

Disappointment in Mexico

Unscheduled stop to repair gearbox drops team back

Mexico City (April 20, 2008) The day started with promise for the Exchange Traded Gold #61 Ford Riley with Mark Wilkins having put the car on the front row and the team confident they had the speed from the Ford motor to continue running at the front. But it would all go away just twelve laps in when a broken seal in the gearbox forced a lengthy pit stop taking the car out of contention.

Mark had a great start but came under attack into the first turn. Keeping his promise to be "more aggressive", Mark held his ground and came out ahead and immediately set about chasing the leader. In fact, the two would start to gap the field by a small margin.

About lap ten, the cameras caught sight of smoke coming from the area of the left exhaust. It was fine down the straights but quite noticeable in right-handers. Although the team reported they did not show any problem on the telemetry, the call was made to bring Mark in and assess the problem.

Once the AIM Autosport crew had the rear cover off, the source of the smoke was from transmission fluid leaking out a broken seal on the gearbox. The crew set about to replace the part but would go seven laps down in the process.

Once back on track, Wilkins would show a pace that matched the front-runners although he would constantly be running through slower GT traffic. "We were in a tough situation being so many laps down" commented Mark, "but in a three-hour race, there is always a chance to make up some positions. As it happens, some of the other DP cars got into some trouble of their own and were able to pick up a few spots."

Mark would hand the car over to teammate Brian Frisselle who continued to run well.

"It was frustrating to know we had the car to run up front but were now so far back," offered Brian. "With a number of mid-race cautions, teams could conserve fuel where normally, with our early stop, we might have been able to make back a lap or two if other teams were forced to pit under the green. Unfortunately it was just not our day."

The AIM Autosport Exchange Traded Gold #61 Ford Riley would finish the race P15, seven laps behind the leader. "We certainly had the pace and the guys did a great job under the circumstances," said Willis. "We finished the race which is always the goal, and we did it despite some very intense pressure on the crew and the drivers under unexpected circumstances." He continued, "We showed that we have the car and the drivers to compete by putting the car on the front row this weekend and running a good pace after the unscheduled stop. It is only a matter of time before we get to the podium. We certainly know what we have to do at VIR next weekend."