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Aston Martin embarks on landmark world championship motorsport programme

- **Aston Martin name joins Formula 1™ entry list for the first time in 59 years**
- **New Vantage GTE to debut in FIA WEC at Prologue in April**
- **Ambitious racing programme signals bold future for Aston Martin**
- **Aston Martin Racing will return to the Nürburgring 24 Hours in 2018**

21 March, Gaydon: This weekend's 2018 Rolex Australian Grand Prix marks the beginning of Aston Martin's most ambitious global motorsport programme in more than half a century. For the first time since 1959, the Aston Martin name will appear in both the Formula 1™ and Le Mans 24 Hours entry lists as the British manufacturer takes a vital step in the structured growth of its comprehensive motorsport vision.

Along with an innovative technical partnership that sees the rebranded Aston Martin Red Bull Racing team compete for the 2018 FIA Formula 1™ World Championship titles, Aston Martin Racing will enter an exciting new challenger – the Vantage GTE – in the GTE Pro category of the 2018/19 FIA World Endurance Championship Super Season. Moreover, Aston Martin Racing factory drivers will race customer Aston Martin V12 Vantage GT3s in the Blancpain GT Series and British GT Championships, while the marque will return to the Nürburgring 24 Hours in May*. In total Aston Martin will be significantly invested in 44 races around the world in 2018.

"Racing forms part of the original DNA of the company and this reinforces the message," said Aston Martin's President and Chief Executive Officer, Andy Palmer. "It's in the name, Lionel Martin built and raced his car up Aston Hill, so it's always been part of what we are."

“Extending our association with, and renaming the team, Aston Martin Red Bull Racing is about seeding the soil for the future. First and foremost, that concerns the Aston Martin Valkyrie and creating the fastest mid-engine car ever. But what it also does is create a fertile ground for when we launch our first core mid-engine car in 2021.

“Secondly, continuing in the FIA World Endurance Championship allows us to demonstrate our quality, reliability and durability. To race for 24 hours and then win, like we did at Le Mans in 2017, helps to sell that message. By going racing we have demonstrated this to the whole world. I think what you are seeing is a much more confident Aston Martin. We're a global force and that reflects on our position in motorsport in 2018.”

While the new Aston Martin Red Bull Racing RB14 that Daniel Ricciardo and Max Verstappen will race in Melbourne this weekend is powered by a 1.6-litre, turbo-charged hybrid engine branded by TAG-Heuer, Aston Martin continues to evaluate whether future F1 regulations might create the right conditions for it to enter as an engine manufacturer in 2021.

“The draft regulations put together by the FIA, I would say, are broadly acceptable to us,” said Palmer. “In other words, they are most definitely going in the right direction. And they are drafted in a way which I believe puts more control back with the driver and less with the electronic brain, which is what F1 is all about.

“We don't expect to see the final draft regulations published before the end of the year, but we are preparing our engine concepts so that we don't lose any time. If we get that simplified engine and we get a cap on costs, then that is something that we are very interested in doing.”

As winners of the 2017 Le Mans 24 Hours GTE Pro category, and the reigning champions in the GTE Am class, Team AMR has a strong legacy to build on when the 4-litre turbocharged Aston Martin Vantage GTE makes its competition debut in the opening round of the FIA WEC Super Season at Spa-Francorchamps in May. Aston Martin will field two of the new cars in the GTE Pro category, while it will defend its GTE Am title with the iconic normally-aspirated V8 Vantage GTE in its last season of competition in the category.

“The team has done an outstanding job in designing and developing the new car,” said Aston Martin’s Vice President and Chief Special Operations Officer, David King. “The driver feedback

is excellent and we expect to be competitive, but with an all-new car and the Balance of Performance process, we won't know for sure until the racing starts.

"It is great to see more manufacturers coming into the GTE class – it is a sure sign of health in the GT and sports car sector of our industry. The competition is certain to be intense, which is good for the sport and especially for the fans, many of who I hope will be cheering us on throughout the season."

Practice for the 2018 Rolex Australian Grand Prix begins 12:00 (AEDT), Friday, 23 March. The scheduled race start is 16:10 (AEDT), 25 March. The 2018 FIA WEC Prologue takes place at Paul Ricard on 6-7 April, ahead the opening round of the FIA WEC Super Season at Spa-Francorchamps on 5 May.

*Details of Aston Martin's entry in the Nürburgring 24 Hours, which takes place on the 12-13 May will be confirmed soon.

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Interview with Aston Martin President and Chief Executive Officer Andy Palmer

2018 marks the most ambitious motorsport programme Aston Martin has embarked on in more than half a century, why is the company taking such an approach?

“Racing forms part of the original DNA of the company and this reinforces the message. It's in the name, Lionel Martin built and raced his car up Aston Hill (in 1914), so it's always been part of what we are. Our association with, and renaming the team, Aston Martin Red Bull Racing is about seeding the soil for the future. First and foremost, that concerns Aston Martin Valkyrie and creating the fastest mid-engine car ever. But what it is also doing is creating a fertile ground for when we launch our first core mid-engine car in 2021.

“Secondly, continuing in the FIA World Endurance Championship allows us to demonstrate our quality, reliability and durability. To race for 24 hours and then win, like we did at Le Mans in 2017, helps to sell that message. By going racing we have demonstrated this to the whole populous.”

This is first time that Aston Martin has appeared on a Formula 1 entry list since 1960, is this a landmark moment in the history of Aston Martin?

“It's certainly one. We have been in Formula 1™ in the past, but I think what we have now is a clear structure as all our race programmes come together. So along with the programme that already demonstrates the durability of our cars, we have something that strategically prepares the market for our mid-engine cars. This is not a marketing whim, this is demonstrating that our motorsport has a real function to play in the growth of the company.”

