

AIM Qualifies Fifth For Rolex 24 Grid

Fastest in Thursday night practice session

2008.01.24: After taking a fighting fifth in its Rolex 24 At Daytona debut last season, AIM Autosport is looking to do even better this year as Mark Wilkins, 24, of Toronto, Ont., lapped Daytona International Speedway in one-minute, 41.413-seconds this afternoon to take fifth place on the Rolex 24 grid. The race is scheduled to begin Saturday at 1:30 pm and Wilkins will share driving duties of the Exchange Traded Gold/Barrick Gold Ford-Riley with Brian Frisselle, Colin Braun and Andrew Ranger.

The 2008 Rolex 24 marks the second Daytona Prototype effort for Wilkins who scored podium results in his first two starts in the GT class of the grueling event.

"Starting off where we finished last year is great. I feel like we are more competitive than we were a year ago, so by that measure we're way ahead," Wilkins said. "Every lap during the session just seemed to get a bit quicker and the team were on the radio, feeding me information about where I needed to pick up a little time. I'm happy we are in much better shape than last year and hopefully starting close to the front will help us keep out of trouble early on."

Team principal Ian Wills came away very satisfied that his AIM crew and driver executed well on their qualifying plan.

"We're picking up where we left off last year! The session went as planned for us. We chose to run a limited number of laps and so after the tires came in Mark was able to run some very solid, fast laps," Willis commented. "We did our best lap without the benefit of a draft and the one opportunity we had to draft the No. 7 car was spoiled when they pulled off. At that point we called Mark in and parked it. We know what need to do come race time and this qualifying put us in a good position for what is hopefully a clean start."

Afterwards, Wilkins complimented the efforts of the team overall and especially his fellow driver, Brian Frisselle.

"Brian and everyone on the team has done a great job of developing and setting this car up. The Riley/Ford combination is just fantastic. The fastest lap came together really well, despite not getting a tow. I always want to be faster, but overall, I'm really pleased," he said.

The Thursday night practice session saw the team keep moving up the order as Andrew Ranger set the fastest lap of the hour-and-a-half session. Colin Braun also showed well as he took his first laps of the weekend in the Exchange Traded Gold/Barrick Gold Ford-Riley.

"The guys have done a great job setting the car up and Mark did a great job qualifying today," said Braun, who spent some time fulfilling his NASCAR Media obligations on Thursday. "It's great to just get in the car and have it be quick and easy to drive. This is a team effort, and I'm really looking forward to Saturday's race."