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Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Teams CrowdStrike by Riley, CP Racing and RENNtech Motorsports Combine for Four Race Wins in Competitive Season-Opening SRO America Race Weekend at Sonoma Raceway

Press Information

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Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Team CrowdStrike by Riley Begins Fanatec GT World Challenge America Championship Defense with Pro-Am Weekend Sweep in Season-Opening SRO America Race Weekend at Sonoma Raceway

SONOMA, California – Reigning Fanatec GT World Challenge America Pro-Am Champions CrowdStrike by Riley moved their 2024 title defense off to a perfect start Saturday and Sunday at Sonoma Raceway with a weekend sweep of the Pro-Am class race wins with co-drivers George Kurtz and Colin Braun in the No. 04 CrowdStrike by Riley Mercedes-AMG GT3. CrowdStrike's pair of victories were part of four race wins on the weekend for Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams in the Sonoma SRO America season-opening race weekend. Jason Daskalos captured the first GT America powered by AWS race of the season in the No. 27 CP Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 on Saturday while Michael Auriemma and new co-driver Matheus Leist secured the Pirelli GT4 America Pro-Am class win Sunday in the No. 89 RENNtech Motorsports Mercedes-AMG GT4.

CrowdStrike's victories gives the No. 04 team and drivers their third consecutive GT World Challenge win at Sonoma following a victory on Sunday of last year's doubleheader weekend.

Of the two wins this weekend, Sunday's race was the real nail biter with closing driver Kurtz having to race the competition and the clock. The No. 04 was assessed a five-second time penalty when a loose tire accidentally rolled into pit lane during the team's driver change pit stop.

Kurtz continued a lead that Braun began in his race opening stint but had to rip off a string of qualifying pace laps to ensure he would stay five

seconds ahead of the second-place challenger. In the end, an on-form Kurtz crossed the finish line to seal the victory with several seconds to spare as he actually steadily gapped the runner-up finisher in the closing laps.

The other victorious Mercedes-AMG GT3 team this weekend was Daskalos who captured the first race of the GT America powered by AWS season with CP Racing for the second-straight year. Daskalos came from the back of the field to win the opening race of the 2023 season in St. Petersburg, but he enjoyed a much smoother run to the finish this year. Leading flag-to-flag from the pole, Daskalos took the checkered flag with a 4.306 second margin of victory.

The Mercedes-AMG GT4 also hit the win column at Sonoma with a breakout Pirelli GT4 America Pro-Am class win by Michael Auriemma and his new co-driver Matheus Leist in the No. 89 RENNtech Motorsports Mercedes-AMG GT4 on Sunday. In addition to pacing the Pro-Am class field for the majority of the 60-minute race, starting driver Leist and closer Auriemma each led overall before taking Pro-Am honors and a competitive third-place overall finish.

The Pirelli GT4 Pro-Am race was the first for both drivers in their first career starts in the class and followed a 12-year hiatus from racing for Auriemma and former IndyCar driver Leist's first race since 2020. Leist's most recent victory in any category prior to Sunday came in Indy Lights in 2017.

In addition to the race wins, Mercedes-AMG customer teams secured several podium finishes in the weekend's packed schedule of races.

Brent Holden made his GT America debut in the GT2 category in his first race starts in his No. 44 GMG Racing Mercedes-AMG GT2. Holden finished second in the emerging GT2 category on Saturday and followed it with a third-place class showing on Sunday.

Former series champion Kurtz also doubled up on GT America podium finishes to go along with his Pro-Am GT World Challenge win sweep with Braun. Kurtz overcame setbacks in the weekend's pair of 40-minute GT America races to finish third overall and in class on Saturday and Sunday.

Kurtz and Braun were joined on Sunday's GT World Challenge Pro-Am podium by Scott Smithson and Bryan Sellers who moved their season off to an encouraging start with a third-place finish in the No. 08 DXDT Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3.

The team's sister No. 91 DXDT Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 of Jeff Burton and Philip Ellis also showed some impressive pace as one of the first teams to experiment with this year's new rule opening up starting driver selections. In previous seasons, the professional drivers in each Pro-Am pairing were required to start each weekend's Sunday race in addition to having to be the second or race-closing drivers in Saturday's opening sprint.

While most teams held to the traditional rotation, DXDT made a deliberate team split-strategy call and the No. 91 had Mercedes-AMG performance driver Ellis in as the Saturday starter and Sunday closer. Racing against primarily Silver and Bronze "Am" drivers on both days, Ellis charged to a more than 20-second lead from the pole on Saturday and then mounted a charge through the field to close Sunday's race.

Although the move never quite put them in a podium position, the No. 91 team's experiment was an entertaining and somewhat show-stealing performance. The best result was fourth in Pro-Am on Sunday after Ellis passed for the position on the final lap.

