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Motorsport

Ingolstadt, 7 June 2002

Le Mans – the race of the year

After months of preparation, things are now getting serious: June 15, the Le Mans 24 Hours will be taking place for the 70th time – for Audi the most important race of the year. The French endurance classic attracts worldwide attention, last year, in excess of 2,500 media representatives and some 200,000 spectators visited the race track.

Audi has prepared itself for the season highlight as intensely as in previous years. A 30 hour endurance test at Magny-Cours in France, high-speed tests at the German manufacturer's proving ground and a two-day pit-stop practice near Ingolstadt – the near 100-member strong team, led by Head of Audi Sport Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, has left nothing to chance in recent months in order to achieve their ambitious goal: a third consecutive victory in Le Mans.

In achieving this AUDI AG would add another important chapter to its successful motorsport history. To date only a handful of manufacturers have succeeded in winning Le Mans three times in a row enabling them to take home the historic trophy for good. Frank Biela, Tom Kristensen and Emanuele Pirro, the victorious trio for the past two years, could also be writing motorsport history on June 15-16: never before has the same driver line-up won at Le Mans three times in a row.

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However, Rinaldo Capello, Johnny Herbert and Christian Pescatori in the Infineon Audi R8 with start number 2 want to prevent this. In their first joint effort, the Anglo-Italian trio won the 2002 Sebring 12 Hours. Moreover, "Dindo" Capello set the fastest lap time in the pre-event test on the slightly modified Le Mans track in May which is a little longer compared to last year.

A podium finish is also the goal of the all German-speaking Audi team: Philipp Peter and Marco Werner are Le Mans "rookies" while Michael Krumm has contested the race in the French Sarthe-region two times already.

Like the 1-2-3 result in 2000, the three silver Infineon Audi R8 sports cars have additional colours referring to the German flag: black (#3), red (#1) and yellow (#2). All three cars have been improved in detail and will be racing with a rear end that has been modified compared to last year, in order to achieve a better airflow around the rear wing, which proved effective during the pre-practice in May.

However, Audi expects to have the greatest advantage over the opposition with the FSI-technology, successfully used for the first time when Audi achieved a 1-2 result last year. Because of the better fuel consumption, up to two refuelling stops could be saved in normal conditions assuming the race length is around 5000 kms (3100 miles). Courtesy of the FSI-technology, also introduced on Audi's production models this year, the Infineon Audi R8 can complete almost one more lap of the 13.880 kms (8.62 miles) track on one tank of fuel. But

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the FSI-engine is not only more fuel-efficient, it also has more power, especially in the lower rev-ranges, a better throttle response and a higher maximum torque.

For Audi Sport Team Joest and customer team Audi Sport Japan Team Goh, that has entered one of last year's R8 cars, also featuring FSI-technology, for four-time Le Mans-winner Yannick Dalmas and Japanese duo Seiji Ara and Hiroki Katoh, Le Mans begins on Tuesday with technical scrutineering. Traditionally, the race will start on Saturday at 4 pm (CET).

The Audi Press Conference with the Audi works team and the Audi Sport Japan Team Goh takes place on Friday, June 14, at 3 pm.

Quotes before the Le Mans race

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8#1): "Winning the Le Mans 24 Hours three times in a row would be a dream come true. I would rather not talk or think about it but it crosses my mind time and time again. Probably, I will never get a chance like this again. In the last two years, our performance was good and we also had a bit of luck which is necessary. Maybe that will stick for a third time. But for me, as an Audi man, the important thing is that an Audi wins. It's almost incidental which one. We have the task of claiming the third victory for Audi. In the past years, we were well prepared and this year, we are at least as well prepared. Le Mans is the most important race of the year. It puts everything else in the shade. For me, being successful again there is ten times more important than in any other race."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Le Mans would not be Le Mans, when nothing unexpected occurs. Last year, it was the torrential rain; let's wait and see what awaits us this year. We just have to be prepared for everything and we are – car and drivers alike. I have won Le Mans twice in a row, but I don't want to think about that at all. Our goal is doing a good job. Of course, expectations are high, both from the team and from myself. In my home country Denmark, Le Mans is very popular. The entire race is shown live on television. And this year, there will be even more Danish fans among the spectators than last year. I am looking forward to Le Mans."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "All preparations have been made to achieve a good result. But the fact that it worked so well for us in the past two years, doesn't mean that this will be the case again this year. We know that we cannot make any mistakes or have bad luck during the race. This year's car is very, very good. Dindo has shown this with his fastest time during the pre-practice in May. The test results have given us important information about the set-up of the car. I hope that it will remain dry because then we can show how big the fuel advantage of the FSI-engine is."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Fourth, third, second – when you look at the sequence of my Le Mans results, I hope for first place this time. But I also know that anything can happen in such a long race. Any of the four Audis can win but I hope that I am in the

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winning car this time and that the number two will be in front at the end. Being able to race at Le Mans is a great thing for a driver and doing so with the best car is a bonus. We, as drivers, are very well prepared. Only last week, we racked up hundreds of kilometres cycling during a fitness training camp in the Alsace. That was a good endurance test for Le Mans."

