

Unkind results for ART Grand Prix at Euro opener

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The opening round of the CIK European KZ Championship, held on the German circuit in Wackersdorf on 17-19th May, seems to have been cursed for the ART Grand Prix Factory Team. Fielding the experienced Ben Hanley and the young Charles Leclerc - who already showed great performances in the first part of the season - the team managed by Armando Filini could not get the deserved results despite showing throughout the weekend brilliant performance that could have been well worth a podium.

Following Friday's qualifying practice, where the two ART Grand Prix drivers managed to get the 5th and 9th fastest laps with Leclerc and Hanley respectively, Saturday's qualifying heats would decide the position for the prefinal starting grid. In the first heat, Leclerc dropped four positions in the first 3 laps after a good start that saw him move up to 4th. With his pace settled, and consistently lapping with the fastest, the young talent managed to get one position back and bridged the gap to the leading group, closing in 8th. Hanley had a similar run to his younger team mate, dropping few positions in the early stages and making them up by the end to close in 10th. Penalties inflicted to few other drivers moved the duo up the standings.

The second heat confirmed the strength of the ART Grand Prix drivers, both lapping consistently with the best - particularly Leclerc who stopped the third fastest lap of the race at less than 3/100 of second from the best - and closing in 7th (Leclerc) and 10th (Hanley). Nevertheless the two were inflicted 10" penalty for jump start, beginning a streak of episodes that would compromise the weekend.

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Despite the penalties, Sunday's prefinal starting grid saw Leclerc and Hanley sitting in 11th and 13th position, still with a good chance to move up in the order following the positive morning warm-up session. After a solid start at the green lights, the two ART Grand Prix talents did manage to make up positions. With the leading group still very tight, and the top ten separated by few tenths, Leclerc and Hanley steadily rose to the challenge lapping similar times to the leader. After disposing of few more rivals, Hanley challenged Leclerc for 7th, but an engine failure caused him to stop abruptly collecting Leclerc and two other in the process.

Forced to start the final from 28th and 29th, Leclerc and Hanley had to make a true miracle to reach the point zone. But once again, it proved just one of those weekends where nothing goes right for the Brit, who was out right after the start unable to avoid a driver who spun right in his racing line.

Leclerc on the contrary managed to escape the tricky first few laps trouble-free, and he marched on through the field disposing of his rivals one after the other. In a typically tough circuit to overtake, in a highly-competitive field with all drivers lapping very similar times, Leclerc excelled in his pursuit to the point zone.

By lap 6 the young Monegasque had made up as many as 8 positions, by lap ten he was sitting in 17th place, and with 5 laps to go he stopped the 5th fastest lap of the race reaching the 14th place where he would finish at the chequered flag. As two drivers preceding him were inflicted a penalty, Leclerc was accredited of the 12th position and collected 4 valuable points for the championship. A meagre consolation if compared to the potential shown on track, which nevertheless bodes well for the second and final round in Belgium next month.

Armando Filini (Team Manager):

"It's a pity we had not the best luck over the weekend, because our equipment as well as our drivers were definitely up to the task. An engine failure comprised Hanley's prefinal, and that of Leclerc as a result, while in the final Ben found an accident on his way which he couldn't avoid. But it's part of racing! Also our strategy was good, we saved the new tyres for the final, and it's a shame only Charles was able to make use of them and pull off a very consistent, flawless and mature performance. What I've seen in Germany induces me to be optimistic in view of the final round in Belgium next month."

Charles Leclerc:

"Racing against the world's best is always tough, and considering how close my pace was to that of the leaders and where I started the final, I can only be happy of the result. If it weren't for the jump start penalty in the second heat I would have started the prefinal from the top five rows, and probably it would have been different also in the final. But that's how it goes, I can't wait for the final round and we will use the next race to prepare for it."



Ben Hanley:

“The weekend was quite disappointing in terms of results, but I have to say that I’m very pleased with the performance of our equipment. We had some difficulties in the first few days, I could only stop 9th fastest lap in qualifying, tyres were at the limit but as the sessions went on the grip on the track improved well. Unfortunately I was out in the very beginning of the final, which means no points in the championship, so we will use the second round in Belgium mainly in preparation for the World Championship in Varennes.”

ART Grand Prix next race

02/06 - WSK Euro Series Rnd.4, Genk (BEL)

Results CIK European KZ Championship Rnd.1

	Q	H1	H2	PF	F	CHAMP.PT.
3 B.Hanley	9	8	19	(13) DNF	(29) DNF	-
34 C.Leclerc	5	7	18	(11) DNF	(28) 12	4

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