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Payne and Rousseau on top as FIM Sidecar World Championship gets under way in Le Mans

Former champions Harrison Payne and Kevin Rousseau got their quest to regain the FIM Sidecar World Championship title off to a perfect start after dominating Qualifying and both points-scoring races when the 2026 series got under way at the Circuit Bugatti in Le Mans, France, at the weekend.



Podium at 2026 FIM Sidecar World Championship - Le Mans (France) © Mark Walters

- 2026 FIM Sidecar World Championship opens at Circuit Bugatti
- Former champions Harrison Payne and Kevin Rousseau draw first blood
- Sam and Thomas Christie begin title defence with third in France

Staged as part of the iconic 24 Heures Motos, the opening event in the six-round series gave fans an early indication of which crews have been working hard over the winter break and the British/French pairing – champions in 2024 – had clearly put the hours in during the off-season, shrugging off determined challenges from defending champions Sam and Thomas Christie and veteran Finn Pekka Päivärinta with Adam Christie, the third of the British brothers, in the chair.

Following a close-fought Qualifying that saw the leading five crews separated by less than a second, Payne/Rousseau led the eleven-lap Sprint race on Friday (17 April) into the first turn with Päivärinta/Christie slotting into second ahead of Christie/Christie and Switzerland's Markus Schlosser with new German passenger Lucas Krieg.

With the leading pair beginning to gap the chasing pack, the British team of Lewis Blackstock and Oliver Lawrence – who claimed a race podium on their sole championship appearance last season – were forced to pull out when their outfit caught fire.

Just after half-distance the safety car came out for another incident and remained on the circuit until one lap remained before Payne/Rousseau opened their account with maximum points ahead of Christie/Christie and Päivärinta/Christie as Schlosser/Krieg took fourth from the British/French pairing of Todd Ellis and Emmanuelle Clément with a pass on the final lap.



2026 FIM Sidecar World Championship - Le Mans (France) © Mark Walters

The following morning the crews rolled up to the startline for the concluding eighteen-lap Main race and Payne/Rousseau once again put their outfit into the lead chased by the Christie brothers and the French son and father team of Ted and Vincent Peugeot along with Päivärinta/Christie and Schlosser/Krieg.

With the leading pair looking good for another twenty-five points, the red flags came out following a crash involving the British/French pairing of Lewis Nicol and Clément Conil that forced a restart over a five-lap race distance.

Payne/Rousseau made sure their earlier form was not wasted as they immediately re-established their position at the front of the field with the Christie brothers losing an initial second to Päivärinta/Christie. Ellis/Clément and Peugeot/Peugeot fought for fourth ahead of Schlosser/Krieg who led Britain's multi-time champion Tim Reeves – who last won the FIM Sidecar Rider World Championship title in 2019 – with France's Mélanie Farnier in the sidecar.

With the gaps between the leaders lengthening, Payne/Rousseau brought it home almost five seconds clear of Päivärinta/Christie with the Christie brothers almost two seconds further adrift in third before another sizeable gap to Ellis/Clément and Peugeot/Peugeot.

The focus now switches to Grobnik-Rijeka in Croatia where round two will take place over the weekend of 9-10 May.

[OFFICIAL RACE 1 RESULTS HERE](#)

[OFFICIAL RACE 2 RESULTS HERE](#)

Selected rounds of the 2026 FIM Sidecar World Championship will be streamed LIVE on FIM-MOTO.TV. For more information [click here](#).



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Contact - Isalen Cooper | Press Coordinator | isalen.cooper@fim.ch

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