

Pratt and Miller's Historic Daytona Win

Superb Car Preparation and Outstanding Teamwork Yield Overall Victory

The big news story out of Daytona prior to the start of the 2001 Rolex 24 Hour race was the driver lineup in the Pratt & Miller built #2 C5-R. Corvette racing regulars, Andy Pilgrim and Kelly Collins, were joined by NASCAR legends, Dale Earnhardt Sr. and Dale Earnhardt Jr., but after the race was over all the attention shifted to the #3 C5-R, driven by Ron Fellows, Chris Kneifel, Franck Freon, and Johnny O'Connell. Superb preparation by the Pratt & Miller crew, consistently great driving, and outstanding teamwork enabled the #3 GTS class machine to defy more powerful prototype class cars, overcome inclement weather and get past mechanical gremlins to achieve an astounding overall victory.

The 39th running of the famed Rolex 24 at Daytona started in dry weather but heavy, dark clouds overhead foreshadowed what was to come. When the rain began to fall three hours in, the #2 C5-R enjoyed a comfortable lead in GTS and held 6th position overall behind five prototypes. The #2 car kept climbing up the order with Franck Freon taking it to the 5th overall after 6 hours of racing, Ron Fellows moving up to 4th two hours later and Chris Kneifel making it to 3rd at the half race mark.

While C5-R #2 kept creeping up the order, its sister Corvette had to deal with several problems, including a broken half-shaft. Once that was fixed, both cars made it through the 13-hour long Florida night without any other issues except for a precautionary change of the ECU on the #2 car after the heavy rain started to affect the electronics.

Three and a half hours from the end, C5-R #2 Corvette moved into 1st overall after the leading prototype suffered an engine failure. Twenty-four wet and grueling hours after it began, Fellows took the checkered flag. "It makes up for the last year," the Canadian driver said with a smile. In 2000 the team missed out on the overall victory by a mere 32 seconds.

Teammate Johnny O'Connell added another important win to his tally. "I've won Sebring outright and won my class in Le Mans, so this makes it three wins in the three most important endurance races in the world. This is my best win ever. I can't say enough about Pratt & Miller and about General Motors. It's unbelievable! We had a very good car, four very smart drivers and that's what it takes to win a 24-hour race."

Chris Kneifel agreed with O'Connell: "This win is a tribute to the great racing effort of GM, Pratt & Miller and the great car that is the Corvette. We think of it as America's greatest sports car, but today it became the world's greatest sports car. There's nothing like winning this event in a Corvette!"

Corvette Team Manager Gary Pratt summed up the weekend: "Finishing 1st and 2nd in GTS is a fantastic result by itself, but winning this race outright with a GT car is unbelievable. The victory is a tribute to the depth of talent and dedication of everyone at Pratt & Miller!"