



PRESS RELEASE

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Successful maiden FIA WEC visit to Portimão for Michelin

- The new MICHELIN Pilot Sport range for the latest LMH prototypes take Portimão's heat in their stride
- Competitive debut for the Glickenhaus and its 29/71-18 (front) and 34/71-18 (rear) tyres
- Michelin's LMH tyre range conceived to cover spectrum of temperature windows

The replacement of the former LM P1 cars by the latest-generation LM Hypercars forced Michelin to design a completely new range of tyres. Given that the new prototypes differ from their predecessors through their weight, power output and aerodynamics, this shift called for a complete rethink regarding their tyres' constructions and compounds, resulting in a completely new range of MICHELIN Pilot Sports that was developed entirely on simulators.

The FIA World Endurance Championship's regulations provide the teams with a choice between two tyre-size options, namely 31/71-18 covers for all four wheels, or a combination of 29/71-18s at the front and 34/71-18s at the rear. At the end of the day, the choice is governed by the aerodynamic loads to which the tyres are subjected by the configuration and front/rear weight-split of the different cars.

While Toyota Gazoo Racing and Alpine Elf Matmut have both gone for the former option, Glickenhaus Racing's new 007 LMH runs the combination of wide rears and narrower fronts.

In the recent past, Michelin has split its endurance racing range into SOFT, MEDIUM and HARD compounds. With the introduction of the new LMH cars, however, the French firm's engineers have preferred to revert to a more technical categorisation and the options available for the Portuguese clash were a MEDIUM and a High Temperature MEDIUM compound, i.e. tyres featuring the same rigidity but covering different track-temperature spectrums.



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Internal running temperatures of up to 150°C for Michelin's tyres at the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve!

The date-change for the 8 Hours of Portimao from April to June had a significant impact on the challenge faced by tyres. At the end of 2020, the Portuguese venue was resurfaced and now features a particularly dark asphalt, the surface temperature of which amply exceeded 50°C in the course of the weekend. The smooth, low-wearing track also generated high amounts of thermal energy but tyres had precious few opportunities to cool due to the circuit's fast turns and undulating layout. Their only chance to 'take a breather' was along the long start/finish straight.

In conditions like this, the interior temperature of MICHELIN Pilot Sport Endurance's tread band can soar to as high as 150°C, exposing tyres to the risk of blistering. Although this phenomenon has no impact on either safety or performance, it can lead to the generation of vibrations that detract from the drivers' comfort.

"Michelin had four engineers and chemists at Portimão to monitor the performance of our new LMH tyres in extremely hot weather," says **Aurélien Fabre**, Chief Developer of the new MICHELIN Pilot Sport Endurance range. "We dissected and analysed a high number of tyres to identify the correlation between the phenomenon of blistering, the high running temperatures, the cars' set-ups and the different driving styles. We leave Portugal delighted with our weekend for two reasons. First of all, it demonstrated the capacity of the MICHELIN Pilot Sport LMH range to deliver winning performance in spite of the heat, and our partners were effectively able to double-stint their tyres with ease during the race. Secondly, the amount and quality of the data we collected at Portimao will allow us to make further improvements to our simulation systems which are already exceptionally reliable."

The 8 Hours of Portimao also served as a test bench for the new Michelin 29/71-18 fronts and 31/71-18 rears used by the Glickenhaus 007 LMH. They were developed entirely on the simulator and had only previously run during the new car's development testing.

"We worked hand in hand with our partner Glickenhaus to finetune the set-up of its car and optimise the performance of its tyres," notes **Pierre Alves**, Manager of Michelin's endurance racing programmes. "However, developing a car in private testing and contesting a round of the FIA WEC in a competitive environment, with traffic and having to adhere a strategy are two different things altogether."

"With the 2021 Le Mans 24 Hours approaching fast, we are making the most of every opportunity to progress and work alongside our new partner who will run two cars in the next round of the FIA WEC [July's 6 Hours of Monza] before the season's big one at Le Mans."



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An entertaining duel between Alpine and Toyota

The eagerly awaited clash between Alpine Elf Matmut and Toyota Gazoo Racing was one of the weekend's chief talking points. The potential of the Alpine A480-Gibson allowed it to qualify on pole position, but the car was penalised during the race by its shorter range compared with that of the Toyota GR010 Hybrid. All eyes were consequently on the monitors when the French car pitted for its first refuelling stop after 30 laps, with a lead of more than five seconds over the two Toyotas. The two GR010 Hybrids, which are also equipped with electric motors, were able to stay out for six more laps before pitting. They re-joined six seconds behind the Alpine.

The teams' engineers used their respective simulation systems to see if this performance delta could be absorbed by the time saved during refuelling stops and tyres played a fundamental role in this calculation, since double stinting on the same rubber equated to a saving of up to 25 seconds in the pits. Judicious management of their Michelin tyres and the exceptional consistency of the latter's performance were key to determining the most effective race strategies, as well as to the final outcome, aided by the French tyres' 'Performance Made to Last' qualities and their ability to take the afternoon's high track temperatures in their stride.

In the end, the eight-hour thriller was won by the N°8 Toyota GR010 of Sébastien Buemi/Kazuki Nakajima/Brendon Hartley which was followed over the line by its N°7 sister car (Mike Conway/Kamui Kobayashi/José Maria Lopez) and the N°36 Alpine A480-Gibson of André Negrão/Nicolas Lapierre/Matthieu Vaxivière.

There were fiercely-fought scraps, too, in the LM GTE Pro and LM GTE Am races where all the cars were competing on Michelin tyres. Despite the exacting nature of the circuit, which put the cars and their drivers to a truly punishing test, the HARD MICHELIN Pilot Sport – Michelin's recommendation – turned out to be the most durable and competitive solution.

The LM GTE Pro class was won by the Ferrari 488 GTE Evo of Alessandro Pier Guidi/James Calado, ahead of the similar car of Miguel Molina/Daniel Serra and the Porsche 911 RSR-19 of Kevin Estre/Neel Janiet/Michael Christensen. The LM GTE Am spoils went to the Cetilar Racing-tended Ferrari 488 GTE Evo, ahead of Team Project 1's Porsche 911 RSR-19 and the AF Corse-run N°54 Ferrari 488 GTE Evo of Flohr/Castellacci/Fisichella.

The third round of the 2021 FIA World Endurance Championship will take teams to Italy for the 6 Hours of Monza on Sunday, July 18.



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