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Audi R15 TDI



By next week, the world will have a better idea of Audi's chances in this year's Le Mans 24 Hours - and whether the seemingly invincible marque can scoop victory yet again. This Saturday 21st March will see the Audi R15 TDI race car face its first real challenge... the 12 Hours of Sebring, where Audi's new diesel sportscar will compete head to head against Peugeot, Acura/Honda and other strong entries it will need to beat at Le Mans.

"Sebring is an important test for the 24 Hours of Le Mans," says **Head of Audi Motorsport, Dr Wolfgang Ullrich**. "Experience shows that the track is very hard and mercilessly reveals any problem a car has." This is especially true when temperatures are expected to reach some 30 degrees Celsius in the shade - and the **R15 TDI** has, up till now, tested almost exclusively in cool temperatures and often in the rain.

It was at **Sebring**, in 2006, that Audi scored the first victory for a diesel sportscar in an important international endurance race. The drivers were **Dindo Capello, Tom Kristensen** and **Allan McNish** - the same trio which was victorious at Le Mans last year, and which will be driving the new Audi R15 TDI in 2009. **Lucas Luhr, Mike Rockenfeller** and **Marco Werner** will drive the 'sister' R15 TDI at Sebring.



The 12-hour race at Sebring will also be the debut for the new technical regulations for Le Mans prototypes. Diesel-powered cars must compete with smaller air-intakes and lower turbo pressure - hence less power - while the width of the rear wing has been reduced by 40cm.

As **Allan McNish** explains, "The new **Audi R15 TDI** has a smaller, lighter engine, but there is an enormous amount of work going on in the background to compensate as best as possible for the restrictions enforced by the regulations. The new car has a better weight distribution and is more agile as a result. The aerodynamics have also been optimised. The **R15 TDI** is a huge step compared to the **R10 TDI** which won the **24 Hours of Le Mans** three times in succession."

Sebring will be the first real test of the car's potential and McNish sounds optimistic - but keenly aware of the size of the challenge. "My target is to claim the first victory for the **Audi R15 TDI** on its debut. This means that we cannot afford to make any mistakes as the competition is very, very tough this year."



Meanwhile, **Audi** has begun delivery of its **R8 LMS**, the new **GT3** race car. Twelve examples of the 500bhp V10-engined sportscar will be delivered over the forthcoming weeks to six customer teams, with the first races scheduled for April. Races will include **European GT3 championships** and the **Nürburgring 24 Hours** and, because GT3 regulations prohibit the use of four-wheel drive, the R8 LMS comes with the rear-wheel drive typical of GT racers. **Audi Sport Italia** received the first **Audi R8 LMS**, with chassis number 101.

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Photos: Audi

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