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Le Mans Series – Paul Ricard 8 Hours - Preview

IMSA Performance Matmut makes its grand homecoming this weekend at Paul Ricard

For everyone at IMSA Performance Matmut, a team that began its 2010 sporting campaign two months ago, the Paul Ricard 8 Hours is viewed as the true launch of the squad's international programme. Unusually, the race, which is the opening round of the Le Mans Series, will be held over eight hours and represents the first direct fight between all the major rivals in the GT2 category, all of which will do battle throughout the year, including at the Le Mans 24 Hours in June. The race is therefore a very important date on the Rouen-based team's calendar as it will be the squad's first chance to gauge its performance against that of the new Ferrari, Aston Martin and BMW, all of which will be joining IMSA in taking on Corvette at La Sarthe. The challenge is being met with a calm attitude by the Porsche contingent after the encouraging pre-season tests at the beginning of March at Paul Ricard, even though the sessions in Provence didn't allow them to gather all the information they'd hoped for. *"The temperature during the tests was too low,"* explains Patrick Pilet. *"The fact that we didn't exploit the tyres in normal temperatures prevented us from trying all the set-up options we had planned. It meant we just ran the car for much of the time and, in particular, validated certain new upgrades."*



For the new Le Mans Series campaign, IMSA Performance Matmut will line up with a single Porsche 997 GT3 RSR as it will also do at Le Mans and in the International GT Open. Both Raymond Narac and Patrick Pilet remain as the team's nominated drivers and will be joined by a third Porsche works driver, possibly a fourth at Spa, during the 24-hour events.



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Porsche has also brought a raft of new improvements to the 997 GT3 RSR for the new season in the areas of chassis, aerodynamics, transmission and the engine, in an attempt to counter the efforts of the marque's competitors and in an attempt to retain the title it won last year. *"The improvements will be necessary,"* says Patrick Pilet, who returned to the American Le Mans Series during the 12 Hours of Sebring last month. *"The level of competition in the Le Mans Series has gone up another notch during the off-season and the work accomplished by the technical staff at Porsche will be necessary to make sure we stay ahead of our rivals. In particular, we have tried to optimise the car across the board, rather than to concentrate on a single area. One of the main improvements is the addition of larger front wheels which should help to stop the understeer which we had quite often last year."*



At least six to eight cars should be capable of fighting for the win this year, a situation which doesn't change IMSA Performance Matmut's goal of scoring its first success in the Le Mans Series. If that moment arrives this weekend then it will build on a superb start to a season that has already yielded two wins, in the Dubai 24 Hours and V de V Championship, for Franck Rava and Raymond Narac's team. The race, which is the first ever French round in the history of the Le Mans Series, takes place on Sunday between 11am and 7pm and is an opportunity for the #76 Porsche to make its own history!

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