



5 May 2017

## Rounds 5 & 6 – WEC 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps – 4 / 6 May 2017

### RACE 1 REPORT

#### **Stefano Comini gives maiden win to Audi and Comtoyou Vernay stretches his leading margin in the standings**

Reigning champion Stefano Comini claimed his first win of the season this afternoon in Race 1 at Spa, in a newsworthy success as it also meant the maiden win in the TCR International Series for both the Audi RS3 LMS and Belgium's Comtoyou Racing.

Comini, who started from pole, dominated the race after re-taking the lead in lap 2 from Attila Tassi, who took a stunning start. The young M1RA Honda Civic driver shone again in the final laps, defending from a charging Jean-Karl Vernay (Leopard Racing Volkswagen Golf). The Hungarian was rewarded with the third position on the podium, behind another young gun, Benjamin Lessennes, who finished a brilliant second in the Boutsen Ginion Honda Civic.

The battle for fifth was intense and thrilling as a long queue of cars was trailing the other Comtoyou Audi of Frédéric Vervisch. The Belgian managed to keep everybody at bay, finishing ahead of Rob Huff, Edouard Mondron, Tom Coronel, Pepe Oriola and Pierre-Yves Corthals.

Vernay stretched his leading margin in the points standings to 15, while Comini climbed to second on equal points with Tassi and Dušan Borković.

Race 2 will take place at 11:35 tomorrow, with Maxime Potty (Mazuin Racing Volkswagen) and Pepe Oriola (Lukoil Craft Bamboo SEAT León) sharing the front row on the top-ten reverse grid. The race will be streamed live at [www.tcr-series.com](http://www.tcr-series.com) and [www.tcr-series.tv](http://www.tcr-series.tv).

#### Key facts

Grid – Kajaia starts from the last position because of an engine change after the Bahrain event; Paulsen starts from the pit lane

Start – Comini is not super-fast and Vernay dives in-between the two Audi cars, but it is Tassi who pips everybody on the outside line and takes the lead; Colciago spins at La Source; behind Tassi, Lessennes is second, followed by Comini, Vervisch, Vernay, Huff and E. Mondron

Lap 1 – Comini passes Lessennes for second at Les Combes; Homola and Potty make contact and the Opel driver pits with a broken wheel; Comini attacks Tassi but the young Hungarian resists well.

Lap 2 – Coronel passes Oriola for seventh and attacks E. Mondron; Comini manages to take the lead from Tassi at turn 3

Lap 3 – Comini pulls away and Lessennes passes Tassi for second; Ficza passes Morbidelli for 11<sup>th</sup> at the chicane

Lap 4 – Vervisch (4<sup>th</sup>) is under very strong pressure from Verney and Huff, which allows E. Mondron and Coronel to join the fight



Lap 5 – Vernay passes Vervisch at La Source but the Belgian retakes the position at Eau Rouge; they continue fighting and the Frenchman passes the Belgian again at Blanchimont; E. Mondron hits Coronel, who goes off-track but rejoins; Ficza takes 10<sup>th</sup> from Nash

Lap 6 – In the fight for 5<sup>th</sup>, Vervisch is chased by a group of ten cars

Lap 7 – Vernay is behind Tassi and attacks his third place; Vervisch gets a warning for track limits; Ficza drops to 13<sup>th</sup> after going wide after La Source; Corthals takes 11<sup>th</sup> from Morbidelli

Lap 8 – Corthals passes Nash for 10<sup>th</sup>

Lap 9 – Comini wins from Lessennes; Tassi manages to save the third place beating Vernay by three tenths; Vervisch, Huff, E. Mondron, Coronel, Oriola and Corthals fill the other points positions.

### Quotes from the Race 1 podium finishers

Stefano Comini (winner): *“It’s fantastic to win here and to give the Audi RS3 and Comtoy you their first pole and their first win on such a great track and in the team’s home country. I am really very, very happy. I adore Spa, as everybody knows, and the car today was simply perfect. I really want to thank Jean-Michel Baert, from Comtoy, he saved my 2017 season, and it’s nice to be able to thank him this way, and also my engineer Corrado Àvila, who is doing a fantastic job.”*

Benjamin Lessennes (second): *“It was a great result for me and the Boutsen Ginion Racing team. At the start I was able to dive inside Comini at La Source, but Tassi overtook all of us on the outside. Then I tried to overtake him at Les Combes, but it did not work. After Comini overtook me, I finally managed to pass Tassi, but the Audi was too fast today and I couldn’t catch up. I am confident for tomorrow’s Race 2, because my car is very good in the second part of the race and I think we can aim for a fourth or a third place.”*

Attila Tassi (third): *“I think I can be happy and proud of my race today. I took a very good start and could lead for one lap and a half, but the Audi had much more top speed and it was impossible to resist to Stefano. Later, I was under pressure from Vernay, but I could resist up to the end. I think it was a nice fight, very clean and I hope everybody enjoyed the show. I worked a lot during the winter, on simulator but also following the “Fit for race” training program put in place by Norbert Michelisz, which was very helpful for improving reactions, stress management, car control and this kind of things. I think it meant a real progress for me...”*

### Comini and Vervisch made an Audi 1-2 in Qualifying

The two Audi RS3 LMS cars of Comtoy Racing will start Race 1 from the first row, as Stefano Comini and Fred Vervisch were the fastest in an exciting qualifying session and gave the German car its first pole position in the International Series.



