

Starting from pole, the celebration is short-lived

AIM Autosport No. 61 Ford Riley is fast again... but

(Daytona, FL) – 4 July 08: On a day that started with great promise, the AIM Autosport crew would come away from Daytona International Speedway with even more reason to look forward to the next race. Maybe then, the No. 61 Ford Riley will reach the podium and give rise to the anticipated celebration. It looked good last night in the Brumos 250 with fast laps, incredible overtaking maneuvers, a near-miraculous recovery from a high speed spin plus a good pit strategy that keeping the Exchange Traded Gold car in a podium position. The team already had something to celebrate though, having scored AIM Autosports' first pole in the Rolex Sports Car Series presented by Crown Royal Cask No. 16.

After leading the practice sessions earlier in the day and securing pole with a strong run, drivers Mark Wilkins and Brian Frisselle were feeling confident going into the race. The No. 61 had already started from the front row three times this season with pole being the icing on the cake. At the green flag, Mark took control and had a great run into the first turn to lead the pack. He would give up the lead briefly and take it back with a daring outside pass into the bus-stop that took SPEED's commentators by surprise. It was later deemed "the move of the race"... and this was just the first lap. Mark settled into a rhythm and on lap four, set the fastest lap of the race at 1:42.499. He would pit from the lead position on lap seven to complete the mandatory stop. The second place car would also pit and Mark would win the drag race out of pit lane but lose the position when caught up behind a GT car. Once the remaining DP cars cycled through their stops, Mark was sitting second when the leader went off elevating the No. 61 back to first place.

Having lead sixteen of the first thirty-six laps, Mark prepared to bring the car in for fuel, tires and to hand the wheel over to Brian when it got just a bit exciting. Slowing to 160 miles per hour coming through NASCAR Turn Three approaching pit entrance, a cut right rear tire sent Mark on a wild ride He would spin down to the apron then shoot backwards up the track, heading for the wall. Mark got the car under control, turned it towards pit road and brought the No. 61 Ford Riley in for its scheduled stop. The tire had been cut by debris on the track and a full course caution came out immediately. Brian took the controls and came back to the race in third place under the full course caution.

At the green, Brian sat .204 seconds back of the 01 car but another caution came out immediately. Green again on lap 49, Brian was at the tail of the lead pack of three as they pulled away from the field. It seemed that Brian had the measure of the cars ahead and it would just be a matter of time before he made a move to the front. Now, with the race seemingly unfolding as it should, spirits were high. But on lap fifty-four, a broken half-shaft had Brian bring the car to pit lane from third place. It turns out that the debris that cut the tire causing Mark's spin had also damaged the boot on the half-shaft allowing the grease to bleed out. The car could not continue this way and the decision was made to replace the damaged part. Repaired, the Exchange Traded Gold No. 61 Ford Riley would get back on track to finish the race but would be nine laps down. A bitter disappointment for Brian, Mark and everyone on the AIM Autosport crew.

Mark Wilkins: "The car was absolutely fantastic today and it was a really big boost for the team to get pole. The race was going well and I learned early that we needed to preserve brakes to be there at the end. The spin? Yeah, that was a bit hairy and I was really happy not to hit the wall and end our day. When I handed the car over to Brian I knew we were quick and that from third, the race would come back to us. Unfortunately, we got bitten although we did see the checker." Mark continued, "At the end of the day we were disappointed but know that we are just a step away. This was another big step on top of the result at Mid-Ohio and both Brian and I are feeling even more confident going into the next race at Barber."

Brian Frisselle: "You feel the heartbreak after a day like this. You feel it for everyone on the team, but in the end, we are all pleased with the performance we got out of the car. Fast in practice, pole and fast in the race are all positive steps toward that podium. Yes it's disappointing to not have the podium here, but you can't always control the situation and it was a debris issue - nothing we did, that kept us off the podium. As Mark said, the race would come back to us. He gave me great info about preserving the brakes that would have given us a great shot at the leaders and that is the value of good teamwork and communication." Brian commented further, "The team did get us back on track. Nobody gave up and that will work to our advantage in the future."

Ian Willis: "Everyone, drivers and crew, did a great job today but it was not meant to be. We'll happily take our first pole and now look forward to our first podium and first win. The Ford Riley was quick and both Mark and Brian showed the potential in the car. The season isn't over yet and in two short weeks we'll be at it again with more determination than ever."

The AIM Autosport Exchange Traded Gold No. 61 Ford Riley will be participating in a Pirelli test session at Homestead over the next few days and then the team will prepare for the next round in the Rolex Sports Car Series presented by Crown Royal Cask No. 16 taking place at Barber Motorsport Park in Birmingham, Alabama July 18-20. The race will be broadcast on SPEED TV, Sunday July 20 at 3:00 p.m. ET

AIM Autosport Facts:

Established in 1995, AIM Autosport has a mandate to identify, train and manage emerging motorsport talent. AIM has provided many young drivers with a solid foundation on which to build a career in professional racing. The success of the AIM driver development programs has been achieved through the dedication of our employees and the ongoing support of our commercial and technical partners. Away from the track, AIM Autosport serves the needs of the racing community with a purpose-built preparation shop situated in the Toronto suburb of Woodbridge, Ontario. AIM fields the Exchange Traded Gold #61 Ford-Riley Daytona Prototype in the Rolex Grand Am series with drivers Mark Wilkins and Brian Frisselle. The team also competes in the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear with John Edwards at the wheel of the #7 Formula Mazda

Photo credit: No. 61 Ford Riley - Caitlin Fell

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