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Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Teams Winward Racing and CrowdStrike by Riley Secure Respective IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and SRO GT America Powered by AWS Fourth-Place Race Finishes at the 50th Grand Prix of Long Beach

Press Information

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Winward Racing Extends IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship GTD Class Points Leads with Fourth-Place Finish at the 50th Grand Prix of Long Beach

LONG BEACH, California – Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing team Winward Racing extended its points leads in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship GT Daytona (GTD) driver and team championship standings with a fourth-place finish Saturday in the 100-minute sprint race at the 50th Grand Prix of Long Beach. Starting seventh in the No. 57 Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3, co-drivers Russell Ward and Philip Ellis improved three positions on the 1.984-mile Long Beach street circuit in a clean and competitive run to the finish.

Along with reigning manufacturer titlists Mercedes-AMG, Winward, Ward and Ellis are the defending IMSA GTD team and driver champions. The Winward team and drivers have moved their title defense off to a strong start after their second-straight 12 Hours of Sebring victory two races ago and their first fourth-place finish of the year in January's season-opening Rolex 24 At Daytona.

The solid finishing record has been earned in what is generally considered the toughest three-race stretch of the season. Daytona and Sebring combine for 36 hours of grueling endurance racing while the quick 100-minutes at Long Beach – the shortest GTD race of the season – is nothing short a street fight on a tight and unforgiving temporary circuit lined with concrete barriers.

Race-starting driver Ward stayed in lead-pack contention from the drop of the green flag and raced into the top five. The team and Ellis, who took over for Ward halfway through the race, shook off a minor pit stop miscue after the driver-change pit stop, and the No. 57 returned still in the lead battle in fifth.

Ellis soon advanced to fourth place and closed out the final laps and minutes of the race making sure he held the spot to the checkered flag. With two of the four competitors ahead – including the race winner and third-place finisher – non-contenders in the full-season GTD championship, Ellis was content to run out the clock to secure some solid championship points.

The No. 57 team and drivers came in with a 41-point lead in the GTD driver and team championship standings but more than doubled the advantage leaving Long Beach to 91 points, 994 – 903, over the nearest challenger.

Joining Winward in Saturday's 100-minute IMSA sprint was the No. 32 Korthoff Competition Motors Mercedes-AMG GT3 that turned in a similarly clean and competitive performance. Team co-drivers Seth Lucas and Kenton Koch both made their Long Beach debuts, with the 18-year-old Lucas competing in the first street race of his emerging driving career.

Both drivers performed well beyond their level of street race experience, combining with top preparation and a well-executed pit stop by the Korthoff Competition team to secure a sixth-place and lead-lap finish that is the No. 32's best result of the season to date.

A pair of Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams also took part in the SRO GT America presented by AWS sprint race doubleheader that was another featured support race series on the packed 50th Grand Prix of Long Beach schedule.

CrowdStrike by Riley and Regulator Racing each fielded a Mercedes-AMG GT3 in the weekend's twin GT America sprints. The top result was turned in by former series champions George Kurtz who secured a fourth-place result in Sunday's final 40-minute race.

Kurtz started 10th Sunday in the No. 04 CrowdStrike by Riley Mercedes-AMG GT3 and improved a race-high six positions to fourth to win the EBOOST Hard Charger of the race award for passing the most competitors.

Kurtz also finished fourth in Saturday's opening 40-minute race in which debuting Long Beach driver Jeff Burton recorded a weekend-best eighth place result in the No. 91 Regulator Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3.

Next up for Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams on the SRO America schedule is an all-series weekend of competition at Circuit of The Americas (COTA), April 25 - 27.

Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing IMSA GTD teams next compete in a full IMSA WeatherTech Sports Championship race weekend at WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca, May 9 - 11.

Russell Ward, Driver - No. 57 Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:

"I think we'll go home and analyze what we could have done better. I think there was some potential to be a little higher in qualifying, which could have helped us. Then some stuff in the pit stop, which we could improve on, but I think in the race with our pace we really made the most of what we had. It's a challenging track in total, not really a lot of opportunities to overtake here, but we went into this weekend in the championship lead, and we leave farther ahead in the championship lead. It's a really good result, we will go home and do some work and then go to Laguna Seca, where the car is really, really strong. I think we can get a repeat win again there too."

Philip Ellis, Driver - No. 57 Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:

"Russell had a good first stint and made up two spots, which basically put us in a position where we could maybe challenge for a podium. A little unlucky with the pit stop, that didn't work out too great, and then most of the last 10 minutes weren't optimal with the traffic. All in all, we extended the championship lead, and I am very happy about that. I tried a little bit to catch third at the end, but I would have to wait for traffic. We were looking for something to open up, and we never had the chance really to challenge, but it is the same mentality as last year. You know, just earn good points, have clean races and execution and see where we end up."

Seth Lucas, Driver – No. 32 Korthoff Competition Motors Mercedes-AMG GT3: “This is definitely something to build on. This was my first time here, my first time ever being at a street course, even as a spectator. So, it was definitely a new experience, being so close to the walls. We were able to make up a couple spots, hold them and not make any contact, or at least not any major contact! Kenton got sandwiched a little, so had a little flesh wound on the car, but it was alright. I love it. I love the street courses. I was a little scared coming in. Even during the first session, I got out and was like 'yeah, this is scary.' But after a couple of sessions, qualifying and the race, it was cool, and a lot of fun. I'm excited to do more street races in the future and for the rest of this season after the Long Beach result.”

Kenton Koch, Driver – No. 32 Korthoff Competition Motors Mercedes-AMG GT3: “Honestly, I felt like we executed pretty well and did the best we could with the strategy that we played. We didn't take tires during the pit stop, it gave us some track position, but we just didn't really have pace at the end to try to get into the top five. But that strategy gave us the opportunity to jump one or two people in the stop. So, you get a little here, give a little there, but I was pretty happy with what we did and had some really fun battles. I was able to kind of live my childhood dream of racing at Long Beach, almost getting put into a wall, dicing with people and a little rubbing here and there. It was probably one of the most fun races I've ever had.”

George Kurtz, Driver – No. 04 CrowdStrike by Riley Mercedes-AMG GT3: “We made a lot of changes after Saturday. We never quit. We made a lot of setup changes, but we just didn't have the car this weekend and kept trying and trying. The Riley CrowdStrike guys dug deep, made some really great changes and that really helped Sunday. It's a shame we didn't get there a little bit earlier, we might have had a better result today, but we went from 10th to fourth. We'll take it and, and we live to race another day.”

Contacts:

Adam Saal Tel.: +1 321-890-2848

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saalgoodpr@gmail.com

Jochen Übler Tel.: +49 (0) 7144 302-92 470

jochen.uebler@mercedes-benz.com

Andrew Brudnicki Tel.: +1 470-409-8048

andrew.brudnicki@mbusa.com

Further information from Mercedes-Benz, Mercedes-AMG and Mercedes-Benz USA is available on the Internet: media.mercedes-benz.com, www.mercedes-benz.com and www.mbusa.com.

For more information on Mercedes-AMG Customer Racing, please visit www.mercedes-amg.com/en/vehicles/customer-racing.html.