



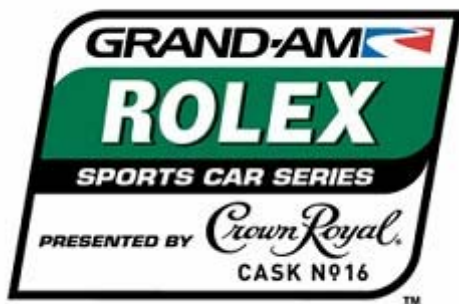
ash automobilia

ash - through the *esses*

The Next 24 Begins Now For The Daytona Prototypes

04/23/09 - © Andrew S. Hartwell

When the green flag waves this Sunday for the Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series presented by Crown Royal Cask No. 16 Bosch Engineering 250 at Virginia International Raceway, it will mark the end of nearly 14 weeks of waiting for the Grand-Am Rolex Series to roar back to life this season. When the Brumos Porsche-Riley of David Donohue, Darren Law, Buddy Rice and Antonio Garcia took the hotly contested and well deserved Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona - Daytona Prototype - race win, it seemed like 2009 held the promise of so much more. So far though, race fans have had to live with so much less.



All that waiting through an extended drought will now be followed by a torrent of racing action with the Verizon Wireless 250 at New Jersey Motorsports Park following exactly one week after the VIR weekend. Then the series really makes up for lost time by fitting in nine more races from May to the first week in October.

That sure was a lot of waiting to go fast followed by a lot of going fast without waiting.

While the Rolex 24 hours was certainly a test of endurance for every team involved, the next 24 weeks will be the real test as several key contenders will be chasing down short lap times – and full length races - in pursuit of a championship.

The many teams that did not win the Rolex 24 are gearing up for a second chance at a win at the second race and beyond. SunTrust Racing stalwart Max Angelelli says his team is anxious to get back to the action with a good feeling for what is to come.

ash “Through The Esses” - Copyright Andrew S. Hartwell

"I can't say how much I am looking forward to racing again. I really started looking forward to it at least two months ago. It got to be pretty awful not being able to race for three whole months. It was boring, from a racing standpoint. We are definitely looking forward to starting the season again at VIR because it has been a really good track for the SunTrust team. I'm really looking forward to taking the Dallara back there for the second time. It is a very good car, a very good project for us. I'm feeling very good, personally. Basically, there is a very good atmosphere throughout the team."

Tracy Krohn's KROHN Racing is coming back to the track with a single car this time around. He has decided to step out of the second KROHN Proto-Lola and let his hot shoes Nic Jonson and Ricardo Zonta chase the rest of the field to the checkered flag.

"The first thing to understand is that (going with one car) is because of business opportunity." Krohn said, "Right now, we think that with lower prices and the fact that my company, W&T Offshore (WTI – NYSE) has cash and has liquidity, we see this as an opportune time to be out buying properties and making deals. We think this will set us up for the next decade. That's our opinion and we think that we will grow the company and make it much stronger than it already is. That part of it is why I am stepping out of the car - because that is my primary expertise...in the oil and gas business. And now is a good time to be out making things happen. So that's the reason that I stepped out of the car, not because I want to quit racing or anything. Certainly I will miss it, but on the other hand, this will put us in the position to race for a long time."

Lead driver Nic Jönsson feels the loss of a second car will not deter his team's chances for a great run. "It's obviously always a challenge when you go from two cars to one car from a set-up standpoint. Having two cars is a big benefit in a team. Now we are going to get everything done on the No. 76 car between Ricardo, David (Brown – Engineer) and me. We are going to have Simon (Marshall) along as an engineer on the same engineering staff as well and expect that to be beneficial to us. Although initially it is different for everybody, I know we are going to manage and really stay focused on the task of winning races and making a run for the championship...not just for Tracy as an owner, but for the whole Krohn Racing team. We are really going after it."

Jönsson expects the KROHN team will be very competitive by channeling their energies to focus on collecting enough points to come out on top at season's end.

"At Daytona our Krohn Racing Ford Lola was only out qualified by the Porsches, who now have had restrictions imposed by Grand-Am. Tracy continues to be committed to the development of the Proto-Auto Lola, as demonstrated by testing sessions in March and April, We are optimizing set-ups that have found more performance and we expect to be very competitive this weekend. We are focusing on winning and overcoming the points deficiency from our DNF at Daytona. For Ricardo and I, the strategy is to win races and make a great run for the championship this year."

