



n eight-hour sportscar race has never been run at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca. That changed in October as the Intercontinental GT challenge brought endurance racing to Monterey.

The vision was to bring together a variety of sportscars that run in other endurance races around the globe for a four-part challenge. Anchor events include the Spa 24 hours and



Eight Hours around Laguna Seca – A First Time for Everything

story and photos by Kevin Ehrlich

Bathurst 12 hours. With the European and Australian continents accounted for, the California 8 Hours sought to add an American round along with a planned 12-hour race in Sepang, Malaysia.

Eligible entrants include GT sportscars such as Porsche, Audi, McLaren, and others that are commonly found in endurance sportscar racing. Spa and Bathurst have existed as



strong stand-alone events, so the idea was to leverage them in a format that allowed manufacturers to get more exposure and invited local private teams to join.

The California 8 hours managed a preliminary entry list of 22 cars, comprised of a mix of European, American and Australian teams and drivers. Factory support generally took the form of partnerships with private teams such as the case of Audi Sport joining with Magnus Racing and Land Motorsport or the full factory-backed RealTime Acura NSX. In other cases, factory drivers like Patrick Long, Sven Müller and Wolf Henzler were made available to private teams. Several private teams on the grid were very familiar to US spectators





that follow IMSA and Pirelli World Challenge competition. In fact, the Land Motorsport Audi team that won the GT class at the IMSA Petit LeMans just weeks before was on the entry and put their race-winning and bug splattered Audi R8 on display in the paddock.

Seeking to establish a new event and a new tradition is always difficult. By the time the green flag waved, only 19 cars comprised the starting grid. There were high quality teams, cars and drivers, but still thin. Spectators were likewise sparse and the event had the feeling of a club race where friends were getting together to drive fast cars around a great track for the day. The weather for the weekend was wonderful, if a bit toasty on race day.





The headline for the weekend was clearly Audi strength. Strong teams, cars and drivers made the trio of Audi entries the teams to beat. Audis took pole and three of the top four starting spots, recorded the fastest lap of the race and finished 1-2 at the checkers. If not for contact between two of the Audi runners late in the event, it would have been an Audi podium sweep. The K-PAX McLaren 650S and RealTime Acura NSX provided the main competition. The highest overall placing Porsche was the Black Swan 911 GT3 R entry in fifth which was also the winner in the GT ProAm class.

Land Motorsport took the pole position in qualifying and dominated the bulk of the race. Attrition was light but mechanical issues claimed two strong entries in the form of a RealTime Acura NSX and the Wright Motorsports Porsche 911.

The trio of Land Motorsport drivers maintained the Audi lead past the seventh hour when a sequence of contact and yellow flags tightened the field. Kelvin van der Linde in the

Magnus Audi put pressure on Christopher Mies in the Land Audi and made the pass for the lead with only about 20 minutes to go.

Van der Linde and co-drivers Marcus Winkelhok and Pierre Kaffer took the overall win for Audi Sport Team Magnus with a 2.488 second margin at the line. Audi Sport Team Land drivers Christopher Mies, Christopher Haase, and American Connor De Phillippi finished second ahead of the K-PAX McLaren 650 and the RealTime Acura NSX.

Is the California 8 Hours destined to become an endurance icon like the Spa 24 hours and

Bathurst 12 hours? Time will tell. There are a lot of other venues and places for teams to race. Budgets and logistics will always impact entries and fans have a lot of options for where to spend their time, money and attention. The Sepang 12 hours was cancelled for a lack of sufficient entries, so the concept is clearly struggling to gain a foothold. Stay tuned for 2018 schedules to see if it returns, but trying an endurance sportscar race at a track that is a favorite of drivers and fans seems like a good place to give it a try

