

The Test Days have been the final rehearsal before the season kicks off, and testing could scarcely have gone better for Team ORECA Matmut as Soheil Ayari was fastest overall with the ORECA 01 – AIM and Olivier Panis was second with the Peugeot 908 HDi FAP.



Three names set the world alight in their respective class, but none of them is a big surprise. Danny Watts posted the best time in the LMP2 class, while Stefan Mücke ruled the GT1 class and Richard Westbrook did the same in the GT2 class.

The weather conditions have been difficult for both days, and high winds and very low temperatures affected driving. Nevertheless, no major incident disrupted the sessions as the track remained dry.

ORECA MATMUT AND STRAKKA RACING SHINE

Testing form is notoriously difficult to read - you never know for certain what fuel load or set-up a team is running at any one particular time - but there are always the indications to be had about the future hierarchy. Despite an engine problem, Soheil Ayari, Didier André and Andy Meyrick drove neatly, which allowed the ORECA 01 - AIM to set the best time, but the signs are that they will have fearsome opposition. Soheil Ayari declared: *"We did a good job. We tested many different kinds of tires and we found interesting things. The car is faster than last year and it is always a pleasure to top the time-sheets!"*

Team ORECA Matmut has very high hopes for their new Peugeot 908 HDi FAP that was unveiled two days ago in its brand-new livery. Olivier Panis, Nicolas Lapierre and Loic Duval had a productive first day with the most laps of the circuit under their wheels and the second fastest time in the two-day session. Meanwhile, Rebellion Racing is now focusing only on the LMP1 class with two Lolas-Rebellion and a very impressive drivers' line-up. The prototypes set the third and fourth time while Marco Andretti was busy learning the track.



LIKE FATHER, LIKE SONS!

Greg and Leo Mansell join a growing group of second-generation racers keen to emulate the successes of their fathers. The Mansell family didn't miss its entrance with the fifth time, and the father and sons could achieve their work program and should stay in ambush for the whole season.



We are now used to Strakka Racing topping the time-sheets after the unexpected pole last year in Barcelona for the kick-off of the season, but this time, this is in the LMP2 class as the British team bought an Honda Performance Development prototype. This car already has an impressive record of victories, but this is the very first time that it has run in an official event in Europe. During this two-day session, Danny Watts chalked up the best time in the class, but above all, the car has been very reliable, which is promising for the competition in the class, especially with the defending champion Quifel-ASM Team.

Though the mood remained optimistic in the Portuguese camp, the season should be tougher than last year for Miguel Amaral and Olivier Pla, who couldn't do better than second, all the more so as Team RML is not too far behind with their Lola now running Dunlop tires.

In the Formula Le Mans class, the test days at Le Castellet saw Team Boutsen Energy Racing and Team DAMS almost evenly matched before Hope Pole Vision Racing set the best time. On the International Women's Day, the young French driver Corentine Quiniou made her debut on a Formula Le Mans, but could not make the most of the car because of a lack of grip.

ON THE GT'S SIDE

The GT1 class was well represented during these two days thanks to the three Fords. One of them (the Matech Competition's one) will participate to the 1000 Km of Spa-Francorchamps. The drivers line up will be 100% made of ladies!

The Larbre Compétition Saleen stayed only one day, but has been able to keep up with the pace.

The dual between Porsche and Ferrari has been exciting for two days, and the German car-maker was fastest thanks to Prospeed Competition and Richard Westbrook. CRS Racing is very close and Pierre Kaffer and his Ferrari did their best time in the last lap.

Knowing the circuit might have definitely helped Jaime Melo and Gianmaria Bruni and their AF Corse Ferrari F430: they completed their planned program with no problems and chalked up the third time. The fight between the GT2s is always fierce with many cars able to bring the trophy home. This season should meet the race-fans' expectations with several cars within one second.

Jean Alesi and Giancarlo Fisichella had a good start. The Italian driver said at the Press Conference: *"I know that I have a lot to learn because the GT car is fully different from a Formula One car, but I am very happy to be here for a new challenge."*

SCHEDULE

Come and meet all these drivers and teams for the first round of the Le Mans Series season, which will be at the Paul Ricard circuit April 9, 10 and 11. Remind that this race will present an exceptional format as it is an 8 hour race!

Please visit www.lemans-series.com for further information. Regarding the ticketing, consult the circuit website: www.circuitpaulricard.com

