



OAK Racing, Team Mazda France – Le Mans 24 Hours preview

12 months after finishing on the LMP2 podium at the Le Mans 24 Hours, the new look OAK Racing returns to the scene of its most famous result hoping for a similar outcome in 2009.

The French squad has undergone many changes since Matthieu Lahaye, Pierre Ragues and Frankie Cheng sampled the unique atmosphere of the Le Mans rostrum celebrations last year, not least thanks to a new name. Yet the team owned by Jacques Nicolet holds the same racing principals as it always has.

Partnerships with Mazda and Dunlop have boosted the team's technical package and their two-car assault is balanced between a young ambitious line-up of Lahaye, Karim Ajlani and Guillaume Moreau in the #35 car and an experienced trio of gentlemen drivers, Nicolet, Richard Hein and Jean-Francois Yvon in the #24.

"We hope to emulate what we achieved last year," says **Team Manager Francois Sicard**. "That means we want both cars at the finish and a place on the podium. We realise that's a lofty ambition, but we arrive in Le Mans with an excellent package.

"The new Pescarolo aero is very efficient and a huge step up in performance, while the Dunlop tyres have adapted well to the chassis and are showing good performance. We also have a highly motivated team which isn't afraid of hard work in order to achieve results."

One major change for the team since last year comes in the shape of Mazda, who have partnered with the team to supply engines to both their Pescarolos and resulted in the squad adopting the OAK Racing, Team Mazda France moniker.

"We're delighted to welcome the OAK Racing programme to the Mazdaspeed Motorsports Development family," says **John Doonan**, Competitions Manager of Mazda North America. "The leadership of Jacques Nicolet and Francois Sicard is tremendous and you can see their positive influence on every member of the team. The level of preparation and attention to detail is what ultimately ends up making the difference between winning races and not finishing...and OAK is fantastic in this regard. It is our sincere hope that all of these important elements combine for a fantastic result this year at Le Mans. 25 years after our C2 class win here, maybe that anniversary will mean something extra special come Sunday morning."





Car #35

Lahaye tasted the podium champagne last season after a faultless drive to third-in-class behind the all-conquering Porsche RS Spyders and is eager for a repeat performance.

“As a Frenchman, driving at Le Mans in a French team, in front of a crowd that has come from all across the world, is an extraordinary feeling,” he says. “Nothing is ever a certainty here and you must guard against complacency, but I am aiming for a result at least as good as last year.”

Ajlani makes his Le Mans debut and in the process becomes the first ever Syrian driver to take part in the iconic race.

“The team has done an amazing job in the Le Mans Series so far this season and we have the ambition to score a good result,” he says. “To be the first Syrian driver to enter this race is the realisation of a long held personal ambition for me. I hope me entering the race will encourage others to do the same and will get the sport acknowledged throughout Syria.”

Reigning Le Mans Series GT1 champion **Moreau** joins the team at La Sarthe and recognises the race as one of the toughest challenges in world motorsport after his fifth place finish in the GT1 class last year.

“The circuit is fantastic but you must always remain cautious as it doesn’t allow for any mistakes,” he says. “There is always a moment where tiredness can get you and the circuit always springs one or two surprises from one year to the next.”

Car #24

Nicolet makes his third appearance in the endurance classic and recognises the race as the pinnacle of his season.

“Despite the quality of championships such as the Le Mans Series, the Le Mans 24 Hours remains the highlight of the season, for the teams as well as the drivers,” he explains. “There is pressure to perform and not make any mistakes, but to drive on this track is a true pleasure.”

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Hein returns to the track a year after his 24 Hours debut and admits it's hard to put into words the feeling of driving the famous 13.65km track.

"It's impossible to imagine what it's like to race here until you have actually done it," he says. "I coped well last year on my debut, but this year I have prepared better physically and mentally as well as on the driving side. Le Mans is like a beautiful lady; the first year you meet her and fall in love. After that you have only one desire; to meet her again."

Former race winner **Yvon** enters the legendary event for a tenth time, each time realising a childhood dream.

"Le Mans was always my favourite sporting memory and I dreamt of racing here as a child," he confirmed. "I approach the race with huge respect for the circuit as the slightest mistake can end in disaster. For me, it's much easier to come into a team which is as closely knit as OAK Racing and to share the car with Jacques and Richard whom I have a lot in common with away from the track."

A six hour practice session for the Le Mans 24 Hours begins on Wednesday 10th June with practice on Thursday 11th June. The race commences on Saturday 13 June.

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