

Lexus Opens Season with Top-10 Result at Rolex 24 at Daytona

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DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (Jan. 29, 2018) – The 3GT Racing Lexus RC F GT3s both crossed the finish line Sunday in the season-opening Rolex 24 at Daytona that took place at the famed Daytona International Speedway.

The 3GT Racing No. 15 Lexus RC F GT3 scored a team-best Rolex 24 at Daytona finish of ninth-place in the GTD class while the No. 14 RC F GT3 placed 15th in class, fielding an entirely new driver lineup for 2018. The performances of both Lexus entries marks the first time 3GT Racing had both RC F GT3s finish the entirety of the Rolex 24 at Daytona in its second year of competition in the GTD Class.

The No. 15 started the grueling 24-hour race third in class with returning driver Jack Hawksworth behind the wheel and spent the majority of his first stints inside the top-three, including leading two laps in the GTD class during his initial stint. The No. 14 Lexus began the race fifth in class with Dominik Baumann, who was competing in his first American sports car series event. Baumann also ran among the top-five through the first two hours of the race and led a lap along with teammate Kyle Marcelli leading one circuit in class, however both cars were forced to fall back to the 11th and 12th positions after an issue during a caution period in hour three of the race. Both Lexus RC F GT3s proved to be reliable, however an electrical issue on the No. 14 and a few incidents that forced the No. 15 off track with minimal damage during the 24-hour period resulted in both cars not being able to fight for a podium finish or win.

Eight total drivers took turns behind the wheel of the two blue 3GT Racing Lexus RC F GT3s. Hawksworth, David Heinemeier Hansson, Dominik Farnbacher and retiring Hall of Fame racer Scott Pruett were behind the wheel of the No. 15 Lexus, while Baumann, Marcelli, Philipp Frommenwiler and Bruno Junqueira piloted the No. 14 RC F GT3 during the grueling 24 hours.

Pruett retires following 50 years of racing that included multiple championship and wins in all forms of motorsports as well as three Hall of Fame inductions.

After opening the 2018 schedule at Daytona, Lexus and 3GT Racing will compete in 10 additional races in IMSA's GTD class this year. The next event is the Twelve Hours of Sebring endurance race at Florida's Sebring International Speedway on Saturday, March 17.

Lexus Racing Quotes

Jack Hawksworth, No. 15 Lexus RC F GT3

How was your race?

“It was a little confusing because I felt pretty happy with the Lexus RC F GT3 with all of the testing we've done up to this point. I knew pretty early on in the race that the grip and the balance of the car was not as good as it had been in the practice so I struggled a little bit in the beginning and then dropped back a bit. Then, as the night came in our Lexus got a little bit better and I felt a little bit stronger. Obviously, we had some issues towards the end with a bit of contact with a GTLM car and then we had the incident in Turn 5 and that really hurt the balance of the car. Towards the end of the race we really struggled. We had lost a lot of the front so the car was a bit like a sail. In the slow speed corners it felt better. I think overall when you consider the performance was not what we had in practice, and then we had a couple issues throughout the race we kept on battling and came away with a top-10 so we'll take that. It's a much better start for us. We would've liked to have been a bit faster in the race, but we didn't understand what happened between practice and the race and just move forward. The guys did a really good job with all of the pit stops and everyone stuck it out to the end. It's really easy to lose your head in a situation when things are kind of going against you a little bit, but we kept our heads up and we brought home a top-10. It's good to get some points early on.”

David Heinemeir Hansson, No. 15 Lexus RC F GT3

How was your Rolex 24 experience in the Lexus RC F GT3?

“It was certainly a race of ups and downs. A lot of downs during the rain, but then I had a good run going at the end at least until my second to last lap. It was a hard physical race. It was much harder than I thought it would be given the cars that I’ve driven. It’s a tough race especially with only three yellow flags and a green flag the whole way through, but I’m glad we made it to the end. I felt much more comfortable today. I hadn’t turned that many laps in the car and being in it in the dark and in the rain last night was a little tough. It was much nicer this afternoon in the dry getting in a rhythm and going.”

What does it say about 3GT Racing to have both Lexus RC F GT3s finish the race?

“It’s wonderful. I think it’s a real shame that the 14 car had that issue early on because they were running pretty strong. At the end of the day we didn’t have the car to fight for the win today, but we made it to the end and that’s a celebration to finish Daytona. I’ve tried two times prior and failed to finish the race so to just finish the race was such an accomplishment.”

Scott Pruett, No. 15 Lexus RC F GT3

How long do you think you were in the car overnight and did you feel sharp in those conditions?

“I did. I mean, we were posting laps, I was chasing down leaders and running really well. I think, again, it came in a pretty short period ?? in about 12 hours I did I think about five and a half hours of that. And it all was going really well. So it was interesting because we had really good pace at the opening of the race where we just couldn’t maintain it. And it’s not uncommon. We had so much to learn from last year to this year and then from this year to next year. I’ll be proud to get to the checkered flag more than anything else. Again, get there first, but getting there is secondly incredibly important.”

