



"I was really happy that my first weekend with Aston Martin Racing went smoothly..."

London, May 8, 2018. We came away from the 6 Hours of Spa with a sixth-place finish in the opening round of the FIA World Endurance Championship with Aston Martin Racing on the competition debut of the new Vantage GTE. From our side it was a weekend of trying to perfect our execution and trying to focus on the big one next month, the Le Mans 24 Hours, because that's the big target for us. We learned a lot, just tried to finish and do every lap, and learn about our new car within the heat of a race weekend.

Right from the beginning our #97 Aston ran strongly with me, Maxime Martin and Jonny Adam at the wheel. Through free practice we were just firing through different set-ups, and different tyre compounds from Michelin to see what was going to work best in the race. It was an unusually hot weekend by Spa standards, and that made it tricky because it's quite a high-degradation circuit. You have to really think about your strategy, because you only get four and a half sets of tyres – including only two brand-new sets – for the six-hour races in the WEC, and to be honest that's not that much.

It was a nice feeling for me to be chosen to qualify the car alongside Maxime before we got to Spa, especially given that Maxime and Jonny are so experienced in GT racing and I'm the new boy. Each car in WEC is qualified by two of its drivers, with an average of those two drivers' best laps deciding the grid position. With Jonny not taking part in qualifying, he did the long runs through free practice, with me and Maxime working on our qualifying simulations, and it was very satisfying when I set the quickest time of all the Aston Martin drivers over the three free practice sessions.

Qualifying was good for us. Maxime and I put our Aston eighth on the grid, with the sister #95 car 10th. Maxime pipped me on best laps, and we both maximised what we could – that's why it was so close between us. Unluckily for us, we were a little bit behind on Balance of Performance, which is how the organisers try to equalise all the various models of car. Our car is new, the BMW is new, and the Ferrari is heavily revamped – we were all a bit behind, and the pacesetting Fords were in a different stratosphere. We hope that gets resolved for Le Mans, because we need a fun race there – that's what everyone wants to see.

I did the first two stints in the race before handing over to Jonny, and then Maxime finished. It was all quite calm from my side. We had a long safety car at the start of my second stint after Harry Tincknell crashed his Ford heavily at Eau Rouge. I've known Harry for a long time – we grew up together in single-



seaters and he's an old mate, so I was really glad to see he was alright. Apart from that it was quite uneventful. We cycled through our stints, gathered good data, and stayed in the fight, which was good. The safety car brought the field together from time to time so we had a battle with the #71 Ferrari and the BMWs, but we didn't quite have the pace to stay with them.

Overall, though, I was really happy that my first weekend with Aston Martin Racing went smoothly. It's great to represent the team and the brand, and on your first event with any factory team you want to make sure your race is clean. I had really strong lap times in the race, it was positive and now we need to build on it, especially with Le Mans coming up next month – we hope that it will be a much closer race.

In the meantime, I've got another race with Aston Martin Racing next weekend – with a difference! It's the Nurburgring 24 Hours, which I competed in with BMW last year, and I'll be racing a GT4-class Vantage with Jonny as well as Jamie Chadwick – she's won the GT4 class in the British GT Championship before, so she'll be strong – and Peter Cate. I'm really excited to be going back to the Nurburgring – I loved it last year, and from an Aston Martin Racing point of view it's important that all six of the factory drivers do the race to keep us on our toes and stop us getting rusty before the big one at Le Mans. I'm certainly going to have to be on top of my game at the Nurburgring!

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