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Motorsport

Audi driver Allan McNish about Houston

- **Fourth round of the American Le Mans Series in Texas**
- **Third consecutive “city” street race for the Audi R10 TDI**
- **1.7-mile temporary track around Reliant Park Sports complex**

Just a week after racing in Long Beach (California) round four of the American Le Mans Series is taking place in Houston (Texas). The Audi R10 TDI has to tackle its third consecutive race on a street course. Last year’s Houston winner Allan McNish talks about the 1.7-mile temporary track around the Reliant Park Sports complex.

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Last year you enjoyed success in Houston with Dindo Capello at the wheel of the TFSI-powered Audi R8. Did you expect to win that race?

“That’s still a memorable victory. It was the first time in Houston for the American Le Mans Series while to win in what was effectively a six-year-old car, against the latest opposition and on a track that should have been ideal for them, made it very sweet – and surprising.”

You have driven on many street tracks including Monaco, Macau, Pau, Birmingham, Adelaide, St. Petersburg and Long Beach. Do you enjoy them?

“I don’t necessarily enjoy driving on them but I don’t dislike them either. I’ve always gone well on street tracks from the first time I raced on one in Macau in 1989. Dindo and I won in Adelaide to clinch the 2000 American Le Mans Series title for Audi and I set the second fastest time on my first day in Formula One at Monaco. You need controlled aggression on street tracks – otherwise the penalty is a concrete wall.”

Is the Houston track similar to any of the above or what makes it different?

“The bumps! Last year the track was incredibly bumpy and I’d never previously experienced anything quite like it. During last year’s event the

organisers attempted to smooth out some of the worst bumps and so hopefully it won't be quite as bad this weekend. However, it's the same for everyone."

What makes a street race so difficult for the Audi R10 TDI which, up until Long Beach, was undefeated in terms of outright wins in 10 races?

"The Audi R10 TDI – due to the regulations – weighs 925 kg and has a significantly longer wheelbase due to the V12 twin-turbo engine while the smaller LM P2 Porsche and Acura/Honda cars weigh just 775 kg. These factors combine to make the R10 TDI unsuited for slow corners or very tight, first gear hairpins – like the one at Long Beach last weekend which negated everything we gained from the fast straights. So it's the laws of physics and the laws of the regulations."

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Audi TDI Power was victorious in St. Petersburg but LM P2 class cars filled the top-six overall in Long Beach. How will Houston be for the R10 TDI?

"The Audi R10 TDI will be making its Houston début. We now have experience of street circuits with this car but it's still difficult to call how we'll go. Prior to St. Petersburg, I didn't feel we'd be ultra-competitive but despite not having the fastest car, we won. At Long Beach, after I'd looked around the circuit for the first time, I thought it would suit us – and look what happened! I think it could be a little like Long Beach while Dindo reckons it'll be more like St. Petersburg. So let's just say we're not overly optimistic for an outright win but hopefully back on the rostrum. Long Beach was the first time an Audi hadn't finished in the top-three overall in the American Le Mans Series since Charlotte in April 2000."

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