



GT NEWS



GT3 MEDIA LAUNCH AND SRO PRIZE-GIVING Dec 2005

The FIA GT3 European Championship got off to a glittering start in Monaco on December 2nd, with an extremely well-attended press conference and a display of cars in front of the prestigious Hotel de Paris. In the presence of FIA President, Mr Max Mosley, and Vice-President Mr Marco Piccinini, Stephane Ratel, Chairman of SRO, presented his new Championship, which is the culmination of many months of hard work.

With an innovative Cup of Cups format, and non-professional drivers competing both among their Manufacturers groups and for an overall title, the new series will run alongside the FIA GT Championship. The performance of the cars, of varying architectures, will be balanced, following the principles used with such success in the 2005 season of the FIA GT Championship.

"I think the FIA GT3 European Championship is an excellent idea, and we at the FIA are very pleased about it," Mr Max Mosley said. "It fills a gap in the market and it provides the possibility of very good and very entertaining racing for competitors and drivers who might otherwise be left out in the ever more professional top end of GT racing. So we are delighted."

A display of the cars aiming at the new Championship included the Ascari KW01, the Aston Martin DBRS9, the Corvette Z06 GT3, the Dodge Viper Coupe, the Lamborghini Gallardo, Lotus Elise, Maserati Gran Sport Light, Porsche 997 and Venturi Heritage.

The press conference was followed by the first official test day, at the impressive Paul Ricard High-Tech Test Track. The cars were joined by the Nissan 350Z, and a full day's testing took place. This also saw the start of the performance balancing procedures, which will continue in March and April, before the first race in May, scheduled for Silverstone on the 7th.

"It was a very busy day," Christophe Bouchut said. "Working for the FIA is something I take very seriously, and during the test, I completed over 400 kilometres, driving the eight cars present for over four and a half hours. It was exhausting, but very satisfying, and I am very pleased that I did not make any mistakes. The cars are so very different, that it is quite amazing that globally their performances are really so similar."

ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB TOURIST TROPHY CONFIRMED FOR SILVERSTONE

As part of the celebrations in Monaco, it was confirmed that the Royal Automobile Club Tourist Trophy will be contested at the British Round of the 2006 FIA GT Championship at Silverstone on 7th May 2006, further to the tremendous success of the centenary celebrations earlier this year. Royal Automobile Club Chairman, Tim Keown said, *"We are delighted to see that this historic trophy is being re-established as a firm fixture in contemporary motor sport. The Tourist Trophy was the event that all the great racing drivers wanted to win. Teams driving Rolls-Royce, Jaguar, Aston Martin and Ferrari, amongst others, have all fought for the coveted prize over the last hundred years and now the battle of the titans can take place once again."*



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FIA President, Mr Max Mosley



PROVISIONAL CALENDAR - FIA GT3 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

- May 7th - Silverstone (GBR)
- July 2nd - Oschersleben (GER)
- July 30th - Spa (BEL)
- Sept 3rd - Magny-Cours (FRA)
- Sept 17th - Imola (ITA)

FIA GT3 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Claudio Berro, Maserati :



“ For me, the GT3 is a very fantastic idea. We spoke with Stephane some years ago about this type of car, when we prepared a car for the 24 Hours of Daytona. The car was completely normal, with normal gearbox and engine, not an expensive car, and it ran for 24 hours without any problems



and finished tenth in the race. For me, this is the idea for entries in the GT. The car is not expensive, very reliable, and we use a lot of parts from the road version. So that is why I think the GT3 is a good idea, and it was a very good idea of Stephane's to organise this series, to show that you can have endurance without the cost.”

