

Team ORECA-Matmut continues to build up its strength

The Courage-ORECA will carry on with their preparation for the 2008 season during the Le Mans Series' Official Tests. The target : reliability and development.

One and a half month after its first test, the Courage-Oreca «development car» comes back to the Paul Ricard HTTT. Until now, Oliver Panis, Nicolas Lapierre, Stéphane Ortelli and Soheil Ayari, the four drivers who will race for Team ORECA-Matmut in the Le Mans Series, have shared the steering wheel of a single Judd-engined LC70. From this test onwards, the four musketeers will take advantage of having two cars, as the N°6 will for the first time enjoy the company of its twin sister car, the N°5.

After the test sessions at Vallelunga and Barcelona, Team ORECA-Matmut comes back on the track of its first test run with a double goal: to carry on the development of both cars, and to validate the reliability of the latest evolutions. For that purpose, the French team will run a 24-hours test with its Courage-Oreca N°6, which has already completed 3 200 km since the start of the winter tests. Although this car will keep running with some already used components, in order to check the durability of certain parts which will stay on the car for longer than twice round the clock, it will however not be in its final 2008 configuration. Other new developments will appear before the start of the season at Barcelona: mechanical evolutions, but also new aerodynamics, with the 2008 bodywork being currently in the production phase.

Along this endurance distance test, two drivers (one per crew) will focus on the development of the LC70 N°5, which will also take part in the evening test. At the end of this night session, Olivier Panis, Nicolas Lapierre, Stéphane Ortelli and Soheil Ayari will all switch to the cockpit of the N°6 car to carry on the 24-hours simulation. Team ORECA-Matmut will take advantage of this test to give more track time to its drivers. Laurent Groppi and Nicolas Prost, which are among the candidates for the two remaining seats, will also take part in this running. The two young up-and-coming drivers have made their endurance racing debut last year with the Oreca team. Formula Renault 2.0 French Champion in 2006, Laurent finished runner-up in the French GT Championship and 5th of the GT1 class at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. At Le Mans, he was sharing the steering wheel with Nicolas, who will this year compete in the Euro F3000 Championship. Two other drivers, one of them being Loic Duval, will take part in a test session scheduled in mid-March.

The two drivers selected to join Team ORECA-Matmut for the 2008 24 Hours of Le Mans will be announced at the official presentation of the team, on April 1st at the ORECA Courage-Compétition facilities in Le Mans.

**Matmut****Araldite****easydentic**
GROUP**Plus****MOTUL**

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Contacts presse

ORECA

Marjorie Esteveny
mesteveny@oreca.fr
Tél. : + 33 (0)494 885 727

MATMUT

Jessica Lecourt
lecourt.jessica@matmut.fr
Tél. : + 33 (0)235 637 008