



Le Mans 24 Hours Eight Weeks to go

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Each Friday, between today and the 8th June, VMP will bring you an update on the latest from Le Mans, bringing us up to the week of the 24-Hour race when we will be stationed in the press centre in the lead up to the greatest race on the planet.

There are just eight Fridays to go before the week that is the Le Mans 24-Hours! It seems incomprehensible that it was almost a year ago that we were thinking and talking about how quickly the time has passed, but its true folks, that time has come around again.



Nicolas Lapierre, Alex Wurz, Kaz Nakajima with the Toyota TS030 Hybrid, 24 January 2012 (© Toyota Motorsport)



In October 2011 Toyota announced their return to Le Mans but like many similar claims by other manufacturers in years gone by, the media didn't hold its breath, choosing to wait and see what the company would produce. At the beginning of this year, further details emerged and it became apparent that the Japanese manufacturer was indeed quite serious about its intentions as the TS030 Hybrid was revealed. However, in a test session in early April the team was dealt a blow when the car was substantially damaged in an accident, which ruled the car out of the first European WEC race of the season at Spa in May. The manufacturer says that it should be ready for Le Mans but this incident was undoubtedly a setback, as Spa would have provided some valuable feedback in a real competitive situation.



Nissan DeltaWing undergoing wet testing at Snetterton in April 2012 (© Nissan DeltaWing)

Only in January of this year we learned that Audi's only realistic works opposition, Peugeot, announced their withdrawal from sports car endurance racing. The news sent ripples through the sport and thoughts turned to the possibility of a rather dull and uninteresting



24-hour race in June. Then, as the spotlight fell on the rather radical DeltaWing 'Project 56' race car, spirits once again soared as the ballistic missile shaped experimental vehicle broke cover. Details emerged as the weeks passed and as it happens, the DeltaWing has successfully captured the public's attention like no other race car has done in recent time. Nissan were revealed as the engine partner and it would not be unreasonable to say that Project 56 is about the most exciting thing to happen to the Le Mans 24-Hours in many a year, and the ACO and the DeltaWing team are to be congratulated on their efforts.



Audi R18 ultra (left) and the Audi R18 e-tron quattro, 29 Feb 2012 (© Audi)

Then on 'leap day', the 29th February, Audi announced the appearance of a pair of Hybrid R18s to accompany their R18 TDI cars. The Audi R18 e-tron quattro is the first four-wheel drive race car to compete in the 24-hour endurance race, and should prove an interesting spectacle - is this the future of racing? We shall see. Clearly the dominant manufacturer at Le Mans, Audi, will have four cars to watch over which will liven up the grid at the front and even if they do run away with the race there will surely be a lively tussle amongst the Audi



drivers.



Greaves Motorsport Zytek Nissan ELMS LMP2 car at speed at Le Castellet driven by Alex Brundle (© John Brooks)

Not to be outdone, the LMP2 cars will be an exciting contest to watch as the Judd, Nissan, Honda and Toyota engined cars go for gold. A pair of Morgans, this year powered by Judd engines, will also make a welcome return to the 24-hour race.

In the GTE category, competition will be no less fierce as the regulations have been modified to tighten up the cars so that the playing field is more level for all. The Corvettes will need watching as the cars have been widened by 50mm - and that is a significant dimension! - and the rear wing has been raised allowing improved downforce. The Ferraris will be super-quick once again and the Porsches and Aston Martins will be there to keep them honest.



The GTE class is a busy and very competitive class - Le Mans, Saturday 11 June 2011 (© VMP/Glen Smale)

Already the entry list is changing as teams previously accepted have fallen out for a variety of reasons: Dyson Racing has withdrawn both its LMP1 Lola-Judds to be replaced by two LMP2 cars from the prototype reserve list, these being the Status Grand Prix team's Lola-Judd (no. 30) and the Murphy Prototype Oreca 03-Judd (no. 48) - both Irish teams! This means that the list of reserves has also changed: for prototypes only the no. 32 Lotus Team (LM P2 Lola-Lotus) remains, and in GTE the no. 76 Imsa Matmut Performance Porsche RSR 997 in GTE Pro, and the similar car entered by Proton Competition in LM GTE Am.

There are still eight weeks to go and the Le Mans test day is on Sunday 3rd June, so watch this space for the latest updates.

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