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Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Teams Secure IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar GT Daytona (GTD) Podium Finish and Maintain IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge Championship Leads at VIRginia International Raceway (VIR)

Press Information

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Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing Team Winward Racing Breaks Through for First IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship Podium of the Season at VIRginia International Raceway (VIR)

DANVILLE, Virginia – Philip Ellis pulled off a pass for third place with less than two laps to go and joined co-driver Russell Ward in securing the first podium finish of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship season for the No. 57 Winward Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 team in the Michelin GT Challenge at VIRginia International Raceway (VIR) on Sunday. The third place showing topped Winward's previous best finish of fifth in the Grand Prix of Long Beach in April and put an end to a streak of bad luck the No. 57 team has endured this season with two more races remaining on this season's schedule.

Ward started Sunday's two-hour and 40-minute race from seventh on the GT Daytona (GTD) grid and battled in the lead pack for the entirety of his race-opening stint. Ward pitted with the majority of the other GTD leaders 46 minutes into the race and Ellis took the wheel for the nearly two-hour long final run to the finish.

Ellis was in sixth place at the race's one-hour mark and, after the final round of pit stops, was running fourth with less than 50 minutes to go. He steadily reeled in the third-place car and made the pass for the final podium spot in VIR's Turn 3 and Turn 4 section just before the white flag.

Winward's result was the third GTD podium appearance for a Mercedes-AMG GT3 team in the last four IMSA WeatherTech races following third-place showings by the No. 32 Team Korthoff Motorsports Mercedes-AMG

GT3 team this summer at Canadian Tire Motorsport Park (CTMP) and Road America.

Team Korthoff co-drivers Mike Skeen and Mikael Grenier appeared in line for a similar performance Sunday at VIR. Skeen qualified and started the race in fourth and battled in or near the top three throughout his race opening stint. Grenier continued the charge when he took over after Skeen pitted from third but the No. 32 team's hopes for another podium result were derailed by a tire issue in the middle of the race. Grenier and the Korthoff team persevered through the setback for a lead-lap finish in 11th place.

The GTD Pro class No. 79 WeatherTech Racing/Proton Competition Mercedes-AMG GT3 team also saw a promising start to the race thwarted by a hard hit in the left-rear corner by a class competitor that forced driver Jules Gounon to the pits for lengthy repairs.

Prior to that, and following Daniel Juncadella's second-place qualifying result, both drivers ran in the GTD Pro top three, but Gounon never had a chance to fight for a podium finish at the end after the contact incident. The No. 79 crossed the line in the fifth and final GTD Pro finishing position two laps down.

In Saturday's two-hour IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge race, championship leaders Kenny Murillo and Christian Szymczak emerged from a challenging race run in brutally hot and humid conditions for a ninth-place finish. Murillo and Szymczak were on a fuel and pit stop strategy in the No. 72 Murillo Racing Mercedes-AMG GT4 that kept them in lead-pack contention in the race's opening hour but ultimately didn't play out in their favor in the final 60 minutes.

Despite the disappointing result, the top-10 finish was the best for a Mercedes-AMG GT4 in the hard-fought race and keeps Murillo, Szymczak and the No. 72 team in the Grand Sport (GS) class championship lead by 10 points over the nearest competitors, 1,980 – 1,970, with two races remaining on the 2023 schedule.

Mercedes-AMG also maintains its lead in the GS manufacturer championship standings after VIR by 10 points over the nearest competitor, 2,420 – 2,410.

In VP Racing SportsCar Challenge competition at VIR, Tim Probert drove the No. 65 Murillo Racing Mercedes-AMG GT4 to a weekend-best Bronze Cup finish of fourth in Saturday's first of two 45-minute sprint races.

Next up for Mercedes-AMG Motorsport Customer Racing teams in IMSA competition is the Battle on the Bricks Weekend at Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS), September 15 – 17. The IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship runs a two-hour and 40-minute race while the IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge contests its second and final four-hour race of the season.

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

"The team really needed this, especially with the Mercedes-AMG GT3 in the GTD class. We've been doing pretty well in GT4 in Michelin Pilot Challenge, but this is our first podium of the season in GTD. Hopefully we can just carry the momentum and continue to do what we know we can do in Indianapolis and Atlanta. It's been a tough season for the crew, tough for the drivers, everyone, but hats off to all of those guys. They keep pushing at it, and if everyone is pulling in the same direction, you eventually get to where you want to be. We had good strategy and good pit stops and we were able to get on the podium. It's an awesome feeling. I'm really looking forward to Indianapolis and Petit Le Mans. They are at two amazing venues."

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

"We were trying to protect our tires as best we could with the fifth-place car not far behind us and at the end we just kind of took a chance. When I got relatively close, we could see the car in front was trying to save fuel so his pace slowed even more the last couple of laps, and I don't think he could put up much of a fight at the end. Overall, it was a very tough race, but the guys gave me the car we had to have to make it onto the podium so hats off to them. We've had a couple of races where we could have been out front this year and today was a bit more luck than we have been having as some of the competition just couldn't quite make it on fuel, but we were there."

Jules Gounon, Driver – No. 79 WeatherTech Racing/Proton

Competition Mercedes-AMG GT3: “I got rear-ended and unfortunately our race was ruined. It was a crazy attempt with no room to make the pass. The WeatherTech Mercedes-AMG GT3 was good today. I thought we at least had a podium. Let’s go onto Indy in three weeks.”

Kenny Murillo, Driver – No. 72 Murillo Racing Mercedes-AMG GT4:

“This was a worst-case scenario for this weekend, but champions are born from how they recover from this kind of race. We’re going to recover great. We’ll keep looking forward. Our potential is champions and that’s what we’re going to do, we’re going to be champions at the end of the year, no matter what. The Mercedes-AMG GT4 handled great, the team preformed really well but the strategy didn’t fall our way. It was disappointing but you can’t feel too bad for me. I got to drive a Mercedes-AMG on my favorite race track, so onto the next one.”

Christian Szymczak, Driver – No. 72 Murillo Racing Mercedes-AMG

GT4: “We had a rough day today. We have to take it on the chin and move on. There are two races left, we’re still strong and we can win races. We’ve shown that we can. Today there were some circumstances that didn’t quite go our way. Maybe if they were a little different, we would have done better, but we played the hand that we had and lost today. That’s the way it goes sometimes.”

Tim Probert, Driver – No. 65 Murillo Racing Mercedes-AMG GT4:

“I learned a lot in Saturday's race. One of the things I learned was how good the Mercedes-AMG GT4 is. If you really focus and hit your marks you can reel quite a few people in towards the end, which is what we did. It was very hot, and the track got quite greasy. You really had to be precise to make sure you hit your marks.”

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