



OAK Racing-Team Mazda France successfully launches its 2009 program at Paul Ricard test

Following the confirmation by the ACO of its two invitations to the Le Mans 24 Hours, OAK Racing-Team Mazda France launched its technical programme for the first time at the two-day Official Le Mans Series test at Paul Ricard. The Nevers-based team used the test to give a first roll-out out to its Dunlop-shod Pescarolo-Mazda LMP2 car.

The team's four drivers who will contest the Le Mans Series and Le Mans 24 Hours were all present; gentlemen drivers Jacques Nicolet and Richard Hein as well as Matthieu Lahaye and new recruit for 2009 Karim Ajlani.

Despite some small teething problems on Sunday, the car covered more than 100 laps. On the second day development work began in earnest with Lahaye posting the car's best time of 1min 47sec, good enough for fifth quickest in the LMP2 category.

OAK Racing also tested a new environmentally friendly system for pre-heating tyres. Conceived by Green GT, the new device is based on solar energy collected by flexible photovoltaic cells installed on the roof of the team's transporters. The system, which is still under development, allows a significant saving of CO2 and improves safety within the paddock. It proved to be effective during its first test.

François Sicard, Team Manager, was very satisfied with the work achieved during the two days: "The agreements with Mazda France and Dunlop were only signed at the end of 2008 so our workload was enormous. Nevertheless, we've had superb co-operation with Pescarolo Sport and their adaptations to the chassis to fit the new engine worked very well. The test had enabled us to validate all of our technical choices. The drivers had a good feeling in the car and there was a great collaboration between our different technical partners. On the driving side, the return of our drivers was very positive and we will work with Dunlop to develop the tyres for our specific needs."

Young French driver **Matthieu Lahaye** was also very happy: "I familiarised myself with the Mazda MZ-R turbo-charged two litre engine as well as the Dunlop tyres and we made quite a lot of developments. I am very happy with the rubber from Dunlop and was pleasantly surprised by their performance."

The new member of the driving force, **Karim Ajlani**, made a strong impression in his completely new environment: "I became better acquainted with the team, the car, the engine, the tyres and even the circuit! The team were very helpful and I got along very well with Matthieu. We have the same feeling for the car and that bodes well for the season to come."



Team owner **Jacques Nicolet** was also satisfied: "First of all I'd like to thank all the guys in the team and also Mazda, AER, Dunlop and Pescarolo Sport. Our prospects for development look to be very interesting. The presence at Paul Ricard of Thierry Guillemot, President of Mazda France, shows the will for this partnership to succeed on behalf of Mazda (in the USA and France). I am also very impressed by the work already achieved by Dunlop, whose tyres adapted perfectly to the Pescarolo chassis."

Richard Hein, driving LMP2 machinery for the first time having raced in LMP1 in 2008: "I really enjoyed myself during the two days. Matthieu set some very interesting times and I can't wait for the start of the season in Barcelona."

The team will continue to be busy over the coming weeks as they assemble their second chassis, which will have a shakedown on 17 March at Magny-Cours. A second and final test is scheduled for 25 March ahead of the first round of the Le Mans Series on 4 April in Barcelona."

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