James Turner, Aston Martin : “Aston Martin Racing has had a fantastic first year,



really enjoyed ourselves, and we were delighted to finish the season with a win for our privateer team, Cirtek. GT3 seems to us to be a great series, with close, exciting racing, a bedrock for international Sportscar racing, sensible budgets, nice cars and hopefully some good parties as well. For us, the DBRS9 was designed for GT3. It is very closely designed to the production car, the only V12 car in the Championship, a very nice, well-balanced car to drive, and we are looking forward to seeing it on



track tomorrow. To conclude with our team announcement, I am delighted to say that BMS Scuderia Italia has taken three cars and will be entering those in the Championship as our works Aston Martin team in FIA GT as well. Similarly, Barwell Motorsport from England, the former British Touring Car Championship winners, have taken three cars as well. There are still one car and two drives available. We are delighted with the new GT3 series, it's going to be a marvelous spectacle, and as Stephane said, we're going to have fun like never before.”

Gildo Pastor, Venturi :



“We have to start with thanking Stephane, who back in the 1990's helped Venturi very much. The first year of the Venturi Gentlemen Drivers Trophy has 75 cars taking part. I was not in the company at the time, but it was the biggest trophy ever, and we have to thank him for that. I joined the company five years ago, and it was very hard for a small manufacturer like us to race at the time, and we spoke many times with Stephane about it.



We concentrated on electric sports cars. But today, thanks to this initiative, Venturi Cars can go back to racing, and I am very pleased to see many familiar faces here today. I hope you all enjoy the car, which is now on display outside. It is a typical Venturi, a Trophy car adapted for today. We wanted to keep the spirit of the Gentlemen Drivers' Trophy alive. I hope it is going to be a big fight out there, but it going to be fun, and to be a very successful Championship, I am sure.”

Chris Arnold, Lotus Cars :



“The strapline of Lotus is 'performance through light weight'. We specialise in producing small cars, which are very light and have efficient small engines. Historically, that means that we have not been able to enter GT1 or GT2. We were very interested when Stephane announced GT3, as it is based on power



to weight ratios, which can be translated to 'performance through light weight', so we decided we would set Peter Wright a challenge by bringing an Exige prototype car, which is 285 bhp and 750 kg. We are very keen on GT3, as I was brought up in the 60's and 70's, when Elans and Elites were chasing Astons and so on around the circuits. I really hope this Championship can get back to that sort of racing in 2006.”

Hans Reiter, Reiter Engineering:



“We at Reiter Engineering are very lucky, as the basic Lamborghini Gallardo as it is on the street has already got 520 hp, an aluminium chassis, double-wishbone race suspension, the brakes are already good enough to go the distance, and there is not too much for us to do. The car is one of the good basis for GT3, and I am deeply convinced that GT3 is the future for GT racing in the long term.”



Mike Gramke, Carsport Holland

“ It is absolutely amazing to see how many different beautiful cars have been presented here today. I think there has no GT Championship in the world ever started with such a variety of cars. Well done Stephane, as you said you are mad and it seems like that you have a huge number of supporters for your (mad) ideas.

When we made the decision to develop and build cars for the GT3 championship, we had to choose if we should either base the car on a C6 or a Z06. The answer

was quickly found, as the Z06, with its features such as the aluminium chassis, the carbon bodywork, the magnesium sub frames and the powerful 7l engine gave us the perfect platform for a GT3 car. The biggest challenge we experienced was the fact, that the Z06 was so new, that it was simply not available. We only got delivery off the first car on October 26th. Everyone involved made an impossible mission some how possible and I want to give special thanks to Ernst Woehr and his Callaway Competition organisation. Also without the help off Koos Pettinga (Corvette Europe), it would had remained mission impossible. They all can be very proud.

If all the Manufacturer and Teams have the same positive feedback and interest in their cars, as we have had, than we can look forward to a fantastic season and a new era of GT racing.”



ALSO PRESENT IN MONACO AND AT PAUL RICARD HTTT



Dodge Viper Coupe



Ascari KZ01



Porsche 997



Nissan 350Z

FIA GT3 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP - MEDIA INFO

Two galleries of photos have been made available on the FIA GT website, www.fiagt.com.

The first includes photos from the Media Launch and Press Conference in Monaco, the second photos from the test day at the Paul Ricard circuit.

