

The fourth Le Mans victory in sight

Customer sport R8

The Audi R8, which has dominated the sports car scene for four years, is developing into a true classic. Audi customer and importer teams will again profit from the ground breaking technology of the Audi R8 and its powerful 550 hp FSI engine during the 2004 season. The Audi customer teams Champion, Goh and Veloqx contest the American Le Mans Series (ALMS), the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the new European Le Mans Endurance Series (LMES) thanks to the support of the Audi importers in North America, Japan and Great Britain.

The Audi R8 is the competitors' benchmark

"Even if we concentrate on the DTM from the factory side in 2004, the involvement in sports cars remains an important component for Audi," says Audi Motorsport chief Dr Wolfgang Ullrich. "Our importers and customer teams can operate at the highest level with the Audi R8 customer sport prototype car and, as a result, have the best chances of victory. In the meantime we know just how high we have pushed the standard for the competition with the R8."

"Vorsprung durch Technik" also without rear-end change

Also, the technical superiority of Audi did not remain overlooked by the rule makers. Several changes were passed for 2004. Now it is forbidden to change the complete gearbox during the race. Audi had also proved "Vorsprung durch Technik" in this field by developing a unique system that allowed the complete rear end to be changed in about three minutes. Nevertheless, the Audi teams will continue to benefit from the advantages of the Audi R8 modular design: By separating the rear end from the engine, the gearbox internals can be changed faster than with a conventional design. During the shorter ALMS and LMES races the rear end change plays a different role. "Up until now, it was only necessary after an accident in the ALMS," says Dr Ullrich.

New aerodynamic version for Le Mans

While last year's regulations are still valid for the ALMS, a narrower rear wing is mandatory at Le Mans and for the 2004 LMES. Audi re-worked the R8 in the wind tunnel and a new aerodynamic version, which recovers some of the downforce lost, is available for the customer teams at the Le Mans pre-test at the end of April. "The wind tunnel and circuit tests were extremely encouraging," explains Dr Ullrich. "Our target was to be a step ahead of the opposition also under the new regulations."

High-calibre driver squad

The top-class drivers who line up for the R8 customer teams during the 2004 season are a guarantee for further successes. Four ex-Formula 1 drivers number among the twelve men Audi importer star squad: Six of the nine current Audi works drivers and no less than eight Le Mans winners. "That our customer teams can compete with such a high-calibre driver team speaks volumes for the Audi R8," explains Dr Ullrich. "Whether Formula 1 stars, legends such as Paul Frère or newcomers like Pierre Kaffer and Jamie Davies: Up to now everybody who has driven an Audi R8 was impressed."

Allan McNish again in an Audi R8

Also ex-Formula 1 driver Allan McNish, who won the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) as Audi works driver in 2000, sits at the wheel of an Audi R8 during the 2004 season. The Scot was enthusiastic after his first test with the current R8: "The R8 was already back then a fantastic car, but today it is even better. The FSI engine is particularly impressive."

Audi Sport UK with new team

Allan McNish drives for the new Audi Sport UK Team Veloqx that will compete at Le Mans and in the LMES with two Audi R8 prototypes. Team ADT Champion Racing, the team supported by Audi Sport North America, and Audi Sport Japan Team Goh each enter a further R8 at Le Mans. Furthermore, Champion aims to win the American Le Mans Series. Goh contests the LMES.

Support by Audi works drivers

Audi Sport supports the three Audi customer teams during the 2004 season both technically and with their squad of Audi works drivers. Le Mans winner Rinaldo Capello (Italy), newcomer Pierre Kaffer (Germany) and the defending ALMS champion Marco Werner (Germany) are in sports car action full-time. The Audi DTM drivers Frank Biela (Germany), Tom Kristensen (Denmark) and Emanuele Pirro (Italy), who won the 24 Hours of Le Mans three times in succession together, line up at the start this time for three different Audi customer teams.

Fourth Le Mans victory in the sights

The targets for the 2004 season are clear: "Our customer teams will do everything within their power to ensure the fourth Audi victory at Le Mans, to win the ALMS for the fifth time in a row and to win the first ever LMES title," says Dr Ullrich.