

"Is Club Duratec the answer to ageing Kent?"

FF1600 at a crossroads, p20



Davidson is now without a seat

British sportscar star Anthony Davidson has promised to continue chasing his dream of winning the Le Mans 24 Hours, despite losing his race seat after Peugeot pulled the plug on its sportscar programme with immediate effect.

The French automotive giant last week shocked the world of racing by announcing that it is withdrawing its successful 908 HDI machines from competition this year. Peugeot will not take part in this year's Le Mans 24 Hours or in the FIA's new World Endurance Championship. The French firm has cited both the ongoing European debt crisis and falling road car sales as concerns as the key reasons for its withdrawal.

Ex-F1 racer Davidson, who has raced for Peugeot for the last two seasons, finished fourth in last year's 24 Hours with the team and was in contention to win the 2010 event before retiring with mechanical failure. He also took three Le Mans Series victories for the team, including the 2010 Sebring 12 Hours.

The 32-year-old said the news came as a blow: "It was terrible to hear Peugeot had axed the programme and it's come at an awful time," Davidson told *Motorsport News*. "We'd all heard

DAVIDSON SHOCKED BY PEUGEOT PULL-OUT



Davidson (left) won Sebring with Peugeot



Le Mans will run without 908s

rumours over the winter that the programme was shaky but we all stayed positive. It's a crushing blow, not just to myself, but to the mechanics, the engineers and the team personnel who have worked so hard to put together one of the most formidable sportscar teams in the world.

"I feel incredibly sad for the fans who have bought tickets to

events like Le Mans and Sebring. They expected to see the classic Audi vs Peugeot duel and this year they won't get it. I fear Le Mans especially may be a bit of an anti-climax now that Audi is left unopposed.

"It's bad timing because it's very close to the start of the year so it's tough to make plans. Sportscar racing is still a great place to be

because there's still a lot of manufacturer interest with Toyota and Porsche both starting programmes, so I'm going to keep pushing for a top seat. My main career goal is to win Le Mans and I think I've proven myself to be one of the fastest drivers out there during my time with Peugeot. I'm giving up, so work starts now to get myself back onto the grid."

THE FASTEST NEWS ROUND-UP



Le Mans Series LMP1 champion team Rebellion Racing will contest this year's World Endurance Championship. Ex-Aston Martin driver Harold Primat will drive for the squad in the new championship behind the wheel of a Toyota-powered Lola. He will line-up alongside Andrea Belicchi, Neel Jani and Nicolas Prost... Formula Renault 3.5 driver Kevin Korjus will challenge for the title again this year with Tech 1 Racing. The Estonian scored three wins in his rookie season with the French squad last year. He also took part in the F1 young driver test in Abu Dhabi with Renault... **GP3 driver Aaro**

Vainio will join Lotus this year for his second tilt at the title. The former Tech 1 racer scored a podium finish at Catalunya last year and finished 15th overall. The team has won both GP3 titles to date, with Esteban Gutierrez and Valtteri Bottas taking the crowns in 2010 and 2011... Kyle and Kurt Busch will split driving duties in a full-time NASCAR Nationwide Series campaign this year. Kurt will step up to Nationwide this year in his brother's team, Kyle Busch Motorsports, in place of a Camping World Truck bid. The two drivers have 47 NASCAR Sprint Cup wins between them...

McNish to aid Starworks bid for Daytona glory

Starworks Motorsport boss Peter Baron reckons the addition of British star Allan McNish to its Daytona 24 Hours team will give the squad a boost when fighting for victory this weekend.

The two-time Le Mans winner has been drafted in by the outfit to help challenge for the prototype title, which was last year won by favourites Chip Ganassi Racing. McNish will race in one of the team's two Ford/Riley prototypes in a five-man team including Scottish racer Ryan Dalziel and Le Mans ace Lucas Luhr.

Starworks will be one of 14 prototype teams going for victory in the twice round the clock event at the Daytona International Speedway in Florida. Action Express and Michael Shank Racing are also among the favourites for the event.

"We felt, with our four current drivers, we had a line-up strong

enough to compete for a win," said Baron. "You just do not pass on the opportunity to put Allan McNish in the car. He is a legend. He brings much more than his speed—he elevates the other guys, gets the others even more motivated and it is great to work with someone with that kind of history in sports car racing."