A temporary user id and password has been set up, gt3/monaco, in order to allow high-resolution photos to be downloaded, which are copyright-free for press use only. All commercial use is restricted.

The press kit from the Monaco conference is also available in the Downloads section, as is a full transcript of the press conference.

For more information, please contact jacquie@groom.ch

SO WHAT IS THE FIA GT3 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP ?

An interview with Stephane Ratel

“Why GT3 ? Because we felt there was a need for a more accessible international series, with all the famous brands of GT cars. There has been an evolution throughout the years of GT2, and GT1, and you all know that this sport is getting more and more professional. At the start, when, along with Jürgen Barth,



we started the BPR series there were a lot of gentlemen drivers, of keen enthusiasts, who were there just for the fun of it. Slowly but surely it became more professional. I thought there was a need for a more accessible formula, with cars which will be less expensive to run, to purchase, and to enjoy.”

What is a GT3 car exactly ?

SR : “The concept is very original, and is one that we started experiencing this year with GT1. It is very simple. In motorsport either you start from some regulations - a lot of legal text, which tells you what you can and cannot do with a car. You put a lot of engineers on the job, a lot of money, and you arrive with cars that are all similar to each other. If you look at Formula One, or at Sports Prototype LMP1 cars - if you painted them all the same colour, you would have difficulties telling one from the other. When you start from a GT car, and we want to start from road-cars, you start from very different architectures. You have cars with front engines, mid engines, rear engines. You have six cylinders, eight cylinders, ten or twelve cylinders. All of this is very complicated. If you look at the history of GT Racing, we always started from cars which were very diverse, and slowly the teams began to transform them. In 1997

and 1998, all the cars became GT1 Prototypes, all starting to look the same with long front overhangs, long rear ends. We looked at this evolution, and came to a conclusion. The architect of this was Peter Wright, and the idea really came from President Mosley, which was that if you start from production cars, there will be a way to balance these cars and give them the same performance. You can play with the aerodynamics, cutting the wing or the spoiler, you can reduce the performance of the engine via air restrictors, and much easier than anything, you can add weight. We haven't invented anything, this has been used in horse-racing for years. You handicap your cars and put them on the same level of performance and get great racing. We thought about it, and decided that if it worked so well, as we experienced this year in the FIA GT Championship - and if you follow that Championship, you will have seen how disputed it has been, perhaps a little bit too much at the end - so we thought why not apply it to another category, the GT3 cars. You just come with what you have : a Porsche, a Ferrari, a Maserati - we are not going to look too closely at the technical regulations, but we will put all these cars on the racetrack, starting tomorrow in Paul Ricard, followed by another test in March and a final test in April, we will compare their performances and, with the same system used in GT1, with the expertise of Peter Wright and all the technical department of the FIA, we will put these cars under the same performance. We are very confident, after what we proved in GT1, that we will succeed in GT3.”

Second element, the drivers. Who can, and who cannot, race in the GT3 Championship ?

SR : “GT racing was re-started mainly with gentlemen drivers, and we wanted to give room once again to these drivers who, I have to say, have deserted the FIA GT Championship. There are very few of them left. We need a category exclusively reserved for them. When I say gentlemen drivers, I do not mean beginners, or inexperienced drivers. Someone like Enzo Calderari, Lilian Bryner - drivers who have been racing

with us for many years and who are very talented, but the fact remains that they are not top professionals. So we have made a very simple rule which is, if you have ever been a Formula One driver, if you have finished in the Top Ten of a major international single-seater series, if you finished in the top six of a Formula Three Championship, if you won Le Mans overall, if you have ever been a contracted factory driver, and you are under 55, you are considered a professional driver. Between 45 and 55 years of age, the GT Bureau will look at his record and decide whether you can be accepted or not. A Formula One driver who stopped his career at 30 and has not raced for fifteen years may be accepted. Someone like Alain Prost, who has continued racing and is competing in the French GT Championship will obviously not be considered an amateur. Obviously, if someone falls through the net, someone like Mike Hezemans who has never done any single-seater racing but who is one of the fastest GT drivers today, obviously would not be accepted as an amateur driver in the GT3 Championship.”

