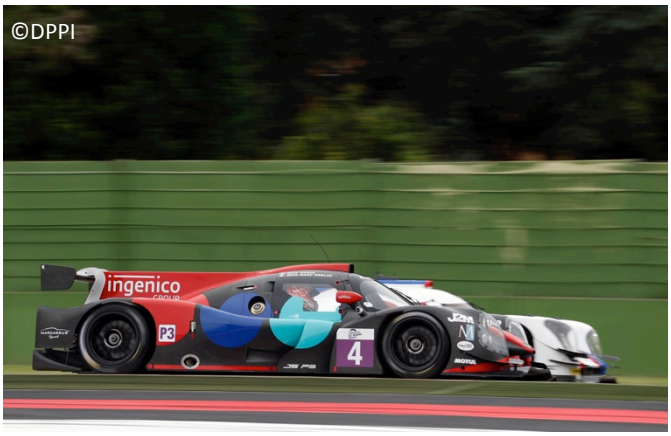
OAK Racing Press Release , 17 May 2016
ELMS – Imola 4 Hours

Work and progress but little reward!

This weekend, the Imola 4 Hours, the second round of the 2016 European Le Mans Series, took place on the legendary Enzo e Dino Ferrari Autodromo. Entrants enjoyed fine, sunny weather for most of the weekend until the final hour of the race when a downpour hit the Italian circuit, and it finished under the safety car. Thanks to the excellent work carried out by the team and the perseverance of the drivers, the OAK Racing nos 4 and 24 Ligier JS P3s both crossed the finishing line despite challenging weather and traffic conditions.



Each car covered around 70 laps in the two free practice sessions, which helped Erik Maris and Jean-Marc Merlin in no. 4 and Jacques and Pierre Nicolet in no. 24, to find their marks on the 4.9 km undulating twisty Imola circuit covered in an anti-clockwise direction. All four drivers said how much they liked the track which is acknowledged to be a difficult, very technical, quick layout. As there isn't really a straight on which the drivers can relax for a moment, it is very demanding physically for them, and the fact that there were 41 cars on the circuit added to the difficulties. The work carried out by the team and the drivers during the three hours' free practice helped them improve their times on a regular basis and find the right setups for qualifying.

This year qualifying in the ELMS is particularly fraught as the drivers have only 10 minutes to set the times that decide the grid positions. Jean-Marc Merlin and Pierre Nicolet in the Ligier JS P3s in the colours of the Ingenico Group and Marcassus Sport did a brilliant job as they both improved their fastest laps in 1m 43.178sec and 1m 41.062sec respectively.

After a satisfactory start to the weekend for the whole team and the drivers the race proved somewhat more difficult. While they got off to a good start despite some worries, in particular because of the traffic, a little later on the latter resulted in the no. 24 Ligier JS P3 in the hands of Pierre Nicolet being punted off the track by another car. Luckily, he was able to bring no. 24 back to its pit where repairs cost it half-an-hour despite the hard work of the mechanics.

In the hands of Jean-Marc Merlin and Erik Maris no. 4 had a solid race apart from a spin. The car wasn't damaged in the incident and stayed on the track coming home in 15th place in the LM P3 category.

The race had been running for three hours for the nos 4 and 24 Ligier JS P3s entered by OAK Racing when a downpour hit the circuit and this led to a full course yellow followed by the deployment of the safety car, which stayed out until the chequered flag. Thus, the last hour of the race was a very frustrating one for all the drivers so the Imola 4 Hours ended in disappointment tempered with common sense.

The team is now preparing for a rather special rendezvous added to the six rounds on its ELMS programme. OAK Racing will enter two cars for the first Road to Le Mans race, a curtain-raiser to the legendary 24 Hours.

Jérôme Boespflug, OAK Racing Team Manager: *"Although we're a bit disappointed by the race, in particular by the incident involving no. 24, we can take away a lot of positives from the Imola event. Erik, Jean-Marc, Jacques and Pierre enjoyed themselves behind the wheel and did an excellent job as they kept improving their times throughout the sessions. The whole team worked hard to find the right setups and to make the cars as quick and as comfortable to drive as possible. It was a difficult race, but it's in situations like these that you progress. All the experience gained this weekend will be very useful for the next events."*

PHOTOS : HD pictures are availble for media & editorial use
www.dppi.fr
Login: media2016
Password: oakracing
Credit: DPPI

CONTACT
Anne Bernard
Communications & Press Manager
a.bernard@oak-racing.com
+33 (0)6 76 84 29 90

www.oak-racing.com
facebook.com/oakracingcommunity
@OAKRacingLive
oakracing