After failing to finish at the Rolex 24, Mike Shank Racing is planning to get right back into the fight as well, now that the series forced gestation period is drawing to a close with racing about to be born anew this weekend.

"It's been too long, but now we are ready to go this weekend in Virginia," said team owner Mike Shank. "We had a great test at Homestead but now it's the real thing at VIR. Everyone has put the disappointment of Daytona behind us, and now we know we have to just come out swinging at VIR and again next week in New Jersey because we have some ground to make up in this championship. We had a great comeback at VIR last year to get both cars in the top ten, and hopefully we can do even better this weekend."

It was at VIR two years ago that we learned of the passing of Brumos Racing's spiritual and authentic leader Bob Snodgrass. David Donohue and Darren Law finished third in that race. It was at the start of this season that Snodgrass' team finally got back on top with the Rolex 24 win. Donohue and Law in the No. 58 Brumos Porsche-Riley, along with Joao Barbosa and JC France in the No. 59 car, will be looking to visit the podium again and often in 2009 despite a rules change that reduces engine RPMs in the Porsche powered cars.

"Brumos has done well at VIR often in the past," said Law, "and we have been hard at work since Daytona getting ready for this race, so we will hope to see a repeat of our past successes there. We are in a good position in points and it is still very early in the season, so we feel confident. Mostly, I think we are all just really looking forward to getting back to racing again.

"We're entering this race off our win in the 24-hour, which is great. We ended last season on a high note – we had several podium finishes and several near-misses for a win. Then we just got stronger and stronger, and it showed at Daytona. We have a high level of confidence in our ability, our car setup and running as a team."

Joao Barbosa agreed with his teammate, saying, "I am certainly ready for what seems to me to be the real start of the season, and can't wait to get back in the car again. VIR is a technical track that I enjoy driving a lot. Last year we had some bad luck there, but I believe we can keep the momentum from 2008 and our podium finish at Daytona going strong this year. We know the competition is going to be tougher than ever and the rule changes will be an added challenge, but I believe in Brumos Racing and all of the hard work everyone has put in. We will do our best and see how it all turns out, but we definitely plan to be back on the podium again."

Kevin Doran has been campaigning a Daytona Prototype in the Rolex Series since the very beginning and his No.77 Doran Racing / McDonald's Doran-Dallara Ford will once again look to put drivers Brad Jaeger and Memo Gidley atop a podium step. Jaeger feels he and the team have shaped up to the point where their screaming yellow and red machine should be viewed as a real threat to the competition.

"Its been a long layoff," said Jaeger, "but I've been hitting the gym and going kart racing with Memo to keep the edge sharp, so I'll be ready to go racing when we get to VIR. The team has completely re-built the car since the Rolex 24, so I think we should be able to work through any small issues during the first practice session. We had a really good car for the race here last year, so I'm feeling confident about what we can achieve in the race."

Alex Gurney and Jon Fogarty pilot the No. 99 GAINSCO Auto Insurance Pontiac Riley for team owner Bob Stallings. Gurney, like Mike Shank and Max Angelelli and Darren Law - and just about everyone on both sides of the fence - expressed his desire to get back up to speed when he said, "The break was a little long," Gurney said "It felt a little like we had two off-seasons! We are all fired up though and ready to see where we stack up against a stellar field."

Others to watch for a position at the front include entries from Penske Racing (Porsche-Riley), AIM Autosport (Ford-Riley), Childress-Howard Motorsports (Pontiac-Crawford), and Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates (Lexus-Riley). The balance of the DP field includes the Spirit of Daytona Racing entry (Porsche-Coyote), Beyer Racing (Pontiac-Riley) and the BMW-Riley entries from Supercar Life Racing and Orbit racing.

The VIR entry list includes 16 Daytona Prototypes and 17 GT cars. The New Jersey entry list is a mirror image except for the No. 55 Supercar Life Racing BMW-Riley. We do not yet know if this entry will be added to the list. What we do know is that all the teams and all the fans are anxiously awaiting the return of the Daytona Prototypes.