



ROUNDS 1 & 2 PRACTICE AND QUALIFYING

Weather: it was rainy in the early morning, but conditions changed to overcast; the track also changed from wet during the first practice to dry for qualifying.

PRACTICE 1 – PRIAULX FASTEST IN THE WET

Andy Priaulx topped the times in the first practice session of the inaugural FIA WTCC event. The Monza circuit was wet and in the early stages, BMW Team Deutschland drivers Jörg and Dirk Müller, Alfa Romeo's Giovanardi, BMW Team Italy-Spain's García and BMW Team UK's Priaulx were changing positions within the top five. However, as the track dried and the session progressed, Priaulx settled at the top clocking a fastest lap time of 2:14.726 in his BMW 320i. J. Müller was 0.283 seconds slower resulting in 2nd place and Giovanardi set the third fastest time, 0.505 seconds behind Priaulx.

SEAT emulated their success at unofficial testing earlier in the year as Rydell and Gené set the 7th and 8th fastest times respectively. Terting was not far behind with 12th. Larini set the best time of the three Chevrolet cars with 2:19.433 which put him in position 14, with team mate Alain Menu right behind. Engine problems put an end to Klenke's practice session during his first lap, whilst the Ford Hotfiel Sport team worked hard to solve another technical problem with Jaeger's car. They did so successfully and the German driver did manage to hit the track for 4 laps. Czech youngster Adam Lacko was the fastest of the Independent contenders in his Alfa Romeo 156, with a brilliant 13th fastest time.

PRACTICE 2 – PRIAULX MAINTAINS LEAD

The drying Monza circuit may have provided a change in driving conditions from the practice session earlier this morning but the outcome was the same - Priaulx was fastest. The BMW driver clocked a time of 2:12.172 on his very last lap, before the session was concluded by the red flag when Valli's BMW stranded in the gravel trap. James Thompson jumped up the time sheet in the final stages to finish 2nd - the fastest of the Alfa Romeo Racing Team. SEAT Sport's rookie Peter Terting secured 6th position with a time of 2:13.142.

Former BTCC competitor Robert Huff, also a rookie, led the Chevrolet bid and finished a respectable 20th, he too used the drying track to his advantage by clocking his best time on his final lap. Again, Ford Hotfiel Sport was plagued by technical problems at the start but both drivers were able to partake in the session with Jäger proving the faster of the two drivers.

For a large proportion of the session there was a battle between two independent drivers, Andrea Larini and Stefano D'Aste. Both are also competing in the Italian Superturismo this season. Larini finished in an excellent 3rd place and D'Aste took 8th. A number of drivers had their best lap times disallowed for having cut the first chicane.



QUALIFYING – DIRK MÜLLER CLAIMS FIRST POLE

The first race of the FIA WTCC will begin at Monza tomorrow with Dirk Müller on pole position. Despite not being the fastest in the two practice sessions, Dirk outdrove his rivals when it counted, and topped the qualifying time sheet with a fastest lap of 1:59.009. Two other BMW cars qualified directly behind Dirk: his team-mate, Jörg Müller and Antonio García. This was an encouraging result for BMW, who claimed both the 2004 FIA ETCC Drivers' and Manufacturers' titles. However, after the end of the session, Jörg had his best lap disallowed by the Stewards because he failed to stop at the weighing scales. This dropped him to 18th and promoted Gabriele Tarquini, the fastest of the Alfa Romeo drivers, to third. His team-mates Farfus, Giovanardi and Thompson will start their championship claims from 4th, 8th and 9th positions respectively. 2004 FIA ETCC champion Priaulx managed to squeeze among them to fill the 5th spot on tomorrow's starting grid.

Another driver had his best performance disallowed today: Roberto Colciago. The JAS Motorsport man had clocked the eighth fastest lap (2:00.413), however he was penalised for cutting a chicane and dropped to 13th.

SEAT Sport's Jordi Gené put in a very good performance to reach 7th on the grid meaning that it will not necessarily be a BMW vs Alfa Romeo battle at the front. And this despite that the Monza track is not a favourite of the Spanish cars.

