



# Asian **LE MANS** series™

## Interview with Daniel Poissenot

*Advisor to the President of the Automobile Club de l'Ouest and Clerk of the Course.*

"We feel very honoured by the interest shown by Japanese manufacturers in our events."

Daniel Poissenot talks about the history of the Asian Le Mans Series and what's at stake. He also unveils various aspects of the complex organisation with the WTCC. And above all, in the name of the ACO, he congratulates the Japanese car manufacturers, who will meet at Okayama on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October before the first race, on the interest they have shown in the concept.

### **How did the idea of the Asian Le Mans Series come about?**

"We've felt that there was a need for Le Mans-type races in Asia for quite some time now. There's a real potential there in terms of teams and drivers who are endurance fans and also in terms of LM P prototypes, as we found out when we announced the races at Okayama. Some of the drivers like M. Kageyama and T. Tsuchiya are very popular, and they are honouring us with their presence at our presentation conference. And of course, they'll be joined by our friend Yoshiro Terada, the ACO ambassador and administrator- Mr. Le Mans in Japan!"

### **So the Asian entrants are taking on European and American challengers?**

"We'll see eight Asian teams at the start: seven from Japan and one from China representing a total of nine cars. The idea was to make up a field with several local entrants and to add teams that we see in the ALMS, the Le Mans Series and the Le Mans 24 Hours. I'd like to have presented the Courage-Oreca YKG prototype entered by Tokai University at our conference, but it'll be busy testing that day. Okayama will be the theatre of the first appearance outside the USA of the Rahal Letterman Racing BMW and the Robertson Racing Ford GT MK7."

### **You've got the quality. Are you also satisfied with the quantity?**

"We've always said that we'd be happy with around twenty entries. We've got twenty-three including nine prototypes, representing fourteen makes and six nationalities, so we're delighted!"

### **We know the technical and economic reasons for the cancellation of the Shanghai event. Is it just a postponement?**

"Perhaps it was a bit early to organise such an event. The ACO wants to have at least one race in China in 2010 and 2011. This year we've set up a company in China, which will enable us to organise races in there in compliance with the law: a company like the one we've had in Japan (ACO Japan) since 2008."

### **With the Intercontinental Trophy in the near future?**

"It is reserved for LM P1 cars and meets the expectations of the major manufacturers who, on numerous occasions, have told us of their interest in this type of challenge. It will consist of a selection of between seven and nine races from the different Le Mans Series: the ALMS, LMS and the Asian Le Mans Series. We're going to set it up in a perfectly transparent manner in relation to the sporting authority as soon as it appears on the FIA calendar. We're announcing it for 2011 as it'll take that amount of time to prepare for it in the best possible sporting and marketing conditions, as well as in the areas of communications and TV rights."

#### **DÉPARTEMENT COMMUNICATION**

Email : [presse@lemans.org](mailto:presse@lemans.org)

Circuit des "24 Heures"  
72019 Le Mans Cedex 2  
Tél : 02 43 40 24 02  
Fax : 02 43 40 24 88  
Internet : [www.lemans.org](http://www.lemans.org)



*"The JAF has asked the ACO to present the Le Mans 24 Hours regulations and those of the Le Mans Series races on Saturday before the start of the first race at Okayama. All the Japanese manufacturers will be represented, and at the ACO we feel very honoured by this."*

#### **Are the Japanese manufacturers showing a particular interest in the races at Okayama?**

"Yes indeed! The very important Japanese Automobile Federation (JAF) has asked the ACO to organize a presentation conference concerning the regulations, the evolution of the Le Mans 24 Hours and the Le Mans Series races. All the Japanese manufacturers will be represented. It's a big event as nineteen people are coming to Okayama on Saturday morning before the start of the first race, whereas up to now, this type of meeting has always been held in Tokyo. We feel very honoured by this."

#### **The simultaneous organisation of two major races the same weekend on the same circuit is in itself a major event...**

"Well, you could say that the WTCC plus the Asian Le Mans Series provides a guaranteed spectacle! We're expecting over 30 000 spectators for this great weekend. Right from the start we wanted to join up with the WTCC to give the launch of the Asian Le Mans Series the dimension of a worldwide sporting event on an interesting circuit."

#### **Why two 500-km races instead of a single 1000kms one?**

"The main reason is the timetable as night falls at 17h00. This schedule also presents several other advantages: a single qualifying session and a second chance for the entrants in case of a setback, as most of them have come from very far away."

#### **The logistics aspect of such an organisation is a pretty big affair...**

"Of course, and it's been very complex to set up. The ACO has paid for the transport of the cars and equipment, an operation for which we can count on one of our partners, DHL, a specialist in worldwide transport – for F1 in particular. DHL is looking after the sea transport from Europe to Osaka (1) as well as the air transport for the American teams for reasons of time."

#### **The ACO has managed to attract numerous partners for the Asian Le Mans Series...**

"Rolex, our watch partner, who has been faithful to the Le Mans 24 Hours and the Le Mans Series for a long time, really wanted to come to Asia with us as well. Our main partner is AIM, an independent engineering company, which has just distinguished itself with Oreca at Silverstone. Michelin has extended the Green X Challenge to the Asian Series, and Mazda is supplying us with the safety car. And we mustn't forget Bosch, DHL, Shell and JTB, a Japanese travel agency specially accredited for the event."

It is worth remembering that the Asian Le Mans Series on the Okayama circuit will give invitations to the winners of the 4 categories for the 2010 Le Mans 24 Hours.

"We'll calculate a combined classification for both races and the winning teams in LM P1, LM P2, LM GT1 and LM GT2 will receive an automatic invitation to the 2010 Le Mans 24 Hours, which will be held, - and here I'm giving you a scoop - on 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> June 2010. We'll publish the full list of automatic invitations after the final round of the ALMS on the Laguna Seca circuit and after Okayama."

(1): A 3-week journey depending on the weather. From Osaka each team's container will be transported by road to the circuit.

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