



Getting Better Every Time

A class win in the Algarve 1000 Kilometres was the next logical step in RML AD Group's progressively improving 2010 Le Mans Series season, and follows on from finishing third in round one, and then second for round two in Spa. It also marked the best possible debut for the team's newly-signed third driver; Ben Collins, making his return to active sportscar racing after an absence of four years.



Three sessions of Free Practice had suggested that RML AD Group's Lola HPD was going to be hard pressed to compete with Strakka Racing's HPD ARX, at least in terms of outright pace. Fierce competition had also been evident from defending champions Quifel ASM, and the two Oak Racing Pescarolos. RML Team Manager Phil Barker revised the team's race strategy accordingly, and sent Thomas Erdos out on hard compound tyres for qualifying on Saturday morning, knowing that the car would have to start the six-hour race on the same set. Confident of being able to double-stint the Dunlop compounds, his tactics paid dividends.



"We had to work so hard for that, but what a result!" said Barker with evident satisfaction. "Tommy drove a stunning lap to qualify the car third on those tyres, but grid position wasn't important today. Provided he could keep the others in sight, we were sure the race could come back to us. "The RML AD Group Lola was the only LMP2 front-runner not to take on fresh rubber at the first pitstop, and double-stinting tyres throughout the race saved as much as forty seconds with each fuel-only visit. The team also worked hard to overcome a series of minor issues, including twice having to replace the

rear bodywork following damage to the legality panels or rear lights.

"It's been a tough race, what with the heat and the demands of this circuit, and it was always likely to be incident prone," said Mike Newton, CEO of AD Group, who drove the mid-race stints. "We had a few minor problems, but the team performed brilliantly to have us back out and racing as quickly as possible every time. We have a great package with Lola, HPD and Dunlop, and came here leading the championship by just one point, but this win now places us in a very strong position for the Series.

"Six hours racing round the Algarve circuit in the heat was never going to be easy," said Thomas Erdos. "The car just kept on running perfectly without any major problems, which is all credit to HPD and the team. We've developed a very strong relationship with HPD, and this win is a great way of saying thank you for what they've given us. When Phil came on the radio to say we were P1, he was



very matter-of-fact about it, but it was a wonderful feeling."

Ben Collins, who won the 2003 ASCAR title with RML, was delighted to be back with his old team. "It's great to turn up half way through the year, after Mike, Tommy and the rest of the team have done all the hard work, and then share this win with them," he said. "It feels very special to be racing with RML again, and this is a dream start. I just hope it can continue." Ben drove the final stints to the chequered flag. "They made it very easy for me," he insisted. "Mike and Tommy did a fantastic job. Tommy drove a double-stint through the hottest part of the race, and when I took over we already had a healthy lead. That removed a lot of the pressure." Ben's lap times tumbled as he gained confidence, and he was consistently fastest in the class.



"We're delighted with the result," said Pauline Norstrom, Motorsport & Marketing Director of AD Group. "We've been close so many times before, leading race in 2009, only to see it all fall apart, but not this time. We hope this tide of change is here to stay. This weekend's win was down to excellent race strategy from the team and the reliability of the new HPD engine package. RML and AD Group are competing here to win, and this result is fantastic on all fronts. In terms of the championship, it also places us a full maximum-points win clear for the next race in Hungary."

Although overjoyed to be back in sportscar racing again, and winning, one question remained for Ben Collins. "He did a great job," said Mike Newton. "We put him in a very difficult situation, driving his debut here in the dark, but Ben's a class driver. His reward for such a great result is that he'll be running with us to the end of the season." So Ben is confirmed for the next round in August and then Silverstone in September. All three drivers celebrated the day by jumping into the circuit's swimming pool, still wearing their champagne-soaked racing overalls.

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