

22 May 2016

Rounds 7 & 8 – Imola, Italy – 22 May 2016

RACE REPORT

Comini and Grachev shared race victories in eventful day

The all-in-one-day event at Imola provided plenty of drama, glory for new faces and a shake-up on top of the Drivers' Championship.

Stefano Comini (Leopard Racing Volkswagen Golf Gti) and Mikhail Grachev (WestCoast Racing Honda Civic) shared the race victories. It was the first one in the season so far for Comini and the first one ever for Grachev.

Two other drivers were able to achieve the first podium results for themselves and their teams: Mat'ò Homola (B3 Racing SEAT León) who was second in Race 2, and Davit Kajaia (Liqui Moly Team Engstler Volkswagen Golf Gti) who finished third in Race 1.

The dark side of the day consisted in the merciless bad luck that hit Gianni Morbidelli and James Nash. They both had arrived in Imola with the hopes to move further up in the standings, but eventually came away empty-handed, and not because of their faults.

Pepe Oriola was able to stay away of troubles and scored precious points that stretched his leadership to 15 points ahead of Comini, who is now his closest competitor.

Maybe it a prelude to a repeat of last year's duel that ended up only at the last race in Macau. But it's not granted, because the fight is closer than ever and provides continuous surprises as it is proved by the fact that seven different drivers in three different types of cars have been victorious in the eight races held so far.

The series will resume in fifteen days at the Salzburgring, Austria, on June 4 and 5, for rounds 9 and 10.

Stefano Comini wins a Race 1 full of drama

Reigning champion Stefano Comini claimed his first victory of the season at the end of a race that was plenty of drama and gave Leopard Racing and Volkswagen their second consecutive win after Jean-Karl Vernay's in Spa Race 2.

The outcome of the first race in Imola spoke in favour of Pepe Oriola as far as the title fight is concerned, because the Spaniard's closest rivals – Gianni Morbidelli and James Nash – were both scoreless. The Italian seemed on the way to secure a comfortable win when a power steering failure resulted in a dramatic incident that involved his own teammate Alain Menu. As for Nash, he was first slowed down by engine misfire and then hit by another car.

Door-to-door fights resulted in a number of contacts and clashes that eliminated or slowed down some of the top players such as Jordi Oriola, Borković and Vernay.

The Frenchman was later demoted from 6th to 12th by the Stewards who imposed him a double penalty for trespassing the limits of the track and for his incident with Borković. Attila Tassi, Carlotta Fedeli and Alessandra Neri managed to finish in seventh, ninth and tenth positions respectively and scored their first points in the championship.

Key facts

Start – Morbidelli takes the best start ahead of Comini, Kajaia and Pepe Oriola who nearly stalled the engine

Lap 1 – Comini tries to overtake Morbidelli on the outside line at the Tosa, but to no avail

Lap 2 – Kajaia defends third place from P. Oriola; Nash drops with his rear bumper hanging loose

Lap 3 – Kajaia struggles to keep P. Oriola behind; Grachev is fifth right behind them

Lap 4 – P. Oriola tries an overtaking move but drives wide at Rivazza 2 and drops to fifth

Lap 5 – Morbidelli struggles with power-steering problems, slows down before the Variante Alta and is hit by Menu; they both are out of the race

Lap 6 – Comini is now leading from Kajaia, P. Oriola and Grachev

Lap 7 – the safety car is deployed to recover Menu's car

Lap 8 – the race resumes and P. Oriola manages to steal second from Kajaia

Lap 9 – Homola and J. Oriola make contact and the latter retires

Lap 10 – P. Oriola sets fastest lap and chases Comini

Lap 11 – Grachev makes a mistake and drops from fourth to ninth

Lap 12 – Gené defends fourth place from Afanasyev, Borković and Vernay

Lap 13 – Gené also makes a mistake and drops to seventh; Borković and Vernay have a tough fight for fifth, they make contact at Rivazza 1 and Borković spins off onto the gravel

Lap 14 – Comini wins from P. Oriola and Kajaia; Afanasyev finishes fourth ahead of Homola, Vernay and Gené

Mikhail Grachev claims first victory in new car

Motorsport can be funny sometimes. The very same car that had won Race 1 in Spa, was victorious in Race 2 at Imola, but with a different driver: Mikhail Grachev who has just joined WestCoast Racing in the place of Aku Pellinen.

