

Ingolstadt, 9 June 2005

## Motorsport

### Audi Teams face tough task at Le Mans

- **Audi R8s start the 24 Hour race with handicaps**
- **Duel between French and American importer teams**
- **Tom Kristensen can write Le Mans history**

The two Audi importer teams from the USA and France are faced with a particularly difficult task during the 73rd running of the 24 Hour race at Le Mans on 18/19 June. In contrast to last year, the Audi R8 is no longer the fastest car on the grid. At its sixth and final appearance, the most successful Le Mans Prototype in history with 54 wins (four of those in Le Mans) must start with 50 kilograms of ballast and approximately 30 hp less – the regulations handing the latest generation of sportscars an advantage.

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The effects were clearly visible during pre-practice: The three Audi R8 prototypes lost over six seconds to the fastest of the new LM P1-Prototypes, which can compete with significantly more engine power. That is five-tenths of a second per kilometre. The maximum speed along the renowned Hunaudières Straight is now only just 310 kph. At its debut in 2000, the R8 reached almost 330 kph at Le Mans. At that time the V8 twin-turbo power plant produced 610 hp, and now it's down to approximately 520 hp due to the smaller diameter engine intake air restrictors stipulated by the latest Le Mans regulations.

The two competing Audi teams, ADT Champion Racing and Audi PlayStation Team ORECA, must therefore take their chances over the distance. The teams are not expecting to qualify on the front two rows. However, in the race they will attempt to exploit the Audi R8 prototype's known strengths: the almost legendary reliability, the Turbo FSI engine's low fuel consumption and the serviceability.

Furthermore, all three Audi cockpits are filled with high-calibre squads. The drivers of the two "American" R8 sports cars can lay claim to a total of 14 Le Mans victories. The former Audi works driver Stéphane Ortelli is the only

Le Mans winner in the French importer team. However, his team mates Jean-Marc Gounon and Franck Montagny are Le Mans veterans.

Audi works driver Tom Kristensen, who has already won Le Mans six times in only eight attempts, could write Le Mans history. A seventh victory would make the Dane the most successful Le Mans driver ever. This time Kristensen drives alongside JJ Lehto and Marco Werner, who is the only Champion team driver never to have won in Le Mans. Frank Biela, Allan McNish and Emanuele Pirro share driving duties in the other R8. Italy's Pirro can be proud of a unique record: Since 1999 he has started the race six times in an Audi, and has stood on the winners' rostrum six times in succession.

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During qualifying on Wednesday (15 June) and on Thursday (16 June), the two Audi teams will concentrate solely on setting the cars up for the race, which starts on 18 June at 4 p.m. The French flag will be waved at this time by Dr Martin Winterkorn. The Chairman of the Executive Board of AUDI AG was invited as honorary starter by the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO).

## Quotes before the race

**Frank Biela (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2):** "We have to make sure that everything is perfectly in place for the race. This is, however, the strength of the Audi R8; the car has proven this often enough in the past. Champion Racing is a very good team. A critical point during the race will be the danger of collecting punctures because there is often a lot of dirt on the track. The small stones do a good job of cutting the tyres to shreds."

**Allan McNish (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2):** "I wouldn't go back to Le Mans if I didn't believe I could win. With the R8 and Champion, we have a great chance. All three cars have a very good driver squad. It will be a hard fight. We just have to adapt to the handicaps. I think that we can live with the weight, but the smaller restrictor has a huge influence on our race strategy. We'll have to make most of the overtaking manoeuvres in the corners, because we are no longer quicker on the straights than the others, which obviously means taking more risks."

**Emanuele Pirro (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #2):** "We are faced with a completely new situation in the race. It's quite frustrating to compete with a

handicap; it will be particularly difficult in traffic because we will have to fight with the quickest cars from the other classes. The fastest cars compete under different regulations, which Audi doesn't actually deserve. However, the Le Mans track is unique. It has a special magic which goes some way towards compensating for the disappointment."

**JJ Lehto (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #3):** "I'm really, really looking forward to the race, it will be the tenth start at Le Mans for me. My expectations are obviously very high having finished third twice in succession. However the competition is very strong this year, that's why it more important than ever before to do everything right. The Audi R8 prototype's reliability and our strategy must be perfect."

