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Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Team Winward Racing and Mercedes-AMG Lead All IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and Michelin Endurance Cup GT Daytona (GTD) Championships After Convincing Victory in the 72nd Running of the 12 Hours of Sebring

Press Information

Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 Team Sweeps IMSA “36 Hours of Florida” with Second-Straight Major Endurance Race Win of 2024 Saturday at the 12 Hours of Sebring

March 17, 2024

SEBRING, Florida – Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing team Winward Racing, and co-drivers Russell Ward, Philip Ellis and Indy Dontje, swept the “36 Hours of Florida” with the team’s second straight major endurance race victory of the season Saturday in the 72nd running of the 12 Hours of Sebring at Sebring International Raceway. Following a similarly fast-paced and controlled victory in January’s season-opening Rolex 24 At Daytona, the No. 57 Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 took the lead for the first time early in the race’s third hour and from there led a class-high 164 of the GT Daytona (GTD) race’s 314 laps in a convincing run to the checkered flag. Closing driver Ellis successfully defended the lead in a pair of restarts in the final hour and crossed the finish line with a 0.646 of a second margin of victory.

The Sebring win was even more impressive considering the No. 57 was sent to the back of the GTD starting grid after an unintentional technical infraction for using non-permitted sensors took away what was a pole-winning lap by Ellis in qualifying on Friday.

Undeterred, starting driver Ellis moved into the top 10 before handing the car to Ward 49 minutes into the race. Ward cracked the top three at the 90-minute mark and put the No. 57 into the lead for the first time just minutes into the race’s third hour.

From there, the Winward team remained focused on faultless execution on and off the track and outstanding strategy to set the GTD race pace and

manage the victorious performance straight to the checkered flag in the remaining 10 hours.

As they did at Daytona, where teammate Daniel Morad joined Ward, Ellis and Dontje on the winning roster, every driver in the No. 57 at Sebring spent ample time at the wheel leading laps. The 164 laps led at Sebring were the most circuits at the front of the field of the race's four class winners and joins the 383 laps led at Daytona – which was also the most of any class winner in the Rolex 24 – in an IMSA WeatherTech Sportscar Championship season-leading total of 547 laps led after the year's opening pair of races.

Winward secured the overall GTD victory as well as the Sebring race's IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup honors, the championship within the overall IMSA WeatherTech Sports Car Championship awarding the top performers in the year's five endurance races.

As a result, the Winward team, the Sebring winning drivers and Mercedes-AMG lead all six GTD championships within the WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and the Michelin Endurance Cup.

The No. 57 and Ward, Ellis and Dontje lead the overall WeatherTech GTD team and driver championship standings with 725 points, a full 136 tallies clear of the second-place team and drivers.

In the Endurance Cup, which is remarkably already at the halfway point of its 14-segment season, Winward and its drivers have taken the lead in both the team and driver standings with 24 points, two ahead of the nearest challenger.

Meanwhile, Mercedes-AMG continues to lead the manufacturer championship standings in both battles, including a 117-point lead in WeatherTech GTD, 751 – 634. AMG is also a comfortable eight points ahead of the closest competitor in the Endurance Cup, 30 – 22.

The No. 32 Korthoff Preston Motorsports Mercedes-AMG GT3 earned the manufacturer points for Mercedes-AMG at Daytona and came to Sebring leading the Endurance Cup driver and team standings, all championships won in 2023.

The door was opened for Winward to step up and take the Endurance Cup points lead at Sebring, however, when the No. 32 crushingly was forced to retire just 35 minutes into the 12-hour race with a terminal mechanical issue. Of the team's driving trio that includes Mike Skeen, Mikael Grenier and Kenton Koch, only Grenier had the chance to drive in an overall disappointing day.

The No. 80 Lone Star Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 team was making its Sebring 12 Hour debut with Scott Andrews, Salih Yoluç and Rui Andrade and was just settling into a strong and steady pace as the race stretched into Saturday afternoon. Unfortunately, Yoluç was sideswiped by an overly aggressive GTD competitor that also had run ins with numerous other in-class entries during the race.

The questionable move went unpenalized despite sending the No. 80 to the garage for lengthy repairs to the damaged left rear suspension. The team returned to the race after losing nearly an hour and ultimately elected to retire the entry early Saturday evening with no realistic chance of improving any positions before the race finished.

Next up for Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams in the IMSA WeatherTech Sportscar Championship is the Grand Prix of Long Beach run on the streets of that California city just south of Los Angeles, April 19 – 20.

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

“It feels great. We've been chasing this one for a couple of years. It's really awesome to be able to get it done. We knew we had the car for it. We just wanted to keep our heads clean. We started off the season in such a great form, winning at Daytona. Our goal really was just to get the maximum amount of points that we could out of this race. This track really suits this race car well. The Mercedes-AMG GT3 gives you a ton of confidence here. You need it at Sebring. A lot of chances to make a mistake. The crew performed flawlessly. No mistakes on their part. A few mistakes by the drivers, but we came out on top.”

Philip Ellis, Driver – No. 57 Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3: “I think the Mercedes-AMG GT3 is a great all-around car. Probably this is the track that suits us the most. A lot of medium speed corners, a lot of

bumps. Super happy. The setbacks we had last year and the year before were important to getting us to where we are now. To kind of understand what needs to be done in this championship, specifically to win races. Just speed alone isn't always the solution. Everybody has to pull in the right direction, and you have to be able to rely on each other. We have always relied on each other and trusted each other but we were trying to get the wins and the podiums too easily, last year especially. It requires hard work and preparation and determination, and even when we have small setbacks like we did after qualifying, nobody has their head down. We were like 'OK, now we definitely want to win.' It's a great mindset we have on the team right now."

Indy Dontje, Driver – No. 57 Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3:

"Last year we were quick, and we knew we were also in the game. Unfortunately, it didn't happen. This year I think it all came together. I mean, the team is doing such a great job. Also on the driver side, on the team side, mechanics, engineers. Yeah, everything has come together. We kept our heads cool. Really cool to win the 12 Hours of Sebring."

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