The reigning double champion and the debuting local hero emerged as the winners from a close fight with Benjamin Lessennes, a brilliant and close third in the Boutsen Ginion Honda Civic. The Leopard Racing Volkswagen Golf GTI cars of Jean-Karl Verney and former World Champion Rob Huff completed the top 5.

The only two incidents in the Qualifying session involved Belgian drivers, with both Guillaume Mondron (Delahaye Racing Team SEAT León) and Maxime Potty (Mazuin Racing VW Golf) hitting the barriers, the first in Q1 and the second in Q2. This did not prevent Potty to take P10, which grants him the theoretical pole for Race 2, if the car is repaired.

#### Q11: Ferenc Ficza on top of the field

Ferenc Ficza confirmed his speed qualities by taking fastest time in a hardly-fought Q1 session. The young Hungarian, now at the wheel of a Zengő Motorsport SEAT León, stopped the watches in 2:31.205, beating Comini (2:31.344) by a tenth and a half. Tom Coronel (Boutsen Ginion Honda) took third, despite a scary moment at Les Combes, ahead of Huff, Lessennes and Verney.

Again, the TCR Benelux drivers did well, with only Guillaume Mondron out of the top 12; the young Belgian, who had led the session at the beginning, lost the car in the chicane after Les Combes, crashing into the barrier.

The list of drivers not making it to Q2 included some big names, like Morbidelli, Nash, Colciago, Borković and Valente.

Even longer was the list of drivers who had at least one lap disallowed for not respecting track limits; Homola, Corthals, Ficza, Kajaia, Morbidelli, Valente, E. Mondron, Paulsen, Ende, Vernay and Oriola.

#### Q2: Comini nails down the pole position

Comini took the pole in Q2, after a good fight with local heroes Vervisch and Lessennes. The Swiss was able to beat his new teammate by a mere 0.067 seconds, while Lessennes was left a further 0.244 seconds adrift.

Potty had a scary moment as he lost his Golf in the Eau Rouge, hitting the barriers on the right side. Despite that, the young Belgian kept P10 and the pole for Race 2.

Two drivers concluded the session without clocking a valid lap time: Davit Kajaia (GE-Force Alfa Romeo Giulietta) had both his laps disallowed for not respecting the track limits, while Ficza was sidelined by a broken driveshaft.

### **What the fastest drivers said after Qualifying**

Stefano Comini (1<sup>st</sup>): *“Comtoy Racing did an amazing job in such a short time and we worked hard to improve the setup. We knew the Audi RS3 LMS has a huge potential and we showed that potential with this pole position. It’s very emotional to do it in Spa and to do it with two cars on the front row. I’m very happy for Fred Vervisch, for Comtoy and for Audi. Sorry I didn’t manage to take Eau Rouge flat out as I promised, but it was very slippery and we ran with almost no wing and so it was a very nervous car. I tried, but it was too dangerous.”*



Frederic Vervisch (2<sup>nd</sup>): *“Yesterday, I really didn’t expect we would be P2 in Qualifying. Okay, we were quick, but the new guys have the new tyres and so it’s difficult to see what is really happening. Today, we were in contention to have pole but I had a bit of traffic at the end. I’m very happy for the team as it’s quite rare to have two cars on the front row and we just have to enjoy the moment. I’ve never done a racing start in a front wheel drive car, even though I made a few practice starts yesterday, so that might be my weak point.”*

Benjamin Lessennes (3<sup>rd</sup>): *“We had a lot of work to do after the TCR Benelux races two weeks ago but the car was really good today. My engineer Kevin Boutsen has found a really good setup and I think we’ve found something good with the car now. It’s a very good setup for every track, I think, so we should also be good in the next races. We may find it a little difficult to warm up the rear tyres at the beginning of the races, so I think the fight will happen towards the end – let’s wait and see.”*

### **2017 TCR International Series – calendar**

2 April – Rustavi International Motorpark, Georgia

16 April – Bahrain International Circuit (F1 event)

**6 May – Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium (WEC event)**

14 May – Autodromo di Monza, Italy (ELMS event)

11 June – Salzburgring, Austria

2 July – Hungaroring, Hungary

9 July – Motorsport Arena Oschersleben, Germany (with ADAC TCR Germany)

3 September – Chang International Circuit, Buriram (with TCR Thailand)

8 October – Zhejiang International Circuit, China (with TCR Asia & TCR China)

26 November – Yas Marina Circuit, Abu Dhabi (F1 event)





