

Lexus and Vasser Sullivan to Pace GTD Field With First Rolex 24 Pole

January 26, 2024

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DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (Jan. 26, 2024) – Lexus Racing and Vasser Sullivan will lead the GTD class to green in the 62nd Rolex 24 at Daytona after claiming their first pole position at the famed endurance race through Parker Thompson and the No. 12 RC F GT3. Lexus factory driver, Jack Hawksworth, just missed out on capturing pole position as well in GTD PRO, qualifying second in the class in the No. 14 RC F GT3, which begins its championship defense this weekend. Hawksworth and Thompson qualified second and third, respectively, out of 37 total GT entries.

The 25-year-old Thompson, now running full time with Lexus and Vasser Sullivan, captured his first career series pole with time of 1:44.494 on the 3.56-mile Daytona road course. Thompson's time claimed the GTD pole by a mere four one-hundredths of a second. Thompson made his series debut last season serving as the endurance driver for the team, and now takes on the full IMSA WeatherTech Sportscar Championship schedule in 2024.

Joining the young Canadian in the No. 12 Vasser Sullivan RC F GT3, will be Vasser Sullivan veterans Frankie Montecalvo and Aaron Telitz, along with first-timer and Toyota Gazoo Racing driver, Ritomo Miyata. Montecalvo enters his sixth full-time season driving the No. 12 Lexus RC F GT3 in the GTD class. Last season, he and Telitz finished third in the GTD class standings and captured victory at Watkins Glen. Telitz returns for his fifth season with Lexus and Vasser Sullivan, now as an endurance driver. Miyata is the final addition to the No. 12 entry for the prestigious endurance race, making his debut in the IMSA WeatherTech Sportscar Championship. The 24-year-old is the reigning Super Formula and Super GT500 Champion and will also be contesting the Formula 2 championship and the European Le Mans Series in 2024, along with serving as the reserve driver for the Toyota Gazoo Racing WEC Hypercar team.



Though he missed out on pole position by eight one-hundredths of a second, Hawksworth placed the No. 14 Vasser Sullivan RC F GT3 in prime position when the green flies for the Rolex 24. The Bradford, England native and fellow Lexus factory driver, **Ben Barnicoat**, begin their GTD PRO class championship defense after capturing the first full-season GT title for Lexus and Vasser Sullivan last season. En route to last year's championship, Hawksworth and Barnicoat scored victories at Long Beach and Watkins Glen to partner with four pole positions and nine podium finishes in 11 races. Now in their third season together, they're focused on winning the biggest race in American sportscar racing after finishing third last January.

Hawksworth and Barnicoat will be joined by Toyota Gazoo Racing driver **Mike Conway**, along with INDYCAR racer and Florida native, **Kyle Kirkwood** for this year's race. Both drivers also competed for Vasser Sullivan in the Rolex 24 last season in the No. 14 and No. 12 RC F GT3 entries. Conway brings extensive endurance race experience with him making his seventh start in the Rolex 24, including a third-place finish with Hawksworth and Barnicoat last year. For Kirkwood, this will be his fourth start in the endurance event with a best finish of fourth in 2022 with Hawksworth and Barnicoat.

Twenty twenty-four marks the eighth season Lexus Racing is fielding RC F GT3s in IMSA competition and the sixth season Lexus and Vasser Sullivan will race together in the GT categories. Over their partnership, Lexus Racing and Vasser Sullivan have amassed 13 wins, 39 podium finishes, 18 pole positions, the 2023 IMSA GTD PRO Driver, Team, and Manufacturer Championship, and the 2020 IMSA Sprint Cup titles.

The Rolex 24 at Daytona will be broadcast live on NBC starting at 1:30 p.m. ET on Saturday, January 27 with additional television coverage throughout the race on USA Network. Live flag-to-flag coverage will also be streaming on Peacock for authenticated subscribers. To keep up with all the racing action, follow Lexus Racing on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#) by using #LexusPerformance.

Vasser Sullivan Driver Quotes

JACK HAWKSWORTH, No. 14 Lexus RC F GT3

What's your outlook for the race starting on the front row?

"We feel like we've prepared well for the race with our Lexus RC F GT3. Obviously coming off the championship last year, we've kept the same people and crew on our Vasser Sullivan team to go along with good consistency in our driver lineup. Mike (Conway) did the Rolex with us last year and Kyle (Kirkwood) did a lot of endurance races, along with Ben (Barnicoat) and I coming back together again. We've continued to build since last year. We feel positive about everything, but the thing with this race is that you never really know until the last two or three hours. We'll have to wait and see, but will give it our best from a good starting spot."

