

ACADEMY MUSTANGS: SUN, SAND AND... SUCCESS

British GT teams travelled to the Algarve for the seventh round of the championship

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Tradition dictates that the British GT Championship (BGT) is an 'international away' race, and most recently that has meant a trip to Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium. But now for 2023 was a one-off visit to Autódromo Internacional Algarve, more commonly known as Portimão, in Portugal. This stunning location meant an overnight ferry to Santander and a 4-day drive for the teams' transport trucks. Flights and hire cars for the engineers, technicians, mechanics and support staff all add to the costs for this round, not to mention the additional fuels and inventory tracking required since Brexit.

The circuit has hosted Formula One races in the past and has an amazing modern layout. 2020 British GT Champion Sandy Mitchell described the 15-km, 2.9-mile track as 'a wide, sweeping circuit with a number of

dramatic changes in height as the track rises and falls. There are some really challenging corners, plus a long, very fast start/finish straight'. With more than one blind braking zone the importance of track knowledge and experience was highlighted when local home favourite Miguel Ramos, driving in the Garage 59 GT3 McLaren, earned overall pole position.

No break time for any of Academy Motorsport's four drivers. A three-hour race will always be a strategy-led event, though safety car rules can demand instant strategy reset. The Academy team is fully familiar with perfectly executing a well-planned attack.

The Mustangs had been granted some relief from the restrictions in the Balance of Performance formula, which is designed to level up the cars but which needed some adjustment, given the improvements in





pace demonstrated by some of the more recent homologation. Team Principal, Matt Nicol-Jones was delighted to receive that BoP note which opened up the Mustang's engine airflow enough to improve parity within the GT4 class.

The GT4 class build-up through free practice and qualifying was a slow-burn, with teams playing themselves into the track and churning the perfect set up for the changing conditions. Academy's 62 and 61 GT4 Mustangs provided out the top 10 qualifiers on Saturday afternoon.

True to form, it was the safety car periods that influenced the race outcome, though not in any predictable way. Two early safety car periods prompted the majority of entries to make two of their three pitstops much sooner than conventional wisdom would dictate. That made the first-hour running order uncertain and gave teams the chance to try alternate strategies that would unjumble the order. Will Moore led the GT4 field after the first period. However, the delayed appearance of the pace car and an unexpected closure of the pit lane exit meant that Cowley and Nicol-Jones were trapped and lost track position at the start of the second safety period.

Both of Academy's Mustangs opted to run in, as did the Raceway Genetics, which meant the true race order would only become clear once those four cars had made their final pit stops inside the last hour. Once the four cars finally peeled into the pits thereby dropping back, it became a straight fight for GT4 honours. Traffic management was key during this race and Matt Cowley's dash to close the gaps resulted in him earning GT4 fastest lap honours.

Late lap drama took out several of the initial front runners, allowing Evans and

Cowley to finish 6th on the road in GT4 and 3rd in their GT4 Silver class. Moore and Nicol-Jones finished with a retirement in pit lane following some 'no fault' collision damage but with sufficient race laps completed to be classified in a points-scoring position.

After the race, Team Manager Andrew Dean remarked: "A really good result in extremely hot conditions". Having secured the earlier mentioned 'BoP relief' the team then had to reset the ride-height, damping, tyre pressure and suspension geometry variables to get the best out of the car. "Our car setup evolved all weekend and excellent team work during pitstops contributed to a decent result".

Matt Nicol-Jones summed up the weekend: "The track suited the car, probably the best all year. The car was singing, but for the pit lane exit red-light, we would probably have had an even better result. Every Yonky did a fantastic job, Will and Eric had an amazing first stint making up places through the field, then Matt Cowley pooped in the GT4 fastest lap during his charge." There are two remaining endurance races to settle the championship. Nicol-Jones continued: "Brands Hatch is a great track for us, and from a car perspective we should be in a strong position".

Academy Motorsport are 3rd in the GT4 Team standings while Evans and Cowley moved back up to 3rd in GT4 Silver with Moore and Nicol-Jones 7th. 🏆

2023 BRITISH GT CHAMPIONSHIP CALENDAR

SEPT 18 - Brands Hatch
OCT 08 & 09 - Silverstone