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Motorsport

The Audi drivers' opinions on the Le Mans track

- **Non-permanent track is venue for 24 hour race**
- **13.650 kilometres with plenty of challenges**
- **Six Le Mans winners at the wheel of two Audi R10 TDI cars**

The "Circuit des 24 Heures", at a length of 13.650 kilometres, is one of the fastest race tracks in the world and is the scene for this weekend's 74th edition of the Le Mans 24 Hour race. The driving duties of the two Audi R10 TDI cars will be shared by six experienced drivers, each of whom have won Le Mans at least once.

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Which corner is the biggest challenge at Le Mans?

Marco Werner: "From my point of view, the Porsche corners are the most difficult part. It is a high-speed section where an LM P1 car, such as the Audi R10 TDI, is much faster than an LM P2 or a GT car. It is very difficult if you catch up a slower car in the last part of this section, a long right-hand corner. You need to overtake on the outside but there is often a lot of rubber 'pick-up' from tyres on the track surface on this 'off line' part of the track. You can easily collect this rubber which deteriorates the grip of your own tyres."

After years of experience, is it easier to adapt personally to a non-permanent race track?

Dindo Capello: "After so many years, Le Mans almost feels like a 'permanent' track for me. But still, you've got to be cautious at the beginning. The grip is very low, especially in places that are public roads for most of the year. Because of this, there are lots of different grip situations over one lap. There are also several different kinds of tarmac. On a wet track, those differences are even more striking. Without the braking signs posted from 300 metres before each corner, it would be really difficult for us, whereas no such signs are required on a permanent track."

Does a diesel car require a particular driving style on certain sections of the track?

Tom Kristensen: “The characteristics of the diesel power means that we generally need to adapt our driving style at Le Mans. Thanks to the fuel economy, we have longer stints but it also means we need to ‘save’ the tyres during this period. In order to take care of them, we need to be disciplined because only will this allow for a fluid, constant and fast rhythm. Owing to the higher weight on the rear axle, there is a different inertia to deal with. In the Porsche corners, it means the car is just fantastic, not least because of the long wheel base. However, it is now a bigger challenge to perform fast direction changes or to tackle the bumps in the Tertre Rouge corner.”

Is there a special challenge of driving at night at Le Mans?

Emanuele Pirro: “The positive thing is that at night, the tyres have more grip, the engine has more power and the car is quicker. But the driving is more difficult. The lighting situations change quickly at Le Mans – in the pit area, it is very bright, in other places, it’s pretty dark. As the human eye does not adapt that quickly, some sections seem to approach quicker than they actually do. So you feel faster than you are. The most important psychological aspect is to recognize the braking points early, i.e. to spot the brake signs erected 300 metres before the corner. Only if you see them, you feel safe. Overtaking is even easier at night as you will be seen earlier.”

Where is the best chance for overtaking manoeuvres?

Allan McNish: “Thanks to the TDI power of our Audi R10, we have much better overtaking chances at Le Mans than in the previous years when the Audi R8 was very restricted in its power by the rules. The V12 TDI supplies so much torque that we can overtake easier under acceleration out of a corner, even on the outside. The new chassis supports these characteristics as it provides a high driving stability and the aerodynamics are very efficient. So it is easier for us on the whole track, not just at certain corners.”

Does the low noise of the Audi R10 TDI affect the driving style at Le Mans?

Frank Biela: “The Audi R10 TDI is very, very quiet. For me it means that under braking from top speed – for instance on the Hunaudières straight – you’ve got to be even more concentrated than before. Until now, you could change down the gears according to the noise of the engine, but now something is missing. Now I’ve got to change down according to my feeling or I’ve got to focus on the rev counter on the steering wheel display. Only at speeds below 200 kph the engine is louder than the

wind, so you can drive according to the noise as in the past. The positive aspect: over the distance, the low noise is very pleasant, so it is more relaxing for the driver.”

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Photographs, sound bites and additional information on the Internet:

www.audi-motorsport.info (Accreditation necessary)

The Le Mans track (based on the data recording of the Audi R10 TDI during the test day)

