



BMW Motorsport

BMW works driver Alessandro Zanardi puts up a brave fight at the season opener in Nogaro.

Nogaro (FR), 21th April 2014. BMW works driver Alessandro Zanardi (IT) has completed his debut weekend in the BMW Z4 GT3. Today's main race was the highlight of the curtain raiser for the 2014 Blancpain Sprint Series at Nogaro (FR). The 47-year-old put in a strong performance in this first main race of his comeback season. He was in the top ten for most of the race, despite the fact he could not change gears properly as there was an issue with the special clutch mechanism developed for him. He only dropped back on the final laps to finish 13th. After it had rained yesterday, conditions were dry today with even some sun.

In yesterday's qualifying race, Zanardi qualified 14th on the grid for today's main race in his BMW Z4 GT3 entered by ROAL Motorsport. The 47-year-old had a strong start and improved to tenth on the opening lap. When the field had sorted itself out after the mandatory pit stops, Zanardi was running in 11th but, with a great overtaking manoeuvre, he fought his way back into the top ten. Despite the fact that he was struggling with the clutch issue, he held tenth position until the closing stages of the race, but then dropped back to 13th.

BMW Motorsport Director Jens Marquardt said: "It was great to see Alex back in race action. At his debut in the BMW Z4 GT3 he proved he is still a real racer. He can be satisfied with his performance. You should not forget that GT racing is something new for him, and that he is competing against strong and experienced rivals. A big 'Thank You' also to ROAL Motorsport, who did a great job in preparing the BMW Z4 GT3. The debut is over, now we are looking forward to many more great race weekends with Alex this season."

Zanardi reported after the race: "I am taking a very philosophical view, because racing is racing and something like this can happen. But to lose points today when we could have scored some is a pity, because it was my debut and to come home with championship points would have been great. But in my heart I know we had a strong finish to the weekend, which did not start very well. In the race our BMW Z4 GT3 was probably better than many other cars, so this gives me hope for the next races. Unfortunately we had this problem, which has nothing to do with BMW, but it was the clutch which we installed for me. It compromised my race even in the first half. After the pit stop, I managed to somehow start without the clutch, but then the car became very difficult to drive and basically I was driving the whole third sector in fourth gear to avoid problems. At the hairpin I tried to shift down but nothing was happening, then all of a sudden the gears were there. But what can you do, this is racing. Now I am looking forward to the next round."

Roberto Ravaglia, Team Principal of ROAL Motorsport, added: "I'm very satisfied with Alex's performance. He could have been in the top ten, but unfortunately he had some issues with the special clutch installed in the car for him. Without that he could have scored the first championship points in the first race of the series. Now we are going to analyse the data to clearly understand what happened. His best lap time was quite good, as he was the eighth fastest driver on track. This shows how



competitive Alex can be. Now we need to work in order to improve in qualifying and to let him start from a better position than this weekend's 14th. I'm confident and I'm looking forward to the next race."

Today's main race was won by the driver pairing of Maximilian Buhk/Maximilian Götz (both DE). The best BMW pairing was Sergio Jimenez/Caca Bueno (both BR) in the BMW Z4 GT3 of BMW Sports Trophy Team Brazil, who finished fifth. Usually two drivers share each car, but the regulations allow handicapped drivers like Zanardi, who had both his legs amputated, or category Bronze drivers over the age of 30 to compete by themselves. The second round of the Blancpain Sprint Series will be held at Brands Hatch (GB) from 16th to 18th May.

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