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**Tom Kristensen (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #3):** "I'm very thankful that Audi have given me the chance to compete at Le Mans again and the possibility to record a seventh victory. Le Mans is of great importance to me particularly as the race helped to establish my name in motorsport. Le Mans is the ultimate challenge for the car, the mechanics, the engineers and also the drivers. With the handicaps, the R8 isn't quite as agile as it used to be. We don't have the fastest car anymore. With team work, no mistakes and low fuel consumption we must be able to work our way slowly towards the front in the race. And every one of the drivers knows that the race isn't won in the first hour."

**Marco Werner (Team ADT Champion Racing Audi R8 #3):** "We don't really know where we stand in terms of race performance, since neither we nor the competition completed a long-run during pre-practice. I see the most potential in the Audi R8 is its consistency. Although we will not have the quickest car, we certainly have the best. The start of the race will definitely be depressing, however our advantage lies in the reliability. We haven't had a single retirement in the last three years. Our target is to finish on the podium, but it would be fantastic to give the Audi R8 a winning send off."

**Jean-Marc Gounon (Audi PlayStation Team ORECA Audi R8 #4):** "We will have to be patient during the race; we certainly won't lead at the start. Our strengths are the low fuel consumption, quick pit stops and fast driver changes. I never set myself a specific finishing position as a target before a race, it prevents

disappointment. I just concentrate on doing my job as good as possible. I think that the ORECA team is at least as good as the American team.”

**Franck Montagny (Audi PlayStation Team ORECA Audi R8 #4):** “I hope that we can fight for a place on the podium . The team doesn’t have a lot of experience with the Audi R8; however, the results at pre-practice were very encouraging. All three drivers got acclimatised with the car very quickly. The R8 is very easy to drive. I haven’t had much opportunity to get to know the car because apart from pre-practice, I only drove at two tests. At the moment my involvement in Formula 1 takes up a lot of my time. However, I have already started five times in a prototype at Le Mans, that’s why I know the circuit and what to expect.”

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**Stéphane Ortelli (Audi PlayStation Team ORECA Audi R8 #4):** “It’s fantastic to drive an Audi again. The R8 is the best R8 that I have ever driven. The car is even better than when I drove for the factory in 2000. The team is working very well together. The input from both the ORECA and Audi technicians was important for me, particularly as I hadn’t driven a Le Mans Prototype for years. The best car will win the race, not necessarily the quickest.”

**Dave Maraj (Team Director Team ADT Champion Racing):** “After two, third positions in the last two years our goal is clear: We want to be the first American team to win Le Mans since 1967. We know that it will be particularly difficult this year because of the handicaps but we are familiar with the strengths of the Audi R8 and our drivers. Audi made five of its best ‘works’ drivers available for us – and JJ (Lehto) also knows how to win Le Mans.”

**Hugues de Chaunac (Team Director Audi PlayStation Team ORECA):** “After the race at Spa we knew exactly the situation with the new regulations. That’s why we concentrated solely on the race set-up during the pre-practice; the car should be as comfortable and as easy to handle as possible for the drivers. It’s true that we have less power, but we have excellent reliability on our side. Our grid position at the start is not important. It will be a very open race. There are two major aspects for us: The drivers have to patient, even when they are not in the top-three at the start, and neither the drivers nor team can afford to make mistakes. We have a chance of winning if everything works.”

**Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Motorsport):** “Le Mans will be harder than ever for both Audi teams and especially the drivers. Tom Kristensen, who has the chance to become the first driver ever to win the 24 Hours of Le Mans for a seventh time, is also well aware of this. I hope that he manages it. Nevertheless it will not be easy. We assume that the difference in race lap times will be slightly less than during pre-practice and in qualifying. Even so, the teams and drivers can not afford to make a mistake. The drivers of the three R8 prototypes are all of the highest calibre. It will be an interesting race during which everybody will have to be very patient.”

**Note for editors: An Audi Press Conference with all nine Audi drivers, the team directors of both Audi importer teams and also Head of Audi Motorsport, Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, will be held at the Le Mans Automobile Museum on Friday 17 June at 2 p.m.**

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