that we had a lot of understeer. It's a shame because the C7.R was as competitive during the race as it had been in qualifying.

"We've been hit with little niggles at every round this season, which have prevented us from being on the podium. I hope we can have a smooth run for the final two rounds."

**Gianluca Roda:** "That was a very strange weekend! I was very happy with the time I set for pole position. I also had a strong first stint in the race with good lap times and a firm position amongst the top drivers, which is very important for me.

"We made a mistake in choosing to remain on the full wets. Not only was the second stint dangerous but we also lost one minute and what would have been second position."

**Nicolai Sylvest:** "There were a lot of new things to consider over what was ultimately a weekend of learning. I'd only raced GTs four or five times before Fuji, so that was the first time I ever completed a double stint!

"I'd never been in wet conditions either but I think I did OK. For sure, if we had not been disqualified in qualifying we could have at least secured a podium."

**Jack Leconte, Team Manager:** "This weekend was Larbre Competition's 10th trip to Japan, a country where we have a successful track record. We were therefore quite optimistic ahead of the race and the pace was clearly there, as indicated by our fastest time in free practice and qualifying.

"With regards to the ventilation valve incident that led to us losing pole position, I'd like to point out that this year our Corvette C7.R has always passed FIA WEC technical scrutineering - which takes place under the authority of a group of 12 officials and as many pairs of eyes - including at the 24 Hours of Le Mans where the similar Pro-entered car won its class using the same system.

"Gianluca drove a particularly difficult second stint on worn-out full wets. With our partner Michelin we made a mistake, which pushed us out of a podium finish. Nicolai was very competitive in all conditions,

especially considering it was his first race with us. In the end Paolo pushed hard to ensure we recorded our season-best result.

"I'm very confident for the next race in Shanghai; the team has recovered its level of performance and found the ideal set-up for the car. Once again, we'll do our best to get onto the podium.

"Finally, I'm happy to confirm that Nicolai Sylvest will be back with us at Shanghai, partnering Gianluca and Paolo in the #50 car again. I'm sure he will be able to build on everything he's learnt in Fuji and keep improving."

The seventh and penultimate round of the 2015 FIA World Endurance Championship season – the 6 Hours of Shanghai – will take place on October 30 – November 1 at the Chinese Grand Prix venue.

#### 6 Hours of Fuji – LMGTE Am results:

1. Dempsey Racing - Proton / Porsche 911 RSR / Dempsey/Long/Seefried: 187 laps
2. Aston Martin Racing / Aston Martin V8 Vantage / Dalla Lana/Lamy/Lauda: 17.210s
3. AF Corse / Ferrari F458 Italia / Perrodo/Collard/Aguas: 1 lap
- 4. Larbre Compétition / Corvette C7.R / Roda/Ruberti/Sylvest: 2 laps**
5. Abu Dhabi-Proton Racing / Porsche 911 RSR / Ried/Al Qubaisi/Bamber: 2 laps
6. SMP Racing / Ferrari F458 Italia / Shaytar/Bertolini/Basov: 2 laps
7. Aston Martin Racing / Aston Martin V8 Vantage / Castellacci/Griffin/Hall: 3 laps

#### FIA World Endurance Championship – LMGTE Am classification:

1. SMP Racing / Ferrari F458 Italia: 140 pts
2. AF Corse / Ferrari F458 Italia: 111 pts
3. Dempsey Racing - Proton / Porsche 911 RSR: 104 pts
4. Aston Martin Racing / Aston Martin V8 Vantage: 99 pts
5. Abu Dhabi-Proton Racing / Porsche 911 RSR: 58 pts
6. Aston Martin Racing / Aston Martin V8 Vantage: 40 pts
- 7. Larbre Compétition / Corvette C7.R: 34 pts**

ENDS



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