BEN BARNICOAT, No. 14 Lexus RC F GT3

How does the strong qualifying effort build confidence for the team heading into the Rolex 24?

"As a group for Lexus and Vasser Sullivan, it's a great way to start off the year with a pole in GTD and a second starting spot in GTD PRO. From our side on the No. 14 RC F GT3, to start on the front row for a prestigious race as this is amazing. Jack (Hawksworth) has always done a super job in qualifying. On the 12 car side, so happy and excited for them with Parker (Thompson) getting the pole in his first GTD attempt. That's very special and shows that even though we were champions last year, we're not resting, and we've continued to work, especially the guys on the Vasser Sullivan team and Lexus. We've all worked extremely hard in the offseason to allow us to arrive here and start the year leading the field. Very excited to get to the race."

KYLE KIRKWOOD, No. 14 Lexus RC F GT3

How has everything gone so far leading up to the race this weekend?

"So far, so good for our No. 14 Lexus RC F GT3 Vasser Sullivan team. Really happy with the performance of the car and team. Everything has been very smooth so far which is exactly what you want going into a 24-hour race. The fact that we have some pace gives us confidence and everyone on the team is gelling well. Things have happened at this race in the first lap over the years, so being at the front and staying up there to keep our nose clean will help us avoid those situations happening behind us. Super proud of Parker (Thompson) getting pole in the GTD class, and Jack qualifying P2 is great. Really excited for this weekend."

MIKE CONWAY, No. 14 Lexus RC F GT3

How is it being back with Lexus and Vasser Sullivan in the Rolex 24?

"Great to be back with Vasser Sullivan in the Lexus RC F GT3, driving a championship-winning car. I knew the guys were doing a great job last year when I was with them, so to see them win the championship at the end was

great. Getting back in the car and used to the nuances of going fast around here. Good qualifying overall, starting in the front of the field. Looking forward to race day.”

PARKER THOMPSON, No. 12 Lexus RC F GT3

How does it feel to claim pole at the Rolex 24 and what’s your outlook for the race?

“One for one in GTD qualifying, getting pole at Daytona! Doesn’t get much better than that. It’s incredible to think I was spotting here two years ago and now I’m taking my first pole in a Lexus RC F GT3. I can’t thank the Vasser Sullivan team and Lexus Racing enough for the opportunity. Getting the first Rolex 24 pole for the team and Lexus is neat. I still have a lot to learn going into the race this weekend, but we’re starting from the best spot with the best driver lineup. There’s no reason we can’t compete for a Rolex watch on Sunday. Excited to see what we can make happen.”

FRANKIE MONTECALVO, No. 12 Lexus RC F GT3

What does a pole at the Rolex 24 mean for the entire team heading into the race?

“The team did a phenomenal job in a hectic qualifying, getting out in a hole after the red flag since it was basically a two-lap shootout. Both cars did a phenomenal job. Parker did an awesome job in his first qualifying effort in the No. 12 RC F GT3, putting us on pole for the Rolex 24, which is amazing. It’d be good to stay up at the front, away from all the hectic stuff in the back. Phenomenal start to the racing season that brings along some good points with the pole, so that will help us down the line considering to how many points it took for us to get third in the championship. We can take everything we can get early on. The Vasser Sullivan team has been firing on all cylinders this weekend. Our Lexus RC F GT3 keeps getting better and better, and the team keeps functioning as a complete family. I have complete confidence going into the race.”

AARON TELITZ, No. 12 Lexus RC F GT3

What are your thoughts and feelings heading into the race this weekend?

“The Vasser Sullivan team is operating at such a high level just like we were all last season, carrying it over into 2024. The team has been working great. Ritomo (Miyata) has been awesome and is a great addition to the No. 12 RC F GT3 team. Parker (Thompson) sticking it on pole for the Rolex 24 has us on cloud 9. We’re really excited for this weekend.”

RITOMO MIYATA, No. 12 Lexus RC F GT3

Can you talk about your experience so far at the Rolex 24 and what you’re expecting this weekend?

“My first time racing in the U.S. has been great. The Vasser Sullivan team and my teammates have been kind to me so far. I’m trying to take everything step-by-step with the difference in the RC F GT3 compared to what I’ve raced before. It’s been very good overall. I’ve had a great time working with everyone at Vasser Sullivan and Lexus so far and the result from qualifying is great as well. Really proud of the team. It’s all been very enjoyable.”