 Monday 30 April 2018

Toyota Motor Corporation

GAZOO Racing Company

**NEW SEASON STARTS AT SPA FOR TOYOTA GAZOO RACING**

TOYOTA GAZOO Racing gets the 2018-19 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) season started this week with the Total 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium.

Fernando Alonso will make his WEC race debut in the #TS050 HYBRID car he shares with last year’s Spa winners Sébastien Buemi and Kazuki Nakajima while the #7 line-up of Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi and José María López are reunited for a second season.

Saturday’s opening race, which takes place only around 120km from the team’s base in Cologne, Germany, marks the start of a new era for TOYOTA GAZOO Racing in endurance, one in which the performance and efficiency of its hybrid electric powertrain will be tested like never before.

Following six years of competition with hybrid competitors from fellow manufacturers in LMP1, this year TOYOTA takes on a field of eight private, non-hybrid cars who benefit from significant performance enhancements, such as 49% more fuel energy per lap, 37.5% more fuel flow and 45kg lower minimum weight.

To compete under those conditions requires TOYOTA’s hybrid electric powertrain to again demonstrate the development progress which has seen a 35% reduction in fuel consumption at Le Mans since 2012. Such advancements contribute to TOYOTA’s ongoing efforts to make ever-better road cars for customers, with more than 11million hybrid electric road cars sold since 1997.

TOYOTA GAZOO Racing has embraced the challenge and prepared its TS050 HYBRID cars for the new season, with more than 25,000km of winter testing completed prior to Spa, where the clear target will be to win for a third time at the classic Belgian circuit.

TOYOTA has raced six times in WEC at Spa, which is considered a second home event for the team, behind Fuji Speedway, as the track is located only an hour’s drive from the TOYOTA GAZOO Racing technical centre in Cologne, Germany.

The Spa race is traditionally a warm-up to the Le Mans 24 Hours in June as it offers the final chance for teams to compete with their cars before the biggest race of the year. This year the race has the additional honour of also being the first race of a season which includes eight events covering 84 hours of racing which finish at Le Mans 2019.

The 1,000hp TS050 HYBRID will compete in low-downforce Le Mans specification, which sacrifices aerodynamic grip in corners for higher top speed on the long straights of Spa or La Sarthe. Last year the low-downforce TS050 HYBRID set the fastest single lap time of the weekend, when Stéphane Sarrazin in the #9 lapped quicker than either of the high-downforce cars in qualifying.

The first track action of the new season takes place on Thursday, with two 90-minute practice sessions in the afternoon. Friday sees final practice followed by qualifying while Saturday’s race begins at 1.30pm local time.

**Hisatake Murata, Team President:** “It is an exciting time of the year; I am sure all team members and fans cannot wait to see the first race. We don’t know exactly what to expect in terms of performance because there are many unknowns with the newcomers to LMP1 but for the fans I am sure this only adds to the excitement. Our priority this season is obviously victory at Le Mans. Although we have completed an intensive pre-season testing schedule, nothing compares to the challenge of racing so Spa is an important step in our preparation. Our three consecutive wins at the end of 2017 have set a high standard, so our target this weekend has to be the centre of the podium.”

**Mike Conway (TS050 HYBRID #7):** “Spa is one of my favorite circuits, so I can’t wait to get there and get back on track. It should be interesting driving the low-downforce package there and I’m sure it’s going to feel quick through Radillon. I like the event in general in Spa, the fans are proper petrol heads and the atmosphere, especially if we get good weather, is always great. We were very strong there last year and the #7 could have won, but we got unlucky with safety cars. So after a lot of work in pre-season to be prepared, I’m looking forward to kick off the season now and I hope to do so with a strong result.”

**Kamui Kobayashi** **(TS050 HYBRID #7):** “Spa is a fantastic circuit and I always enjoy driving there, especially because we have a lot of fans and colleagues to cheer us on. It’s the first race of the season so it’s the first time to see where everyone is in terms of performance, so it is an important part of our Le Mans preparation. Our car was very strong last season but it’s a different situation now with the non-hybrid LMP1 cars. Our target is always to win and the team has worked really hard in pre-season to give us the best chance to do that.”

**José María López (TS050 HYBRID #7):** “Of course I’m really looking forward to the first race of the season in this great championship. The winter was long, too long for my taste, so I can’t wait to drive the TS050 HYBRID in race conditions. We’ve been working hard and we hope to be at a good competitive level. For me it’s going to be a new experience because I was injured last year and missed Spa, so it will be my first time racing there in an LMP1 car. I’m really excited to race our car around this track and I’m hoping for a good result for the team.”

**Sébastien Buemi (TS050 HYBRID #8):** “We are finally attending the first race of the 2018-19 WEC season and I can't wait to start, especially on such an iconic circuit. We won twice here, in 2014 and 2017, so I have some great memories. It will be our very first race together with Fernando and I am very much looking forward to it. In the past the weather was very good so let's cross our fingers it will be similar again this year. We now know the car very well and we already had our first test alongside our competitors at Paul Ricard but this will be the first real fight.”

**Kazuki Nakajima (TS050 HYBRID #8):** “This is the start of my seventh season in WEC and I hope it will be a memorable one. I have mixed memories of Spa but the highlight is obviously the victory alongside Sébastien and Anthony last year. We have a different downforce package this time so it will be interesting to see how that changes the feeling, but I am sure we can be strong and move forward with our Le Mans preparations. After a lot of testing together, it will be our first time to race alongside Fernando; I know that will be really exciting for fans and it’s interesting for us as drivers too.”

**Fernando Alonso (TS050 HYBRID #8):** “After all the hard work done by the team in pre-season testing it is great to be going to my first race in the FIA World Endurance Championship with TOYOTA. It’s a very exciting time for me as Le Mans comes closer. So far I have very much enjoyed my first taste of endurance racing; working together with Sébastien and Kazuki, and in fact all the drivers, has been a great experience. There is such a strong team spirit here; everyone is working together for the same target so I can’t wait to work together at a race weekend for the first time.”

**Copyright-free, high-resolution images can be found at** <https://www.tgr-dam.com>

**Contact**

Alastair Moffitt, Manager Marketing & Communications: alastair.moffitt@toyota-motorsport.com

TOYOTA GAZOO Racing official website:

<http://toyotagazooracing.com/>

**TOYOTA GAZOO Racing’s motorsport activities in FIA World Endurance Championship(WEC) are supported by the following partners:**