Next up for Mercedes-AMG customer teams on the SRO America schedule is a GT America powered by AWS doubleheader at the Grand Prix of Long Beach in two weeks, April 19 - 21. The Fanatec GT World Challenge America and Pirelli GT4 America Championships next return to action at Sebring International Raceway, May 3 - 5.

The Long Beach weekend also features Mercedes-AMG customer racing GT Daytona (GTD) teams competing in that weekend's 100-minute IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship two-day event, April 19 - 20.

George Kurtz, Driver - No. 04 CrowdStrike by Riley Mercedes-AMG GT3: "It's incredibly satisfying. It's a total team effort. We had little bit of a mistake there in the pits and had to outrun the penalty. When they told me it was five seconds, I just had to put my head down and click off

qualifying lap after qualifying lap. We got the gap up and ultimately got the win, which is super, super satisfying for the whole team and one of the most satisfying for me in my career. This sets the tone for the rest of the season. Colin did a great job, of course, the CrowdStrike by Riley guys had a fantastic car so we'll just take it race by race and finish the best we can. Thankful we were in a Mercedes-AMG GT3 because I had a great car underneath me. I still had a little bit of my tires left and really was able to put in some fast laps at the end, which gave me the gap."

Jason Daskalos, Driver – No. 27 CP Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:

"George Kurtz was on me at the beginning of the race. My tires took a little while to come in but his seemed to come in a little quicker than mine. But once I was able to get past some of the GT4 traffic I was able to set sail a little bit and that was definitely the difference. CRP is a great team and Nick Short has been doing this a long time. He's great to work with and we definitely made some improvements from last year. So, we're definitely seeing the results. I have to give SRO and Sonoma credit. To come out here and have these problems with the circuit and see how quickly they acted for us to get back on track, which says a lot. We were just happy to be there racing and kudos to them."

Bryan Sellers, Driver – No. 08 DXDT Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:

"This is hopefully the start of something. It's been a long offseason, but a lot of work has gone into this program by everyone at DXDT Racing. David Askew has us doing the right things to get it moving in the right direction. Both cars this weekend were extremely strong. All in all, it's pretty positive, and we have a lot to build on for the rest of the season."

Jeff Burton, Driver – No. 91 DXDT Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:

"Philip is a global power. In everything he races he wins. When he and I got together last year at the Indianapolis 8 Hour, we just kind of hit it off. At the track and a good friendship. He committed to me this year and I committed to him, and I think it's a good deal for both of us. The DXDT Racing team has made a commitment themselves. We're going to have good equipment and that's a big deal. Last year, we didn't finish enough races because of some mechanical failures. This year that won't be the case. Dave Askew has promised that so I appreciate what Dave has committed to in order to get us to the finish."

Philip Ellis, Driver – No. 91 DXDT Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3: “It was a roll of the dice. Unfortunately, it didn’t work out for us this weekend, but it might any other weekend. It was unlucky a little bit, we couldn’t pull it off Saturday. It looked like it was going to work out Sunday but the same thing. Unfortunately, we got stuck behind one of the leading cars when it came out of the pit lane. In the end, it wasn’t quite what we wanted, of course, but I think we showed the potential of the Mercedes-AMG GT3 at least and that’s something to work on for the next race. The DXDT Racing team has good potential and now we just need to make it show.”

Brent Holden, Driver – No. 44 GMG Racing Mercedes-AMG GT2: “It was a fun weekend. It was fun to be back with GMG Racing and great to make my first GT America start with the Mercedes-AMG GT2. Just being part of the entire GT World Challenge SRO weekend was great, and I’m definitely looking forward to Long Beach.”

Michael Auriemma, Driver – No. 89 RENNtech Motorsports Mercedes-AMG GT4: “I texted my teammates from last year and told them there’s a whole lot more pressure here than the Am-class, especially with a guy like Matheus at the wheel. You know you’re going to get in the car in a very good position, but then you are in the thick of it, there’s no place to hide! I got into the car feeling like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs, but we kept a good pace up and again, and after Matheus built such a gap, all I had to do was bring it home. It was a great effort by the whole RENNtech team, but Matheus pulled it off for us today.”

Matheus Leist, Driver – No. 89 RENNtech Motorsports Mercedes-AMG GT4: “The RENNtech team did a great job and the Mercedes-AMG GT4 was awesome today. The setup of the car was very good. I feel I was consistent the whole time and I was able to stay with the Silver-class guys up front. We made a decent gap compared to the other Pro-Am cars. I was a little nervous sitting in the car right before the start but once you get going, it all comes back to you. I’m just happy to be here, happy to be racing again. It was great overall. It’s always great to start the year off with a win, and we have momentum going into the next race.”

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