Were you pleased that your final race was with a car that was competitive early in the race?

“I’ve had such an incredible long term relationship with mostly Lexus, but also Toyota in the Indy Car days and for the way we were last year at this point in time compared to where we are this year, it’s night and day. More than anything else, getting to the checkered flag, we haven’t had any issues. We’re fighting a little bit of a vibration, but keeping the pace that we’re doing would be the first success. Last year was just getting here and having cars that could go out – unfortunately we had a lot of issues where this year I wouldn’t say it’s been trouble free, but for the most part fairly trouble free.”

Dominik Farnbacher, No. 15 Lexus RC F GT3

Are you satisfied with a top-10 finish in the Lexus RC F GT3 at this year’s Rolex 24 at Daytona?

“Of course we hoped for a better result, but I think we can be quite proud of ourselves. The Lexus RC F GT3 is still in one piece. Nothing is broken. The 14 Lexus finished too, so overall I think it’s quite a good improvement from last year. I think the car has a lot of potential and when it comes down to the other circuits, the Lexus will be better. The team did an outstanding job. Every single pit stop was on time. It was very hard for us drivers because there were hardly any yellow flags and it’s usually the time where the driver can rest a little bit, but here it was always a fistfight. It was always maximum concentration. I never used the physio in racing before, but this time I had to use one. My right foot was hurting so much from pushing the throttle pedal as hard as I could. I’m okay now and I hope the team has good luck in the next race at Sebring. I think a podium is within reach. On the last note, I want to tell Scott Pruett he did an outstanding job. We are all proud of him and I wish him all the best for his future. I hope his wine business goes through the roof and I hope he has a lot of joyful years even though he doesn’t race professionally anymore but who knows, maybe he will have a comeback.”

Dominik Baumann, No. 14 Lexus RC F GT3

What was your experience like racing in America in the Rolex 24 for the first time?

“The first stint was really good. It was an easy run to be honest. The RC F GT3 was great at that moment. I made no mistakes and then we had an electrical problem and I think we lost 26 laps so then the race was more or less over. But, overall, it was a good experience to start the season. It’s just going to get better. It gave me a lot of confidence after my first double stint. I think this was a great team effort. We finished with both cars to see that they are reliable. We just have some tiny things to sort out, but a good job from the team.”

Kyle Marcelli, No. 14 Lexus RC F GT3

What was your experience like driving the Lexus RC F GT3 in the Rolex 24 at Daytona?

“That was a long race. Three o’clock in the morning and you’re thinking ‘Why in the heck are we doing this?’ And then the sun comes up and you get that second bit of energy and you’re 110 percent again to the finish. When I look at this year’s Rolex 24 it was just stacked competition – teams, drivers, manufacturers, you name it. I think we had three or four full course cautions in the entire race. No big accidents, just a lot of minor things and very few cars retired particularly in the GT Daytona class. Super, super tough competition. We had one minor issue six hours in and if it wasn’t for that we would’ve been a contender so it’s a real honor and pleasure to drive the Lexus with 3GT Racing and I look forward to the season ahead.”

Did you feel the Lexus RC F GT3 had good pace during the 24-hour event?

“Certainly even in qualifying the car proved to have the pace. As the weather changes the balance can change and I think our car was certainly setup maybe a little bit more for the qualifying temperature. We seemed to struggle a bit with some understeer through the race that was costing us a few tenths of a lap, but again if it wasn’t for the minor issue that we had at the beginning of the race I think we would’ve been a contender. It was a pretty flawless race. The team executed clean pit stops, there were no penalties and it was a clean race for us. It was just very, very competitive out there.”

What does it mean for 3GT Racing to have both Lexus RC F GT3s finish today’s race?

“This race is a test of man and machine and to finish the race is sort of the first goal and then we accomplished that and we had a ninth and a 15th and we have to take it for what it is, be proud of it because the guys worked hard and then just move on. It’s a long season. The main thing is we finished, we scored points and in this series you’ve got to look at it as a whole. It’s not just one race. You have to string all 11 races together and the points matter. We’re still in good shape, it’s very early.”

Mark Egger, Motorsports Manager, Lexus Division

How would you evaluate the performance of the 3GT Racing Lexus RC F GT3s at the Rolex 24 at Daytona?

“The Lexus RC F GT3 started off very strong. We qualified fourth and sixth in the GTD class and when we look at where we’ve come from it’s been almost a 180 degree turn from a year ago. We had a whole lot of data to fall back on. The Lexus ran strong throughout the first part of the race, we had both RC F GT3s finish the race and a top-10 by the No. 15 Lexus so we’re pretty excited.”

With this being Scott Pruett’s final race, what has he meant to the Lexus brand during his career?

“With the Rolex 24 being Scott’s last race, we’re sad to see him go after a truly historic career however from a branding standpoint he’ll always be a part of the Lexus family. He’s been instrumental in the development of our F Performance cars and he’s been instrumental in our lifestyle and our branding. We’re not going to call it a retirement, we’d prefer to call it ‘next steps’ so we’ll have a long history together.”