

The End of an Era at Road Atlanta,

Story by Phillip Prichard

The 16th Petit Le Mans Powered By Mazda, in the final year of the American Le Mans Series presented by Tequila Patrón, was run on 18-19 October. Many of this year's championships had been decided prior to the event, the last ALMS race was a 10-hour, 1,000-mile slog around Road Atlanta to get names in the record books and decide a few series trophies.

The 1000-mile enduro at Road Atlanta will retain the Petit Le Mans name when it takes its place on the new United SportsCar Racing calendar next season.

United SportsCar, which is the new name of the unified US Sports Car series due to start in 2014, has signed a licensing deal with the Automobile Club de l'Ouest, the organizer of the Le Mans 24 Hours.

The Rebellion Racing Team returned to ALMS and repeated its performance from 2012, with Neel Jani putting the No. 12 Rebellion Timepieces/Lemo Connectors/Speedy Garage Toyota-powered Lola B12/60 on pole, along with co-drivers Nick Heidfeld and Nico Prost. It was Jani's fourth career ALMS pole, his first one coming at last year's Petit Le Mans. And just like last year, although it was a bit messier this time, he and his co-drivers would win the race.

Jani took the pole just ahead of the No. 6 Muscle Milk Pickett Racing HPD ARX-03c Honda driven by Lucas Luhr, Klaus Graf and Romain Dumas. The Muscle Milk car had won eight races in a row coming into Road Atlanta, and in doing so claimed the ALMS P1 manufacturer and team championships, while Graf and Luhr claimed the driver's championship.

Changeable wet and dry conditions dominated the first few hours, along with incidents and retirements that would decide the race. Rebellion led the race from the start, with Muscle Milk close behind, until an hour in when Jani sideswiped the No. 52 PR1 Mathiasen Motorsports' Molecule ORECA FLM09 Prototype Challenge (PC) car driven by Dane Cameron as Cameron exited the pits. That sent the Rebellion into the pits first for repairs, and then again to serve a stop-go penalty for avoidable contact.

The Muscle Milk Team took over the lead and put the Rebellion team a lap down, and looked like it had the pace to take a ninth consecutive victory. But five hours in, Dumas pulled the No. 6 car into the pits, and then had to retire with an overheating issue.

With the Muscle Milk car out, Rebel-

lion was untouched for the rest of the race, leading for 228 of the 394 laps of Road Atlanta – Muscle Milk team led another 158 of them – and taking victory by six laps over second place. There were two other runners in the P1 class, the No. 16 Dyson Racing Lola B12/60-Mazda suffering problems throughout the race and finishing 11th overall, 20 laps down, the No. 0 DeltaWing DWC13 Coupe failing to finish.

Ryan Briscoe brought the Level 5 Motorsports No. 551 HPD ARX-03b home in second with the help of co-drivers Scott Tucker and Marino Franchitti. The class win gave Tucker, the team owner, his fourth-consecutive ALMS driver's championship – three in P2 to go along with a PC crown in 2010 – after sealing the team championship earlier this year.

He had to fight for it, though; Tucker entered the race with a six-point lead over Scott Sharp, driver in the third-placed No. 01 Tequila Patrón HPD ARX-03b of Extreme Speed Motorsports. Midway through the race his car was two laps down due to "minor dramas," and the sister No. 552 Level 5 car was the one challenging for the lead with Extreme Speed. Level 5, though, benefited from excellent pit stops throughout the contest, and a bad stop by Brabham in the last hour of the race helped the No. 551 Level 5 car rise from third to first place, finally beating Brabham by less than two seconds – only 1.394 of them to be exact. The No. 552 Level 5 car driven by Jonny Kane, Peter Dumbreck and Guy Cosmo came in fourth.

In the PC class, Dane Cameron was unable to convert his fourth consecutive pole position into a victory or a driver's championship for co-driver Mike Guasch. After Cameron was brushed by Jani early in the race, the No. 52 PR1 Mathiasen Molecule ORECA FLM09 had to pit for repairs and re-entered the race last in class, 20 laps down. They would finish fifth in class.

Guasch was the series' driver's leader over Chris Cumming in the No. 8 Merchant Services LTD/Evident Capital/MBRP Performance Exhaust ORECA FLM09. Cumming and co-drivers Kyle Marcelli and Stefan Johansson finished first in class, their third victory in a row after the races at COTA and VIR, giving Cumming the championship by a single point over Guasch. They beat the No. 25 8Star Motorsports driven by Ozz Negri – an ALMS debutant, and Sean Rayhall – all of 18 years old, by 11.442 seconds.

Corvette Racing had already claimed its tenth team and manufacturer

