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Press Information

Motorsport

Ingolstadt, 7 March 2002

Audi tackles Le Mans with three "works" cars

Audi contests the Le Mans 24 Hour race on 15/16 June with three "works" cars run by Audi Sport Team Joest and Audi Sport North America. The three silver Infineon Audi R8s will fly the extra colours of black, red and yellow taken from the German flag, like at the triple victory of 2000.

The Le Mans countdown begins for Audi on 16 March with the 12 Hours of Sebring. The season-opening round of the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) is at the same time the first serious test for the 2002-spec Infineon Audi R8, which despite undergoing minor changes to detail, looks exactly the same as last year's car at first glance. The bodywork features only subtle changes which are barely visible to an expert. However, under the bodywork the most successful contemporary racing sportscar was refined in many details. With success: "The tests with the modified R8 have shown that we have uncovered potential, and now we just have to use it in the race," explains Head of Audi Sport Dr Wolfgang Ullrich.

The 12 Hours of Sebring is for Audi an important indicator of where it stands prior to the season highlight at Le Mans. "We'll see at Sebring how well the cars work and where we stand compared to our competitors," says Dr Ullrich. Competition in the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) is stronger than ever: 60 sportscars contest the race in Sebring, 29 of which are Le Mans prototypes (LMP). The fact that the field for the season-opener is larger than at Le Mans - and on a circuit not even half the length - makes the challenge for the drivers even more delicate.

Frank Biela/Tom Kristensen/Emanuele Pirro and Rinaldo Capello/Johnny Herbert/Christian Pescatori compete at Sebring with the two works cars of Audi Sport North America. The Audi R8 run by the American Champion Team also features a strong driver line-up: Stefan Johansson and Andy Wallace have already won the 12 hour classic twice. Jan Lammers looks back on wins at Le Mans and Daytona and is keen to secure his third long-distance classic at his debut race in an Audi R8.

Photos and information about the 2002 ALMS season are available on the internet:
www.audi-sportpress.com (accreditation required)

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Quotes prior to the Sebring race

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "To contest a 12 hour race right at the beginning of the season is of course tough. You don't have a sprint race as a warm-up, but rather things get going with a thunderbolt. But Sebring is a super race – and if it works out as well as the last two years then it'll be great fun..."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "I tested at Sebring in January. They said the track has new asphalt, but in fact there is only one corner with a new surface. That means that the circuit is just as bumpy as before. Nonetheless, I love Sebring and have had a lot of success there: three starts, two wins."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "The winter break was definitely too long, and therefore my motivation is particularly high. I have prepared myself well for the season and I have done a lot of exercise. With the R8 we have again made a step forward, above all with the aerodynamics. Now we have noticeably more downforce. I'm optimistic."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "To make a prediction for Sebring is very difficult due to the long distance. My wish is to repeat last year's win. But we don't yet know how much our competitors have improved over the winter break. Above all, the Cadillac is a big unknown. It looks very similar to the Audi..."

Johnny Herbert (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "I can hardly wait to drive in the Audi 'works' team. Recently I tested the 'works' R8 and was very impressed. Driving the Champion Audi last year whetted my appetite for sportscar racing. I'm very excited about Sebring and Le Mans."

Christian Pescatori (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "This will be my first drive at Sebring and I'm very curious about the track. While testing at Vallelunga I was able to collect experience with the Audi on a dry circuit, which was a little difficult last year at Le Mans."

Stefan Johansson (Audi R8 #38): "Sebring is one of my favourite races. To date I've only brought home good results with one exception. Champion is a fantastic team and our driver squad is very strong. I'm looking forward to driving with Andy and Jan. I've known them both for a long time and I know how good they are, but I've never shared a cockpit with them."

Jan Lammers (Audi R8 #38): "I've won Daytona and Le Mans and now have the possibility to take the Grand Slam. With this team and this car we should be in a position to win the race. I'm excited about driving with Andy again, with whom I've had great success. I've known Stefan since our common Formula 3 days."

Andy Wallace (Audi R8 #38): "I've always liked Sebring. The many bumps and the heat make 12 hours feel more like 24. Sebring features several very quick corners but also some tricky slow ones. This race has tradition and an amazing following with the fans – Sebring is probably second only to Le Mans in terms of numbers of spectators."

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Reinhold Joest, Team Director Audi Sport North America: "Every year Sebring is an important indicator of where we stand for Le Mans. A grid of 60 cars is of course not exactly without its problems, particular care is needed in overtaking. But our drivers have mastered this wonderfully in the last years. They know what's needed."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "It's a good sign that so many cars contest this race – especially in the prototype category. But this also means that lapping slower cars starts from the third lap at least. It will not be easy to escape all the traffic without bruises."

The schedule at Sebring

Wednesday, 13 March

09:20 – 10:20 hrs Free Practice

14:35 – 15:35 hrs Free Practice

Thursday, 14 March

09:30 – 10:30 hrs Free Practice

14:30 – 14:55 hrs Qualifying (prototypes)

20:00 – 21:00 hrs Night Practice

Friday, 15 March

09:35 – 10:35 hrs Free Practice

Saturday, 16 March

07:30 – 07:50 hrs Warm-up

10:30 hrs Start

Local times

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