On to the Calendar - what will it be like and what is the race configuration ?

SR : “The FIA GT3 calendar will follow most of the European events of the FIA GT Championship. We selected the nicest circuits in Europe - Imola in Italy, Magny-Cours in France, Silverstone in the UK, we will go to Oschersleben in Germany and Spa in Belgium. We have limited it to five races for the first year as we considered the starting costs would be high for the first year. We will have six races in the second year, and I am also an expert in finding exotic locations around the world, so we are sure to go to somewhere in Asia or the Middle East to find somewhere sunny to finish the season. Now that the FIA GT Championship has separated from the FIA World Touring Car Championship, we have space in our meetings, so the GT3 Championship will not only share the same weekends, but the same garages. It will be a very full paddock, with an impressive line of trucks. It will look very busy, and give a very good impact.”

A TESTING DAY FOR CHRISTOPHE BOUCHUT

Named as the first of the official test drivers for the FIA GT3 European Championship, Christophe Bouchut had a busy day at the impressive Paul Ricard High Tech Test Track on December 3rd. Driving for nearly five hours, he completed over 70 laps of the chosen circuit, meaning well over 400 kilometres of driving, in a total of eight different cars !

“It was quite tiring,” Bouchut admitted afterwards. “I had to jump from one car to another, and they were not always set up to suit my size. But globally it all went very well. The cars are very different from each other, and at the end of the day, their times are not too disparate, especially considering different factors such as the state of the tyres and the amount of fuel onboard, which you cannot see from the basic times.

It was very important to get these times in order to begin working on equalising the performances. We have already been able to pinpoint the positive and negative points on each car.

All in all, it went well, and I am pleased with my performances. I drove all the cars without making any mistakes, which would have been quite easy to do, considering the fact that I jumped from one to another, from right-hand drive to left-hand drive, with little time to adapt. I tried to drive each car equally, not pushing for a time - I could have been faster in all of them. But that was not the aim - it was more important to gauge the qualities and problem areas with each car. I think it went well. Working for the FIA is something I take very seriously, and I am very much looking forward to the next test day, in March.”



FIA GT1 TITLES TO BE DECIDED IN FIA COURT OF APPEAL



It has been announced that the International Court of Appeal will hear the appeal on behalf of Larbre Competition against decision nr 9 of the Stewards of the Meeting, concerning the exclusion of car nr 11 of the Bahrain round of the FIA GT Championship, on December 8th, at 15:00, in Monaco. The decision is expected on Friday December 9th 2005. This will finally decide the 2005 FIA GT1 Drivers Champion.

BMS SCUDERIA ITALIA AND BARWELL MOTORSPORT - FIRST TWO TEAMS FOR THE FIA GT3 CHAMPIONSHIP

During the press conference to launch the FIA European GT3 Championship, Aston Martin announced the first two teams to have confirmed their participation in the series.

The first is BMS Scuderia Italia, double FIA GT Champions in 2003 and 2004. The team had already announced that it would be back in 2006, with two Aston Martin DBR9 cars. Now the team will also enter three Aston Martin DBRS9 cars in the new GT3 Championship. “It is a great pleasure to be working so closely with Aston Martin and Aston Martin Racing,” said Tiziano Minuti, the BMS Team Manager. “We have numerous projects to work on together, and we look forward to confirming some exciting drivers for the Championship.”

The second team confirmed by Aston Martin was Barwell Motorsport. The British team, a former winner of the British Touring Car Championship Production class, is moving its focus into GT racing, and its participation in the GT3 series is part of a long-term plan that includes moving up to the FIA GT Championship in due course. In addition to competing in the five FIA GT3 rounds, Barwell has already announced that it will be taking part in the Proximus 24 Hours of Spa with one or two DBRS9 cars.

