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Motorsport

DTM and Le Mans – double-header for Audi

- **DTM Brno race and Le Mans pre-practice on same day**
- **Tom Kristensen and Allan McNish not at Pre-Practice**
- **“Difficult job” anticipated for the Audi R8 in Le Mans**

Head of Audi Motorsport Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Tom Kristensen and Allan McNish actually need to split themselves this coming weekend: On the agenda at Brno, Czech Republic, is the fourth round of the DTM. At the same time on Sunday, almost 1,500 kilometres further west, pre-practice is held at Le Mans – the only possibility to test on the 13.650 kilometre “Circuit des 24 Heures”, around which the 73rd running of the 24 Hours of Le Mans will be held on 18/19 June.

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Because defending the title with the Audi A4 DTM in Europe’s most popular touring car series has priority, Dr Ullrich, Kristensen and McNish will travel to the Czech Republic on Thursday and follow Le Mans pre-practice from afar. “I don’t think that it’s such a big disadvantage for me,” believes Tom Kristensen, who competes for Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline in the DTM and for Team ADT Champion Racing from America. “The circuit hasn’t changed since last year. And for my first race in Le Mans, I only joined the team after pre-practice anyway – I nevertheless won the race.”

That was 1997. Since then Tom Kristensen has advanced from Le Mans “rookie” to become the most successful Le Mans driver ever. Last year the Dane celebrated his sixth victory at the French 24-hour classic and equalled the record held by the Belgian Jacky Ickx. In only his ninth Le Mans appearance, the Audi “works” driver now has the chance to become the first driver in history to claim a seventh victory.

Therefore he hopes that, in his absence, his team mates JJ Lehto and Marco Werner, with whom he won the 12-hour race in Sebring (USA) in March, find the perfect set-up for the number ‘3’ Audi R8 during pre-practice on Sunday, because the settings from last year can not be adopted for this year’s race.

The most successful Le Mans prototype of all time must compete with 50 kilograms more ballast and approximately 30 hp less power. "You feel the difference, the car isn't as agile as it used to be," explains Kristensen. "It will, quite literally, be an uphill struggle for us. However the R8 prototype's biggest advantages remain untouched: The reliability and the Turbo FSI engine's low fuel consumption."

Allan McNish must also sit out pre-practice because of the clash with the DTM race in Brno. The Scot shares the number '2' Champion Audi R8 with Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro. In contrast, Audi PlayStation Team ORECA (Audi R8 number 4) with its all-French driving squad comprising of Jean-Marc Gounon, Formula 1 test driver Franck Montagny and the former Audi works driver Stéphane Ortelli, is "complete" for pre-practice.

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Technical scrutineering for the three Audi R8 prototypes is on Friday in the Le Mans city centre. Practice is on Sunday between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. "Pre-practice is of particular importance this time to find the best set-up with the higher weight and the reduced engine power," explains Wolfgang Appel, Director Vehicle Technology at Audi Sport and one of the "brains" behind the Audi R8.

Although the DTM has priority at Audi Sport, Dr Ullrich will be in regular telephone contact with project coordinator Christian Weck in France: "At the end of the day we want to give our R8 a successful final season before it goes out to pasture," says Dr Ullrich.

Editors note: A Photoshoot featuring the three Audi Le Mans teams will be staged on Saturday 4 June from 1 p.m. on the start-finish straight at Le Mans.

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