The Russian had reasons to rejoice, as this move granted him that first TCR race win he was chasing since last year. And the icing on the cake for him was that he took the lead overtaking the very same car he had driven until the previous event.

Mat'ò Homola finished second and climbed on the TCR podium for the first time, while Stefano Comini secured third place after an epic battle with Pepe Oriola.

With both, Gianni Morbidelli and James Nash sidelined by technical issues, Oriola and Comini are now first and second in the Drivers' Championship, separated by only 14 points.

Key facts

Grid – Borković and Nash are missing, as their cars could not be repaired; Menu takes the start from the pit lane

Start – Gené darts from the pole, followed by Grachev, Tassi and Homola; Afanasyev retires with a broken drive-shaft

Lap 1 – Morbidelli recovers to 10th after starting from 13th

Lap 2 – Morbidelli slows down and retires with brake problems

Lap 3 – Tassi tries to defend the third position, but is passed by Homola and Pepe Oriola

Lap 4 – Grachev steals the lead from Gené

Lap 5 – Comini and Vernay run abreast fighting for sixth; Homola and P. Oriola overtake Gené moving up to second and third

Lap 6 – Gené drops further down behind Tassi and Comini

Lap 7 – Gené and Vernay overtake Tassi who drops to 7th; Vernay passes Gené for 5th

Lap 8 – Kajaia skids wide over the gravel at Villeneuve, but rejoins

Lap 9 – the leading quartet – Grachev, Homola, P. Oriola, Comini – is covered by 1.5 seconds

Lap 10 – Grachev creates a gap; Homola is chased by P. Oriola and Comini

Lap 11 – Comini overtakes P. Oriola for third at Rivazza 2; Kajaia passes Jordi Oriola for eighth

Lap 12 – P. Oriola loses also the fourth place to Vernay

Lap 13 – Grachev takes the chequered flag ahead of Homola, Comini, Vernay and P. Oriola

What the two race winners had to say

Stefano Comini, Race 1: *“The most important thing about this victory was from Leopard Racing. They did an incredible job with the Volkswagen; now the car is competitive. To win here in Imola is like winning at home, since Lugano is really nearby. The race was quite perfect – I managed my tyres as I didn’t want to stress them too much, the car was consistent and I think I did a perfect job. It’s good for me, good for Leopard and good for the Championship because I was the Champion last year and I want to be Champion again this year. The fight with Pepe was very fair and quite fun. I wanted a little more combat with him, but I was faster as I think he had stressed his tyres. I wanted more of a show for the people watching at home and the people here in Imola.”*

Mikhail Grachev, Race 2: *“I am very, very happy with this victory. I’m afraid I don’t have the words to say how happy I am, as I’m not used to saying this! I will have to learn some more English words, I think. The deal for me to drive the Honda was quite late in being done, so I have to thank WestCoast Racing for all their hard work and for welcoming me. We had a problem with the car after we tested, so they had to put in a lot of work to fix the problem. I want to thank them and say well done to the team for this result. It was somehow strange to chase what was my car until the previous race, but it made things easier because I know it well and figured out where and how to overtake it.”*

Morbidelli was on pole position for his home event

Italian fans' favourite Gianni Morbidelli achieved his first pole position of the season for his home event at Imola. The former F1 driver set the pace throughout the Qualifying session, posting the fastest laps in both Q1 and Q2.

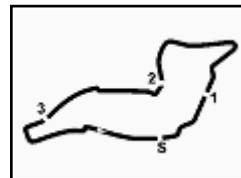
His best lap of 1:53.228 was only 0.057 faster than Pepe Oriola's 1:53.285, which promises a very close fight between them in Race 1.