Johnny Herbert (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "Le Mans is the most important sportscar race of the year, winning is very valuable for a driver. My 1991 Le Mans victory was a little fortunate whereas this time I'm driving the best car. I joined the Audi works team for the Sebring 12 Hours and won the race, together with Dindo and Christian. During the pre-event test, we set the fastest time in the closing stages. It seems to be going well for us. But this race is unique, and we feel by no means safe. We will be facing strong opposition, not to mention our Audi team-mates. Anything can happen during a race that lasts 24 hours."

Christian Pescatori (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "I can hardly wait for the action to start. For me, Le Mans is the race of all races. Last year, I came second on my debut for Audi - this year we will do everything to go one better. I am optimistic that we will succeed. After all, Dindo, Johnny and I have already won the Sebring 12 Hours and Dindo was fastest at the pre-practice, so within the Audi camp, we are something like the favourites. I am very well prepared for Le Mans and I have clocked up a lot of mileage with the Infineon Audi R8, so I know the car much better than last year."

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Michael Krumm (Infineon Audi R8 #3): "The work that Audi has done in past years is sensational. The Infineon Audi R8 is just perfect. As a new driver, you find your place ready and you can just concentrate on your job: driving without any mistakes and completing the quickest possible pit stops. All of us are very well prepared for the race, testing was positive and we are highly motivated. Now we only need a little bit of luck during the race."

Philipp Peter (Infineon Audi R8 #3): "It will be our goal to finish and, if possible, make it on the podium because we are still lacking some experience as far as the Le Mans 24 Hours is concerned. During the pre-practice, the traffic was especially difficult for me. I am looking forward to the race. The interest in Austria and in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, where I spend most of my time, is immense. The frenzy around this race is even bigger than I had expected."

Marco Werner (Infineon Audi R8 #3): "Although the expectations for us as drivers are obviously high, we are not putting too much pressure on ourselves. We don't say: 'We have to win!' although we should be able to do so with the Infineon Audi R8. If we don't have any problems, a podium finish would be realistic. It is our task to remain alert and not make any mistakes during the 24 hours. If we succeed in doing so, we should be among the front-runners. We are still lacking track knowledge, especially in the dark. We will make up for that in qualifying on Wednesday and Thursday. After the last test sessions in Le Castellet, I am very confident. I did very good lap times there. One shouldn't forget that I am changing from a Cup-car into the Infineon Audi R8. That is a major change indeed, like from a small private Cessna aircraft into an F16 jet-fighter!"

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Reinhold Joest (Team Director Audi Sport Team Joest): "During the pre-practice, everything worked perfectly. We are ready for the race. Every year, Le Mans is a new challenge. One never knows what to expect. In the pre-practice, we got to know the new track layout and it really suited the Infineon Audi R8. It would be nice if everything worked out so well as in the previous years. But at Le Mans, no one can guarantee a victory, not even with such good preparation. We have done everything that could be done beforehand, now we just need that little bit of luck. Competing with three cars, like in 2000, puts more pressure on the team but offers us an additional chance. Achieving three Le Mans victories in a row would be sensational."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich (Head of Audi Sport): "Our preparation for Le Mans has been as equally intense and detailed as in previous years. We have been walking the proven road and are just as focussed as ever and not dwelling on our successes. At the pre-practice in May, our cars worked very well as they did in Le Castellet where we did some detail work on the aerodynamics and the balance of the car on a track that is similarly as fast as Le Mans. We have carefully developed the successful Infineon Audi R8, we have a great team of drivers who are particularly motivated for this race. To achieve the historic victory at Le Mans, I also hope for some luck being able to run for 24 hours without unsolvable problems."

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Le Mans timetable

Tuesday, June 11

13.00 – 14.00 hrs Technical scrutineering
Audi Sport Team Joest and
Audi Sport Japan Team Goh

Wednesday, June 12

19.00 – 21.00 hrs 1st qualifying practice, part 1
22.00 – 24.00 hrs 1st qualifying practice, part 2

Thursday, June 13

19.00 – 21.00 hrs 2nd qualifying practice, part 1
22.00 – 24.00 hrs 2nd qualifying practice, part 2

Friday, June 14

15.00 hrs Audi press conference
(Marketing Hospitality Parc du Raccordement)
18.00 – 19.00 hrs Drivers' parade in the Le Mans city centre

Saturday, June 15

09.00 – 09.45 hrs Warm-up
16.00 hrs Start Le Mans 24 Hours

Sunday, June 16

16.00 hrs Finish Le Mans 24 Hours

Photos and further information can be found on the Internet:
www.audi-sportpress.com (accreditation required)

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