

# Flawless AF Ferrari doubles up

The Bruni/Fisichella/Vilander 458 was untroubled for a second Le Mans win. By **SCOTT MITCHELL**

“NO,” SAID GIANMARIA BRUNI WHEN ASKED IF THE GTE Pro-winning AF Corse Ferrari had encountered any problems – any at all – during a typically thrilling GTE fight at Le Mans. “The last four hours were just waiting, waiting, waiting.”

The Italian, reflecting on a performance from the #51 458 Italia that bordered on perfection, was not being arrogant. It really was that good.

This was a contest that, although all-but-decided heading into the final few hours, offered so much more than last year’s race. Unlike the straight Aston Martin versus Porsche fight of 2013, this had more to the storyline. Aston starred before it hit trouble, Corvette’s new challenger was a factor, but its drivers rued a missed opportunity, while Porsche, unable to replicate its race-challenging form of years past, knuckled down nonetheless and salvaged a podium.

But having emerged on top of the wheel-to-wheel racing for the lead that characterised the race up until three-quarter distance, the Ferrari was a worthy winner.

Bruni had fired an early warning shot with a stellar pole lap that left it well over a second faster than its first Pro-class challenger, Jan Magnussen’s C7.R. And while both Chevy and Aston were legitimate challengers – Jan Magnussen led early on in the #73, the #74 Chevy also hit the front and Darren Turner propelled the Vantage into the lead for most of the night shift – the Ferrari was the most constant if never the outright quickest.

With Fisichella putting in arguably his finest drive in a GT car, and the feisty Vilander going toe-to-toe with Bruno Senna and Tommy Milner mid-race, there was no suggestion the outfit was undeserving when reliability woes hit its rivals.



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“Bruni is one of the fastest GT drivers out there,” said Vilander. “Giancarlo and I are also fast and consistent. It’s a good combination.”

It was more than good, it was potent. Earmarking attrition as a potential factor at Le Mans is as far from earth-shattering as it gets, but it’s the simple truth that to win your armour must have very, very few chinks. And come 3pm on Sunday, Ferrari’s had stood up with aplomb.

It was not without serious challenge though, and the fact that each manufacturer – and six different crews – led at one stage or another is testimony to the opposition’s charge.

The new-for-2014 Chevy caught the eye. Magnussen dived with Bruni in the first stint, leading twice, but the #73 car’s victory bid was undone when unfortunate pitstop timing before the rain came forced a second stop under the

safety car and a bizarre failure on the air hose that operates the jack in the pits cost them more time.

Thereafter began a recovery drive in which Antonio Garcia and young American Jordan Taylor starred. As its rivals encountered strife in the second half of the race the #73 Corvette rose up the order to third, before Taylor’s efforts, particularly his final stint three hours from the end, put them within striking difference of the #92 Manthey Porsche in second.

Stellar new-tyre pace from Garcia almost brought him onto the rear bumper of Frederic Makowiecki, though an on-track pass was unnecessary as the 911 RSR pitted and was swiftly swamped by mechanics, costing it second place.

It was a blow for Makowiecki, who had starred earlier in the race when the rain hit, as both Manthey cars moved up from the fringes of the lead battle, at least until the track dried and they slipped back again.

The pace deficit for the squad that conquered La Sarthe 12 months ago, attributed to a weight penalty and breaks for its rivals, meant that over a race distance it was a spectator to the lead fight, though its cause was not helped when both the #91 and #92 cars were split from the lead trio by an early safety car.

As mechanical issues dropped the #91 car out of contention entirely, Makowiecki, flanked by Marco Holzer and Richard Lietz, ploughed on. But for the issue at the end it was a near-flawless race for that trio – “We pressed 120 per cent out of the car,” said Holzer – that secured a podium, though losing second in the closing stages was frustrating.

Despite stealing that place, there was also a tinge of disappointment in the Corvette camp.

The polesitting Ferrari had an almost perfect run to GTE Pro victory