Mark Lemmer, Managing Director of Barwell Motorsport, commented : “We’ve been looking for an international project for some time, and this is a natural step for us. We are very hungry for more success and keen to establish ourselves in the international GT racing arena.”

THE FIA GT CHAMPIONSHIP - A LOOK BACK AT 2005

Although Monaco's press conference focussed on the FIA GT3 European Championship, there were plenty of opportunities to discuss the 2005 season of the FIA GT Championship.

Mr Max Mosley, President of the FIA, spoke first on the Championship : *"I think that the 2005 season of the FIA GT Championship has been a huge success, and that has very much is a result of the work of the GT Bureau. The biggest problem we have had in GT racing probably for the last 50 years, is that it has been impossible to have the great and the famous marques of cars competing against each other. Being basically built for the road, some of them would always have inherent advantages over others. This was really a big experiment, to see whether it was possible to equalise performances, so that these famous makes could race against each other. I think it has been a huge success, as the wins have been divided very equally between some of the most famous names in the motoring world, and on top of that we have a situation where the last race saw three cars absolutely together, and now we have the final decision to be reached in the FIA Court of Appeal. This is not ideal, in fact it is something we prefer not to happen, but we must recognise that the dispute is all about a third of a litre of fuel. So if that tiny quantity of fuel can decide the outcome of the Championship, as that is what is going to happen, then the work of equalising the performance has been remarkably successful. I believe this concept will go on from strength to strength, as I believe the public, the sponsors, everybody who follows racing, never understood previously why the cars which are the most exciting cars on the road can't race against each other. Well, now they can - very successfully, very competitively. I think that is a remarkable achievement for Stephane, for this series and for the Bureau which does the equalisation work. For my part, I can only congratulate them on this success."*

Stephane Ratel agreed. *"I can only be delighted with the 2005 season. After Maserati scored a powerful one-two in Zhuhai at the end of the 2004 season, everybody said GT racing was dead, and that Maserati with the MC 12 had killed it. We had a lot of debates and discussions with the FIA and with President Mosley, and we proved that the MC 12 has killed nothing. It may have won more races than the other cars, but when you consider that we had four Maserati victories, three Ferrari victories, two Aston Martin victories and two Corvette victories, it has been a fantastic season. We had a number of races decided in the very last lap, Dubai was just unbelievable. We have a fantastic product. We don't have the big star drivers yet, but we have some good names, we have the most amazing cars, and the story is good. And like a movie - if you have a good story, eventually it will find its audience. I am very confident that we are on the right track."*

GT Racing is long-distance racing, and will remain long-distance races, so we will stay at 500 kilometres. We also wanted to reduce costs, by reducing the duration of the weekend. We will keep the same free practice, but will reduce the qualifying session to 20 minutes - you don't need more than that. It will be very exciting to have all drivers on the track at the same time, and the technical people will have all the time to look at the cars very closely after qualifying."

SRO PRIZE-GIVING



The GT1 Teams top three



The leading GT2 drivers



The GT1 drivers and their team managers - the final result is still pending...



Two special awards were also made :

Pedro Lamy for the Driver's Performance of the Year

Rob Schirle (Cirtek) for the most improved team of the year.

Thanks to everyone for a great evening !

THE 2005 FIA GT2 CHAMPIONS : MARC LIEB AND MIKE ROCKENFELLER !

So how does it feel to have won the FIA GT2 Drivers Title ?

Mike Rockenfeller : "It feels good. We won the title quite early, which made it a lot easier for us. It's hard if you have all the pressure in the last race, if it is really close. We finished every race until we won the Championship - the last race, in Dubai, was the first we did not finish. I have to say that the crew did a perfect job. Our car was always well prepared, we had no DNFs, which was the key to winning so early, while Spa was the other key race, as the team's other car had an accident and we were able to build up a big lead in the Championship. For me, to win the title as the youngest driver, is good - although it's a shame that all the coverage is all about GT1. It was a good fight throughout the year between our car and the nr 88 car. We would have liked to have more competition, but it's not our fault that there are no other cars pushing us. And it was really hard to beat the other car, driven by Sugden and Collard. Most of the time we had more weight in the car, so we had to push really hard. It might have looked easy from the outside, and people might say 'they have only one competitor', but you have to push as hard as if you have ten rivals, as that one rival is at the very same level."

