



Le Mans, 18th February 2008

24 HEURES DU MANS

14-15 JUIN 2008

55 entrants selected: a list to inspire dreams!

Endurance rhymes with excellence! The list of entrants invited to take part in the Test day on 1st June, the prelude to the 2008 Le Mans 24 Hours, is the perfect illustration of this. Out of the 88 entries sent in to the ACO Selection Committee, 55 have been selected plus 8 reserves. On the list are the cream of endurance drivers and some of the best in Formula 1!

As the entry forms began to flood in, each one more interesting than the one before, it quickly became obvious that the 76th Le Mans 24 Hours was going to reach an incredible level of suspense.

And that proved to be the case with the international flavour of the teams (14 nationalities) and the wide variety of cars. The attraction that the Le Mans 24 Hours exerts is such that the whole world wants to take part in it, and everybody wants to use it to showcase their talents. This year the route to the rostrum is going to be a very tough one given the number of potential winners in each category. The spectators, who beat the crowd record year after year, and the TV viewers are going to enjoy a marvellous spectacle.

No-holds barred battle between manufacturers - Paradise for F1 drivers

15:00 on Sunday 17th June 2007: out of the 3 Audis at the start only one finished but in 1st place. It was a close-run thing for the German manufacturer as its 7th victory, and its second on the trot in the 24 Hours with a diesel-powered car, almost fell to Peugeot, one of whose two 908 HDi FAPs came home second on its first outing in the Sarthe showing just how quick it was out of the box.

In 2007, the duel between major manufacturers Audi and Peugeot fulfilled all its promises, so just imagine what the revenge will be like in 2008! Both teams have clearly announced their aim: victory.

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But the German manufacturer has a head's start thanks to its string of consecutive successes. Audi's matchless know-how will highlight all the more the prestige of the team that beats it with the same weapon, an LM P1 prototype powered by a diesel engine.

Battles between companies, win market shares, portray their sporting excellence and a dynamic image are among the reasons which drive the major manufacturers to compete in the greatest endurance race in the world.

Each one has entered 3 cars so the overall performance and the technical resources invested are very similar. The outcome will probably be decided by human factors: the speed of the mechanics' intervention in the pits and above all the drivers' performances.

Audi has decided to renew its faith in its victorious drivers including men who have accumulated Le Mans successes like Tom Kristensen (Mr Le Mans with 7 wins), plus young chargers like Alexandre Prémat and Mike Rockenfeller.

Peugeot has chosen the squad which dominated the 2007 Le Mans Series beefing it up with former F1 drivers as well as those currently racing in the championship. It's a very strong pointer to the fact that given the level of competitiveness of the cars entered in the Sarthe, the second life of an F1 driver now passes by the Le Mans 24 Hours. Christian Klien, Franck Montagny, Jacques Villeneuve, Alexander Wurz (at 22 the youngest ever winner of the race in 1996) and Ricardo Zonta will be at the wheel of the Peugeots. The 2008 Le Mans 24-Hours 908 HDi FAP drivers have a total of 393 F1 grand prix between them plus 32 Le Mans 24 Hours. It's an awesome combination of experience spiced up by personal challenges. They've all said, "winning Le Mans is our dream." Jacques Villeneuve, not a wit discouraged by his 2007 retirement, is aiming for an even greater feat. After winning the Indianapolis 500 and the Cart Championship in 1995 and the F1 World Championship title in 1997, he is the only driver currently racing who can pull off an amazing quadruple achievement by winning the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Courage-Oreca with its Judd-powered LM P1 prototypes, one of the main outsiders, is another team to call on the speed, experience and popularity of an F1 driver, Olivier Panis winner of the 1996 Monaco Grand Prix. He has said, "no driver can remain indifferent to the magnetic pull exercised by the Le Mans 24 Hours." Duly noted!

The specialists' riposte

A dream cast for a race to dream on.

This is what the Le Mans 24 Hours is all about.

Above and beyond the forthcoming battle between diesel-engined prototypes and F1 drivers, the best endurance specialists will be waiting to pounce on the slightest mistake of their rivals, who, on paper anyway, look stronger before the start!

