



Marcel Fassler

The Inside Line

The Audi sportscar star won his third Le Mans 24 Hours in four attempts last week, and recovered by racing in the Nurburgring 24!

You just don't get used to winning the Le Mans 24 Hours; it's always something special. It doesn't matter if it's the first, second or third time, it's such a difficult race to win that you really appreciate the victory – it always feels amazing.

We celebrated the win properly on Sunday night, but I had to keep in mind that I was driving at the Nurburgring 24 Hours the following weekend – so I was a bit more careful! It's great to celebrate with the mechanics, because they work so hard and are a big part of the success. There is so much pressure to achieve a good result that when it happens you have to enjoy it when that pressure is gone.

We had a tough time in our preparations before the race started. After the big crash of Loic [Duval], there were not so many spare parts because they had so much rebuild work to do on that car – don't forget that these cars are really new this year. There were some intense days for our guys, so everyone deserved that celebration on Sunday.

I was in the car when we had the turbo problem. We've never had this issue before; it was a real surprise for us. It was such a bad feeling when I felt the power loss. We had just taken the lead from the Toyota that had its problem [Kazuki Nakajima's electrical failure at dawn] and knew we just had to stay out of trouble, no need to push... all of a sudden I lost turbo pressure and the power became very inconsistent, but I knew I could bring it back to the pits. To start with, you think, 'I'm sure they can fix this, we can keep our lead' but then it took time.



maybe an hour, but I was always dreaming about waking up to drive the car anyway – I think I was in standby mode, not totally switched off! It's noisy behind the pits, it's never easy to find sleep at Le Mans – but I felt really good, very strong and not tired at all.

Going back to Loic's crash on Wednesday, it was a big shock for all of us. Such a high-speed crash, which looked really bad. We were very happy Loic had almost no injury, just some bruises. Once we knew he was fine, our guys checked there was no puncture or broken suspension or anything. It was difficult to explain what happened, with no TV pictures. I knew there were some pictures around of him crashing, and how the car looked afterwards, but I tried to

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From all my experience, I thought, 'The victory, for sure, has gone'. We were racing for second place, but then everything turned around again when the #1 car had the same problem, and we were back chasing for the win again.

Due to the new rules and regulations we have this year, the technical side has played a big part in this race: nobody was without technical issues. Even after all our endurance tests, these cars are quite young with some brand-new technology that everyone has to learn as they go along. Maybe, in the end, we had fewer issues than the other cars and spent the least time in the pits. I think that was the key point to our victory.

I did eight stints in the car, and we kept to our pre-planned order. I had no other problems apart from that, there weren't too many safety cars – no big troubles to manage, actually.

I started driving when it became dark, and then finished when the sun came up, so I had tried to get sleep before this in the daylight hours. I think I slept half an hour,

avoid them. As a driver, you don't want to see this kind of thing. It's important to concentrate on your own business.

Last weekend at the Nurburgring was very different. Even though my Audi R8 LMS is slower than my R18 e-tron quattro, you feel like you're going much faster on the Nordschleife – the track is so challenging! On the grand prix circuit the GT car feels heavy, rolls around a lot and is underpowered, but as soon as you turn onto the Nordschleife it feels completely different.

It's no problem for me to change between an LMP1 and a GT, it's just like a switch. I know the circuit really well and find it easy to get into a rhythm. I'm really happy to race there. I think it's the most challenging track in motorsport.

The fans are fantastic, and if you compare it to Le Mans the Nurburgring is almost like a rock concert or festival – it's a race that has its own rules. People having fun, camping in the trees, cheering, drinking. Le Mans has its own great atmosphere and spirit, and although I wouldn't say the 'Ring 24 is better than Le Mans, it's just very different. ☞