Testing at the track took place this week and Chip Ganassi Racing star Scott Dixon says his team's consistency could be the key to winning the crown again in this year's event.

"All of us on the team are pretty close with our times, so everyone pulls their weight," he said. "Our times are down a little bit right now as we learn about the new cars, but this team is consistent and it deals with problems real good. It also helps having the same driver line-up back so we are confident."

DAYTONA CONTENDERS

TEAM	DRIVERS
Chip Ganassi Car: BMW/Riley	Joey Hand Scott Pruett Graham Rahal Memo Rojas
Chip Ganassi Car: BMW/Riley	Scott Dixon Dario Franchitti Jamie McMurray Juan Pablo Montoya
Michael Shank Racing Car: Ford/Riley	Jorge Goncalvez Michael McDowell Felipe Nasr Gustavo Yacamán
Starworks Motorsport Car: Ford/Riley	Ryan Dalziel Lucas Luhr Allan McNish Alex Popow Enzo Potolocchio
Top GT entries	
Risi	Gianmaria Bruni
Competizione Car: Ferrari 458	Giancarlo Fisichella Raphael Matos
NGT Car: Porsche 997 GT3	Nick Tandy Sean Edwards Henrique Cisneros Carlos Kauffmann

Rising star Bacheta to battle for F2 success

British single-seater racer Luciano Bacheta will make a full assault on this year's FIA Formula Two Championship following his participation in selected events last year.

The 21-year-old contested just four of the 16 rounds in last year's championship after switching from GP3. His best finish was a fifth place at Monza in Italy.

The former Formula Renault driver is set to contest a full campaign in F2 this season and says he is glad to have his plans confirmed already.

"I'm really excited to be driving in Formula Two this season and to have it all confirmed so early in the year," said Bacheta. "It's great to be running a full campaign in F2. Last year I contested four races and enjoyed every one and was impressed with the set up of F2."

"I would love to get my hands on the Williams F1 test prize but know the competition will be tough."



Bacheta has experience of F2

THE VOICE OF MOTORSPORT

SIMON ARRON

'The potential of race circuits is great'



Photo: Gary Hawkins

Arron was wowed by rally action at Brands Hatch

It might not have the cachet of, say, the 1964 Monte Carlo Rally, but a dusty programme harbours fond memories. The Ian Harwood Stages was a Chester Motor Club event held on February 23 1980 at Oulton Park. It was an exercise in lateral thought, a racing circuit being used slightly differently but wholly appropriately.

Oulton Park sometimes featured as a special stage when Britain's round of the World Rally Championship plied its trade in England, Scotland and Wales, rather than just the suburbs of Cardiff. But it was used relatively little during the mainstream motorsport season (14 car meetings and a handful for bikes would be typical for the period) and hardly at all outside. Compare that with the number of events on the contemporary calendar, then factor in track days, test sessions and so forth.

There was greater diversity back then, before the age of one-make saturation, but significantly less action. That's why the Ian Harwood Stages was a welcome supplement. In their programme notes, the promoters celebrated a move "from the wild wastes of Marchington Depot [a former military barracks] to the civilised roads of Oulton Park". Not that civilised, though: my outstanding memory is having to scramble smartly to avoid a Hillman Imp that had strayed from the prescribed route.

The soundtrack hadn't much altered last weekend, when I attended Chelmsford MC's single-venue stage rally at Brands Hatch. Ford Escorts? Check. Mini Clubman? Check. Hillman Imp – check, but keep a close eye on where it goes...

It was the first time in 25 years that I'd been to Brands so early in the season. The previous such occasion was a sprint that marked my debut in licensed, competitive motorsport. Towards the afternoon's end, marshals on the Cooper Straight were waving their arms in a manner that suggested they'd like me to drive faster, because they were borderline hypothermic and wanted to go home. I was doing my best, but didn't want to push my luck because a) the car belonged to a friend and b) it was snowing.

There were no such problems last weekend. A little fine-tuning had taken place since 2011's inaugural event – timing beams had been shifted, I'm told, to minimise the risk of demolition – and it might have been better if the stages were peppered with a few loose surfaces, such as parts of the adjacent rallycross track, but the most important ingredients were slick organisation and a decent crowd with commensurate atmosphere.

It's a tale of two rallies separated by 32 years and 216 miles, but united by a common principle. Racing circuits are wonderful things, but their potential is greater still.

AGREE/DISAGREE?
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