

TEAM BENTLEY COMES FOURTH AT LE MANS

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([PRWEB](#)) June 20, 2002 -- Le Mans, June 16th 2002, 4.00pm. Team Bentley has again proved its class and pace at the Le Mans 24-hours, coming home fourth overall and second only to the works Audi R8s. The result is testament to the design of the Bentley EXP Speed 8, the calibre of the drivers and the dedication and professionalism of the pit-crew. Moreover it vindicates the strategy of using this as a development year and entering just one car with a brand new Bentley engine.

Those who had read too much into the qualifying times gave Bentley little hope of achieving such a result but, within the team, there was always confidence that the 11th place on the grid reflected only the fact that the team chose to use neither qualifying engines or tyres.

Once the race started the true picture emerged with Andy Wallace charging through the field to take fourth by the end of the first hour. Almost immediately, however, a faulty compressor on a turbocharger wastegate forced Andy to stop, and while the problem was solved in the pit-lane in a matter of minutes, by the time the car rejoined it lay in 18th place.

It took another five hours to climb back to fifth position and a further three to regain the fourth position Bentley had occupied so soon after the start. The dramas, however, were far from over with two lengthy safety car periods and a trip into the gravel when Eric van de Poele was forced off the road by a slower GT car. Mercifully no damage was done but by the time the car had been extracted, the Bentley had dropped back to fifth place.

By breakfast, however, the Bentley was back in fourth place with a two lap margin over the next fastest car. It allowed the team to make a precautionary change of front brake discs and pads without losing position. As the race moved towards its conclusion, the Bentley continued to circulate with reliability and consistency. The clutch was bled during a routine pitstop and harder tyres were fitted to suit the considerable afternoon heat.

This result has not only been a fine one for the team, it has also provided both the encouragement and the raw data to kick-start the programme that will see Team Bentley return to Le Mans in force next year, all efforts focused on the top step of the podium. Franz-Josef Paefgen, chairman and chief executive, Bentley Motors: "This is a fine result and all the more impressive that it was managed with just one car. The new Bentley engine has proved itself beyond doubt and the teams have performed wonderfully. It is to be remembered that this is the second of a three year programme to win the race, and with the improvements we know we can make, it is fair to say we will be in good shape to achieve our goal of outright victory next year."

Brian Gush: "This result has been achieved not just through all the hours the team has put in over this weekend or even since we arrived in Le Mans. It speaks as much for the days and weeks spent standing at test-tracks putting together a package that is both swift and reliable."

Andy Wallace: "Under the circumstances, this was the best result we could have had. Both car and team



coped extremely well with the pressure and while I'm a bit gutted not to be back on the podium, we all did our best and once again beat all save the Audis.

Butch Leitzinger: None of our problems set us back enough to compromise our finishing position and we ended up where we should. We're not on the podium but we beat everyone else so it's still a great result.

Eric van de Poel: It was a privilege to drive the Bentley over the line to the reception I got from the crowd and the team. Bentley is not just a special car manufacturer, it's a very special racing team and I am proud to have been part of it again.

Dave Ward, crew chief: This is the second year most of us have been together and if anything this year was even harder than last. Half the cars does not mean half the effort and all the crew did much more than they were asked and never let me or Team Bentley down.

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