Davit Kajaia and Stefano Comini will fill the second row of the grid, while Mikhail Grachev and Mat'ò Homola will share the third row.

The Qualifying session was also incredibly close, with the nine fastest drivers covered by less than eight tenths.

Jordi Gené and Sergey Afanasyev qualified in tenth and ninth respectively and will be on the front row of the top-ten reversed grid for Race 2. Actually James Nash had posted the ninth fastest lap, but he was demoted to 11th after the Stewards disallowed his fastest lap for trespassing the track limits.

Morbidelli said: *"I think this was the maximum we could do and we scored five points for the championship, so I am happy. I wasn't able to do better than this, even though I expected a little bit more, but when the temperature goes high for us it's a little bit complicated. The SEAT is very close, even when Oriola has extra kilos, it's unbelievably quick; twenty kilos in Imola is worth around half a second. Let's see in the race. Imola is my home circuit and the atmosphere is good so we are happy. Up until now we've done a good job but we have to carry on."*



Enzo e Dino Ferrari 4.909 m

TCR International Series Imola Event - Official Result Race 2

Laps 13 = 63,817 km - Avg 152,409 km/h - Race Time 25'07.401

No.	Rider	Nat	Rider	Team	Car	Laps	Time	Gap	Rel.	Fastest Lap
1	8 GRACHEV Mikhail	RUS		WestCoast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	13	25'07.401			9 1'55.041
2	70 HOMOLA Mat'o	SVK		B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT Leon TCR	13	25'09.196	1.795	1.795	4 1'54.945
3	1 COMINI Stefano	SUI		Leopard Racing	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	13	25'09.839	2.438	0.643	8 1'54.791
4	2 VERNAY Jean-Karl	FRA		Leopard Racing	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	13	25'10.347	2.946	0.508	9 1'54.771
5	74 ORIOLA Pepe	ESP		Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT Leon TCR	13	25'11.208	3.807	0.861	8 1'55.054
6	52 GENÉ Jordi	ESP		Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	13	25'16.099	8.698	4.891	8 1'55.523
7	9 TASSI Attila	HUN		B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT Leon TCR	13	25'18.922	11.521	2.823	5 1'55.506
8	7 KAJAIA Davit	GEO		Liqui Moly Team Engstler	Volkswagen Golf Gti TCR	13	25'19.190	11.789	0.268	5 1'55.576
9	33 ORIOLA Jordi	ESP		Target Competition	Honda Civic TCR	13	25'20.208	12.807	1.018	4 1'54.582
10	40 MENU Alain	SUI		WestCoast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	13	25'20.781	13.380	0.573	10 1'54.759
11	41 FEDELI Carlotta	ITA		B.D. Racing Motorsport	SEAT Leon Cup Racer	13	25'40.446	33.045	19.665	6 1'56.897
12	42 NERI Alessandra	ITA		B.D. Racing Motorsport	SEAT Leon Cup Racer	13	25'48.474	41.073	8.028	3 1'57.987
----- Not Classified -----										
RET	10 MORBIDELLI Gianni	ITA		WestCoast Racing	Honda Civic TCR	1	2'04.430	12 Laps		
RET	77 AFANASYEV Sergey	RUS		Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT Leon TCR	0				
NS	54 NASH James	GBR		Team Craft-Bamboo LUKOIL	SEAT Leon TCR					
NS	62 BORKOVIC Dusan	SRB		B3 Racing Team Hungary	SEAT Leon TCR					

Starting: 16 Not Started: 2 Retired:: 2 Not Classified: 0 Classified: 12 Disqualified: 0

Fastest Lap N. 4 No. 33 Jordi Oriola Time 1'54.582 Avg. 154,234 Km/h

The Stewards of the meeting

Race Director : Massimiliano Ghinassi

Direttore di Prova : Tony Whitaker

22/05/2016 Start 15:49 End 16:15

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