A red flag saw a premature end to qualifying with one minute remaining. The cause was Alain Menu who crashed his Chevrolet Lacetti against the barriers at Lesmo. Earlier the Swiss driver had clocked a lap of 2:02.69 giving him 23rd place whilst his team-mate Huff was 0.078 of a second faster meaning he will start 21st, the highest grid position of the Chevrolet team.

Klenke and Jäger were still struggling to improve their Ford Focus cars' pace, but they could not achieve any better than positions 30 and 32 respectively.

Wiechers-Sport's Marc Hennerici was the fastest driver from the Independent runners securing a brilliant 12th place in his BMW 320i, just behind Alessandro Zanardi, 11th overall and pole setter for the Italian Superturismo.

ROUNDS 1 & 2 QUALIFYING QUOTES

Dirk MÜLLER, BMW Team Deutschland – pole position

“I am very pleased to be starting the first WTCC race from pole. It feels really great. The team gave me a perfect car. We repeated the times we had set two weeks ago during the official testing, however we were eighth tenths slower than last year’s pole because the track was not perfect today. There were wet spots and the grip was just not there. It was a big change to go from wets in the practice sessions to slicks in qualifying.”

Antonio GARCÍA, BMW Team Italy-Spain – 2nd fastest

“It was so difficult to get a clear lap because there were lots of cars on the track. We also had planned to play the slipstreaming game. It worked with me, but when we swapped positions, the red flag stopped the session. I’m sorry for Alessandro (Zanardi), because I’m sure he could have improved a lot and been closer to the top.”

Mario THEISSEN, BMW Motorsport Director:

“It was a strong showing by Dirk and Antonio. In all the teams, we could see how the drivers were taking each other into their slipstream, and that worked pretty well for us. This is a good starting position for the race. Now we will have to wait and see what the track conditions are like on Sunday and how the cars perform in racing trim.”

Gabriele TARQUINI, Alfa Romeo Racing Team – 3rd fastest

“This was a surprise result, because at the testing two weeks ago the car was very very competitive, but track conditions were completely different then. We suffered a lot today. BMW have made a good step forward. We will see tomorrow, with a dryer track and more grip it may be a better result for us. I hope so.”

Jordi GENÉ, SEAT Sport - 7th fastest

“The chassis set-up is fantastic; I’m very happy with the work we did here two weeks ago, although I had some slight problems with the brakes which obviously cost me a little time. I have to say, however, that I’m happy with 7th place and I’m confident for the races. I won’t say I’m over-optimistic, but I thought the best we could hope for from Monza would be to score some points. Maybe I can get even more than that tomorrow.”



Marc HENNERICI, Wiechers-Sport – 12th fastest, 1st of Independents

"I am very happy, I did not expect that I would be the first independent driver. I am already very proud to be a part of the first world championship. My qualifying position is unbelievable. I don't want to think about my race results, anything can happen. First I want to get through the first corner and then we will see."

Roberto COLCIAGO, JAS Motorsport – 14th fastest

"I am a bit upset, because we were aiming for something more than this position. As a matter of fact I had managed to clock the eighth fastest time, but the Stewards decided to penalise me because I drove a bit over the kerbs. I don't think I deserved it, as a lot of other drivers were doing the same."

Jörg MÜLLER, BMW Team Deutschland – 18th position

"Nothing works out as you had planned, because Dirk and I had planned to take it in turns to get a slipstream. However, with so many cars on the track we could not stay together, and I was lucky to get slipstream on three straights."

Rob HUFF, Chevrolet – 21st fastest

"It was a fantastic lap. I was hooked up, the car was hooked up and it just worked out fine. I'm very pleased with that lap. Unfortunately the red flag came out just before the end of the session for Alain's off. A pity, because I was on an even faster lap. We are running a stiffer set-up now than we did in March, which has made the car much more predictable."

Hans HOTFIEL, Ford Hotfiel Sport team principal

"Our cars have only just been completed. We were running late - in fact, much later than expected. Both the gear ratios and the latest engine specification only arrived in Monza on Friday afternoon. Our mechanics had to work all through the night just to complete the cars."