Marc Lieb : "When I first won the title, with Stéphane Ortelli back in 2003, that was the perfect season. The battle was Porsche versus Ferrari, and there were about six cars which could win every race. It was all decided in the last race, even though we had a good lead after Spa. It was really tough compared to 2005. However, in the end, I have to say that a Championship is always hard to win, you still have to push 100%, whether you are up against one car or ten. I think this year, we were really well prepared, and we got closer



GT3 OFFICIAL LAUNCH AND TEST DAY

after every race. At the start, everything was brand new. Mike and I had only done two or three races together before the season, although we did know each other. The whole team, engineers, the working together in a group got better through the season, with the best work coming at the end of the season."

Mike Rockenfeller : "If you compare the times to the results of the Freisinger cars last year, we were a lot quicker, despite a smaller restrictor and more weight for most of the time. In Dubai, we were over two seconds quicker than last year's best Porsche time. The team did a great job, and the two of us did as well. There were no team orders, it was a real fight and very open."

Marc Lieb : "In Istanbul, for example, the other car made a strategy call, and was lucky with the safety car - these are things we did not cover in a briefing before the race. They were like a real competitor, which just happened to be in the same garage and with the same car. Dubai was perfect, when we were fighting nose-to-tail for nearly an hour. We had mostly more weight than the other car; we were on the same weight twice, but here in Bahrain, this is the first time we have had less weight than the nr 88 car. But I am really pleased with how we managed to finish the season, as our performance was really good. It might not seem, from the outside, that we did such a good job, but we know what we've achieved."

Mike Rockenfeller : "We didn't crash, we didn't spin, we didn't flat spot a tyre during the whole season. We always set a good pace. And it's a great title to have on your CV. It's always good to be able to say you won the FIA GT2 Championship."

Marc Lieb : "We never put a foot wrong. We just had one crash in Spa, and we went out in the gravel in free practice once. I'm very pleased to win the title again. It has been a great season - especially with the LMES title as well, to have won Spa, to have won Le Mans - both of us had phenomenal seasons."



So which was your favourite race ?

Mike Rockenfeller : "I really liked the first race in Monza. It was really close; I was coming down the pit straight, and Tim was pulling out of the pits - it was really good. But there were many good races."

Marc Lieb : "Apart from the results, I think Istanbul was our best performance. We were a lot quicker than the nr 88 car, it was close at the end - but we didn't win. We had to make up the equivalent of a pit stop, and we nearly managed to do it. I think we had our best car of the year in Istanbul. It was definitely a good experience, and the track is beautiful."

And what about your plans for next year?

Mike Rockenfeller : "I think I will stay with Porsche and they will decide what I drive. It's hard to say with the new rules. It might be nice to try a different Championship instead of defending the title. But I've heard there might be a number of Ferrari cars joining, so if there is a good competition again, like back in 2003, it will be a completely different story."

Marc Lieb : "For me it is a different story. I'm back at University, studying engineering, so I doubt if I can do a full season, especially in the FIA GT, as it would just be too busy, with the travel. But my biggest focus at the moment is my studies. I hope to be back for one or two races at least, and definitely to race at Spa."

Mike Rockenfeller : "I really enjoyed this year, and I really enjoyed racing with Marc. I would love to win again."

Marc Lieb : "We were a perfect team. We had fun all season, with no arguments. . . Kenny Chen has done a really good job putting this team together. I have never seen a better customer team than GruppeM. It's the best private team I've ever been with. Everything is professional, organised, and they all want to win."