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Motorsport

DTM drivers strengthen Audi team at Le Mans

- **Third Audi R10 TDI for Luhr/Prémat/Rockenfeller**
- **Experienced Le Mans drivers in the two other R10 TDI cars**
- **Mattias Ekström is reserve driver for Tom Kristensen**

For the first time since their triple victory in 2002, AUDI AG will be fielding three factory cars again in the Le Mans 24 Hours. The DTM drivers Lucas Luhr (27/Germany), Alexandre Prémat (25/France) and Mike Rockenfeller (23/Germany) are going to drive a third Audi R10 TDI (car number 3) in the French endurance classic on 16/17 June. Former DTM Champion Mattias Ekström (28/Sweden) is Audi's reserve driver in the event that Tom Kristensen (39/Denmark) should not be fit in time for racing again.

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"The race at Le Mans poses a new challenge every year," commented Audi Head of Motorsport Dr Wolfgang Ullrich. "By fielding a third car, we are increasing our chances of again being successful. Experience has certainly shown us how quickly a team can 'lose' a car at Le Mans. The costs incurred for a third vehicle versus a two-car team are reasonable."

Mattias Ekström, Lucas Luhr, Alexandre Prémat and Mike Rockenfeller proved their abilities to race at Le Mans in tests at Paul Ricard (France) in early April by setting consistently fast lap times. "All four left an outstanding impression," explained Dr Ullrich. "We opted for the combination of Luhr/Prémat/Rockenfeller because we want Mattias to concentrate on the DTM, in which he has good chances of winning the title. Le Mans is exactly between two important DTM races at Brands Hatch and the Norisring. "

The Swede will only drive on 16/17 June in the event that the seven-time Le Mans winner Tom Kristensen has not received medical approval to race. "At the moment we're assuming that Tom will be fit again by the time of

the Le Mans race, but of course there's no guarantee for this," said Dr Ullrich.

The Dane sustained a severe whiplash trauma in the DTM season-opening race at Hockenheim on 22 April. Only two days after the crash he was able to leave hospital and has since been recovering from the accident at home in Denmark. "Basically, he's doing well," said Dr Ullrich. "However, when he subjects himself to excessive physical strain, Tom does not yet feel totally fit. These are normal symptoms after this kind of accident. At the moment, no doctor can predict when he'll be fit again."

As a precaution, Audi Sport will nominate Mattias Ekström as a reserve driver for the race at Le Mans. On 3 June at the Le Mans test day, the Swede will take the wheel of the Audi R10 TDI (car number 2) and familiarise himself with the 13.650-kilometre circuit. His team-mates will be Dindo Capello (Italy/42), who has already won the 24 Hours of Le Mans twice, and Allan McNish (Scotland/37), who was triumphant at Le Mans in 1998 but is still waiting to clinch his first Le Mans victory with Audi.

The number 1 Audi R10 TDI will be driven by last year's race winners Frank Biela (Germany/42), Emanuele Pirro (Italy/45) and Marco Werner (Germany/41), who – between them – have a total of ten Le Mans victories under their belts.

"I'm convinced that by deploying our seasoned drivers, who rank among the world's absolute elite of sportscar drivers, and our promising juniors, we are well prepared for the battle against Peugeot," said Dr Ullrich. "At the same time we are giving three young drivers the big chance to fight for overall victory at Le Mans for the first time. This is also a part of our motorsport concept."

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