

## LE MANS SERIES TEAMS TEST IN THE SUN AT THE PAUL RICARD TRACK



New tribunes seating 4,000 people are a new feature at the Paul Ricard HTTP circuit in the South of France, where the 2009 Le Mans Series cars are in action on March 8-9 testing for the new season. GP2 star Bruno Senna was a late addition to the Team Oreca Matmut-AIM sportscar team ("this is probably the longest test he will ever do" observed team principal Hugues de Chaunac), who says that Senna will be invited to test again, perhaps with the chance to race at Le Mans. For the keen-eyed fans former World Champions Alain Prost and Nigel Mansell were in the pits to see their sons, Nicolas and Leo respectively, test new cars in preparation for the season.

Nicolas Prost drives an Aston Martin V12 powered Lola for the Swiss Speedy Racing Team Sebah in the Le Mans P1 category, while Leo Mansell settled well into Team Modena's Ferrari 430 GT, which he will drive all season with Spanish star Antonio Garcia.

Attention was focussed on the new Lola Aston Martins in the LM-P1 category, liveried in the evocative colours of Gulf Oil. Bearing the numbers 007 and 009, the Aston Martins have been built with the aim of repeating the British make's famous victory in the 24-Hours in 1959, a Golden Anniversary celebrated in Gulf's blue and orange colours. Defying the credit crunch, Aston Martin Racing will contest the full season Le Mans Series taking in 1,000 kilometre races in Barcelona, at Spa in Belgium, at the new Algarve circuit in Portugal, at the Nürburgring, and at Silverstone.

Late on Sunday afternoon Tomas Enge crashed the 007 Lola Aston Martin heavily, damaging the front bodywork and suspension, an admitted driver error; unfortunately. At the time he was second fastest overall in the time-sheets at 1m.42.575s, with Olivier Panis topping the list in the Team Oreca Matmut-AIM at 1m 41.771s, matching the time set last year by the fastest petrol-powered prototype. It is "business as usual" in the LM P2 category where the Team Essex Porsche RS Spyder is fastest in the hands of factory driver Emmanuel 'Manu' Collard, ahead of the Mazda powered RML Lola of Tommy Erdos and Mike Newton.

Defending GT1 champion Luc Alphand sees his Corvette C.6R fastest in the category, while in GT2 Marc Lieb sets the pace in the Team Felbermayr Porsche 997 GT3 RSR. An outstanding addition to the GT2 division is the Drayson Racing Aston Martin Vantage driven by Lord Paul Drayson and Jonny Cocker. The team boasts 'Energy Efficient Motorsport' where the regulations permit.

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