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Pescarolo Sport, full of confidence after being taken in hand by businessman, Jacques Nicolet, knows what it feels like to be on the rostrum (2nd in 2005 and 2006, and 3rd in 2007) and the whole team will be aiming to get back up there again this year with its LM P1s.

The closed Lola-Aston Martin prototype entered by Charouz Racing brings back a host of memories. Lola, a world-famous constructor, will celebrate its 50 years in 2008, while for Aston Martin, which supplies the engine, it will recall its outright Le Mans victory 50 years earlier (1959).

The return of the Japanese

The Automobile Club de l'Ouest has always said it: the Japanese will come back to Le Mans in force. And that'll be not far from the truth in 2008 as Dome, THE racing car constructor in Japan par excellence, has entered a completely new machine complying with the rules for closed-bodied prototypes.

It is a technical choice that prefigures the evolution of the LM P1 prototype category, and the future ambitions of Dome (or a major manufacturer?) at Le Mans.

The Tokai university in Tokyo has taken up an unusual challenge, which is going to make all its budding engineers dream; it has entered a car based on a Courage powered by the YGK Japanese engine making its very first Le Mans appearance.

Yojiro Terada, one of the 24 Hours' outstanding characters and figurehead of the Japanese drivers, will start his 30th Le Mans 24 Hours at the age of 61 with the Terramos team that he has set up specially to race a Courage-Mugen in LM P1.

Last but not least, those who remember the only outright Japanese (and rotary engine) victory at Le Mans by the Mazda 787B in 1991, will have a soft spot for the Lola-Mazda entered in LM P2 by the Kruse Schiller team from Germany. The unique sound of the rotary engine will cause more than a few spectators to sit up and take notice!

Favourite makes and star drivers

What would the past and future history of Le Mans be without Porsche?

It is one of the makes most closely associated with the event, like Ferrari. The latter is there in force with eight F 430 GTs out to crush the three Porsche 911 GT3 RSRs in the LM GT2 category. Here too there will be a battle for revenge: a race within the race. But Porsche is also down to race in LM P2. Two RS spyders entered by private teams will make their Sarthe debut. In 2007, these cars gave Audi a severe headache in the American Le Mans Series. They are quick and agile and will do everything possible to fight at the front - and not just in their own category.

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And talking of favourites let's not forget drivers who are stars in another sphere, and a dab hand behind the wheel at Le Mans. In addition to singer/driver David Hallyday, who may drive the Saleen in which he is entered in the 2008 Le Mans Series, Luc Alphand will be under a lot of pressure. His past feats on the ski slopes, his victory in the Dakar rally plus his 7 Le Mans outings as a driver will certainly help him to cope. However, at the wheel of one of the Corvette C6.Rs entered by his own team, he will have to tackle the works Corvette C6.Rs and no fewer than 4 Aston Martin DBR9s. The LM GT1 category will also be the scene of a ding-dong battle!

The Le Mans 24 Hours: a few figures

76th race in 2008: **55** places on the starting grid
88 entry requests for 2008, **21** of which are automatically qualified
20 LM P1s, **12** LM P2s, **10** LM GT1s, **13** LM GT2s, plus **8** reserves
250 000 spectators in 2007

Note the dates

Sunday 1st June: 9h00/13h00 – 14h00/18h00: Le Mans 24-Hours test day.
Wednesday 11th June: 19h00/21h00: qualifying practice for the Le Mans 24 Hours, 1st session - 22h00/00H00: 1st nighttime qualifying session.
Thursday 12th June: 19h00/21h00: qualifying practice for the Le Mans 24 Hours, 2nd session - 22h00/00H00: 2nd nighttime qualifying session.
Friday 13th June: 18h00/19h00: drivers' parade (Le Mans town centre).
Saturday 14th June: 09h00/0945, Warm up.
 15h00: start of the 76th Le Mans 24 Hours.
Sunday 15th June: 15h00: finish of the 76th Le Mans 24 Hours.

Information and ticket prices on the www.lemans.org site

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