

Algarve Pro Racing's John Falb, Alex Peroni and James Allen scaled the LMP2 Pro-Am podium in the European Le Mans Series (ELMS) 4 Hours of Monza (1-3 July).

As in previous rounds, testing and free practice was all about race preparation, yet Allen in the #47 ORECA 07 still placed Algarve Pro in the thick of the fight for pole position in Saturday's hotly-contested qualifying session.

The young, rapid Aussie repeatedly set purple sectors but was pipped to pole by those who ran a second set of tyres late on, his best time of 1m38.625s proving sufficient for fourth on the grid, with Sophia Flörsch in the sister #19 car the highest-ranked Silver-rated driver in 14th.

In the race itself, American Am Falb became baulked in the pack and could do nothing to prevent his fall from fourth to 14th on lap one, but he soon recovered to 11th overall, where he had a clear view of the Pro-Am-leading #34 Racing Team Turkey entry.

Falb saw out his double stint, extended by intense fuel-saving under successive Safety Cars, passing control of the #47 machine to Peroni during the third neutralisation.

The Aussie was a fixture of the top eight for the duration of his mid-race run, but there were a wide array of strategies in play and the order shuffled incessantly thereafter.

Allen was plugged in to the #47 ORECA on lap 68, ascending into the Pro-Am podium places at the expense of the #88 AF Corse entry and quickly zoning

in on the top two in the LMP2 sub-category after a late splash-and-dash.

In fact, the top three in Pro-Am continued converging to a point where the #24 Nielsen Racing, #34 Racing Team Turkey and #47 Algarve Pro machines were separated by just two seconds.

It was a tense finish to the 4 Hours of Monza and, as Allen's attempts to pass the second-placed #34 car were thwarted, the order remained unchanged and Algarve Pro classified third with Falb, Peroni and Allen.

John Falb (#47 Algarve Pro Racing ORECA 07

LMP2): "I'm really happy to be on the European Le Mans Series podium for the first time in 2022. We had a tough, interesting race with so many Safety Cars and Full Course Yellows. My start was really good until the exit of the first chicane when another car bogged down, backing up the field and enabling several cars to pass me. That was frustrating but I kept my head down and basically pounded out my laps until the first driver-change.

"Alex (Peroni) did a really good job on triple-stinted tyres, then there was a lot more shuffling of the order during James's (Allen) run. After the last round of stops, we were within sight of the lead. James tried a move on the #34 Racing Team Turkey car for second in LMP2 Pro-Am but was pushed wide and finished third. It's certainly nice to have our first Pro-Am podium of the season. It's a great team effort and we've taken a decent haul of points away from Monza, but there's a lot of work to do if we're to make real headway in the

championship and that's something I'm really looking forward to."

Alex Peroni (#47 Algarve Pro Racing ORECA 07 LMP2): "The European Le Mans Series 4 Hours of Monza was actually quite a tough race, because it was incredibly hot and the car was on edge the entire time. The sheer number of Safety Cars and Full Course Yellows also made it difficult and we fell down a bit in the first half of the race. We clawed our way back up the order and put ourselves in the fight for the LMP2 Pro-Am podium, though. It would have been nice to come away with something more but we'll take this one. A big thank you to Algarve Pro Racing and all of my sponsors. Hopefully we can build on this result in Barcelona."

James Allen (#47 Algarve Pro Racing ORECA 07 LMP2): "It was definitely a hard-fought race for us. It seemed like the heat was making it difficult for everyone to manage tyres during the race, and then there were a lot of incidents that threw a spanner in the works for many teams' strategies. Overall, our pace was good and we managed to get right in behind the LMP2 Pro-Am leaders at the end, but overtaking is another thing entirely and we had to settle for third. Still, it was nice to get our first podium of the season and I can't wait for more."

From 14th on the grid, Silver-rated Bent Viscaal made an immediate impact in the #19 Algarve Pro entry, quickly working his way up into the top six before bridging the gap to and clearing the #43 Inter Europol Competition machine for fifth prior to the first Safety Car.

The Dutchman pounced on the #22 United Autosports car for fourth soon after returning to green flag running

but found himself at the head of the field when Algarve Pro kept him out while the majority boxed during a third neutralisation.

Very much out of sync with the bulk of the LMP2 field, Viscaal did well to prevent the pursuing #37 Cool Racing and #28 IDEC Sport cars from getting within 20 seconds of him on the approach to his second stop on lap 45, when Flörsch took the reins of the #19 car.

Inconveniently, the driver-change occurred just prior to a Full Course Yellow (FCY) that enabled the bulk of the LMP2 field to get cheap stops and demote Algarve Pro's Flörsch all the way down to a lowly 13th.

However, the German racer and teammate Viscaal pushed on and regularly cycled back into the top eight as strategies unfolded, ultimately coming home disappointed on the very edge of the top ten.

Algarve Pro Racing Team Principal, Stewart Cox, said: "We achieved our first European Le Mans Series LMP2 Pro-Am podium of the year, but I'm going home disappointed with the results for both the #47 and #19 crews. All five drivers were absolutely amazing, the cars were quick and our strategy calls were right, but opportunities went the way of other LMP2 teams and we were also compromised by the championship organiser's poor planning.

"For some reason, the pit garages were allocated in such a way that three LMP2 teams were placed together, and that caused a lot of headaches, with teams blocking each other and people having to jump out of the way of cars coming into or exiting the pits. All

three teams did as much as they could to create space but it was futile.”

Cox continued: “This also influenced our strategy; we chose not to box the #19 ORECA during the third stoppage because those around us would have also pitted and blocked us in, and because our mechanics had to carry wheels and tyres over the cars, we were concerned about damaging dive planes and bodywork. Because we didn’t box we knew we were exposed to stoppages for a few laps and, lo and behold, there was a Full Course Yellow immediately after we pulled the #19 car in, absolutely destroying the race for Bent (Viscaal) and Sophia (Flörsch). I don’t mind taking a chance on strategy, but the fact we did it purely because we didn’t want to cause an incident in pit lane is a hard pill to swallow.

“The pace was mega with both cars, we were trying absolutely everything and everyone was happy. John (Falb), Alex (Peroni) and James (Allen) all pushed on and we quickly caught first and second in LMP2 Pro-Am in the last stint, but James only had four laps to get the overtakes done and the order ultimately stayed the same. It’s nice that they got to stand on the podium for the first time this year, but I’m still very disappointed.”