



LD3 Designspeed's GT3 for Blancpain runs as high as 10th overall in the first hour. **BELON** The race begins 11 minutes before the race.

It is four o'clock in the afternoon on July 25 and the cars—Audi R8s, Bentley Continentals, BMW Z4s, Ferrari 458s, Lamborghini Huracans, McLaren 650 Ss, Mercedes SLSs, Porsche 911s, and more—are being positioned on the starting grid of the 24 Hours of Spa. This being the Belgian Ardennes, near the German border, it is as usual raining cats and dogs. Umbrellas, rain tires, temperatures hovering below 60° F, wet photographers, and shivering grid girls do not make for a glamorous scene, but it's the price one must pay to compete in what one driver calls "probably the best GT race in the world."

The Total 24 Hours of Spa (named after its main sponsor, a French oil company), along with the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the Nürburgring 24 Hours, represents the pinnacle of GT racing in Europe. The race, first run in 1924, is also the crown jewel of the Blancpain Endurance Series, a six-event calendar that turns GT3 cars into endurance racers. The Blancpain series was launched in 2011 and met with

instant success. Today, it runs at high-quality tracks like Monza, Paul Ricard, Silverstone, and the Nürburgring, and features massive fields of more than 50 cars in three classes.

Ferrari is well-represented, with 14 Italia GT3s spread among the 57 starters. A 458 wasn't expected to win outright, however, as none were entered in Blancpain's fastest GT3 Pro class. Instead, ten of the Ferraris ran in Pro-Am, the remaining four in the Am (Gentleman) class.

America has contributed two of this year's Ferraris. The #100 Dragonspeed 458, driven by Ryan Dalziel, Henrik Hedman, Ethon Julian, and Anthony Luzzaro qualified mid-field in Pro-Am. Kessel Racing's #111 Italia, piloted by Stephen Earle, Liam Talbot, Marco Zanuttini, and Marc Rorran gridded in sixth place in Am.

The start, at 4:30, is wet. After the green light, the field storms towards Raidillon in clouds of spray. These are not the best circumstances for a safe race and it shows: The first safety car arrives after just 20

## DAY and NIGHT

Two American Ferrari teams tackle the brutal 24 Hours of Spa.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MICHEL MULDER