You've stated that you would like to see Aston Martin return to F1 as an engine-builder if the conditions were right, how much closer are we to those conditions being met?

“The draft regulations put together by the FIA for 2021, I would say, are broadly acceptable to us. In other words, they are most definitely going in the right direction. And they are drafted in a way which I believe puts more control back with the driver and less with the electronic brain, which is what Formula 1™ is all about. Clearly there are objections to those draft regulations by at least two of the incumbents and my job is to support the FIA in maintaining their direction. We don't expect to see the final draft regulations being published before the end of the year, but meanwhile

we are preparing our engine concepts so that we don't lose any time. If we get that simplified engine and we get a cap on costs, then that is something that we are very interested in doing.”

How significant a role would Aston Martin's new Performance Design and Engineering Centre at Red Bull Racing's Milton-Keynes HQ play in any future engine project?

“It would play some role. Clearly, we must recruit more skills, but we have skills already through Luca Marmorini who is running our concept design. Basically, we can run it through that centre. The centre bases 130 people on the campus at Red Bull and it is basically there for advanced engineering and advanced in design of mid-engine cars. So, by nature, all that osmosis and the knowledge that you get from that co-location all goes towards Valkyrie and its future brothers and daughters. Whether the engine development is done there is not decided yet.”

Aston Martin is known for its beautiful performance cars, why are we not considering entering Formula 1 as a manufacturer like Ferrari or McLaren?

“Because it would take us a long time. The engine programme is something we can achieve and genuinely participate in. To my mind, Red Bull Racing has a wealth of experience that you can't just buy or simply imagine building quickly. I think it would be arrogant to believe that you can go in to Formula 1™ and within two years be up on the podium. It takes a long time, and to some extent we can shortcut that by working with a team that is already there, and of course save the enormous cost associated with it.”

What expectations do you have for the Aston Martin Red Bull Racing team in 2018?

“I think we are going to be competitive. When you look at the testing times and performance out of Barcelona, it would seem – though one never knows – that there are three teams in contention. So not dissimilar to last year, though it looks as though Aston Martin Red Bull Racing is more in the mix this time. Hopefully what we get back this season is racing, and not a parade.”

The last time that Aston Martin entered Formula 1, in 1960, it relied on its Le Mans-winning line-up for its driving strength. Times have changed, but would you like to see more interaction with our programmes further down the line, so we take advantage of driver ambition like Toyota has with Fernando Alonso?

“Yes. We participate in multiple forms of racing, whether that be in FIA WEC or any of our other series including Formula 1™, so it would be good to have a race driver programme. I've done it in my previous jobs with other manufacturers and I would like to see it happen again. We have certain drivers that we have come across who would benefit from this. One of the things about young drivers is that they need to have experience in different series, and between Red Bull Racing and ourselves, we're able to create these driver programmes. It's not something that we have matured yet, but it is something that I would like to develop.”

We will see Aston Martin factory drivers racing through the full spectrum of the GT category, from World Championship level and Blancpain, as well as the Nürburgring 24 Hours, all the way down to the British GT Championship. Is this a strategy we would like to synergize across our programmes?

“Exactly. The way I look at it is that our GT4 allows our customers to move into the racing world and depending on their talent they can then go to GT3 or they can go to GTE. But our professional drivers that come in at a much higher level and are making a living out of it within our orbit, you can imagine a good driver having ambitions to the very top of WEC racing or Formula 1™. Some of them could easily make it, and we can help develop their careers.”

Aston Martin racing is the reigning Le Mans 24 Hours GTE Pro winner. We begin the Super Season with a new Vantage GTE, what are your expectations for it going in to this unique new campaign?

“Everybody hopes that we can deliver with the new car and that we can replicate what happened last year. One would hope that we are competitive, and the feedback from the drivers is good. You must always factor in the Balance of Performance and what that may or may not do. We'll be there and hopefully we will be competitive. But it's the first season for the Vantage GTE, so we just don't know until we get up against those other cars.

“The good news is that there are more manufacturers coming in to the GTE class, which means that other companies are in the same position as we are. They will have new cars and they don't know their performance level either, so it is going to be really interesting.”

What is your take on the FIA World Endurance Super Season format? Do you believe this to be a good step forward for WEC?

“I think so. It is a long season and you get two Le Mans in one campaign. But it is a way of fixing the future, and so I think from a GTE Am and Pro perspective it has never been better to be frank. Obviously, FIA WEC is a bit distressed when you talk about LMP1 and LMP2, but I do know that the FIA and the ACO are making moves that can potentially fix that.”

We know discussions are ongoing with the ACO about an LMP1 category replacement, but can you foresee a time not so far away where Aston Martin is competing for overall victory in Le Mans and the Monaco Grand Prix?

“Be a nice thing to happen and it would be very sweet wouldn't it? But again, it depends very much on the rules and the way that you see LMP1. As long as LMP1 is about essentially prototype cars, then basically we're not interested. But if you can get to a point where LMP1 was more about racing Aston Martin Valkyries versus Ferrari La Ferraris versus McLaren P1s, or something resembling that genesis, then Aston Martin would be very interested in doing that.”

2018 Aston Martin Racing Driver Roster

Daniel Ricciardo (AUS)

#3 Aston Martin Red Bull Racing – TAG-Heuer RB14
FIA Formula 1 World Championship

Max Verstappen (NL)

#33 Aston Martin Red Bull Racing – TAG-Heuer RB14
FIA Formula 1 World Championship

Marco Sørensen (DK)

FIA WEC GTE Pro; #95 Aston Martin Racing Vantage GTE
British GT Championship; TF Sport

Nicki Thiim (DK)

FIA WEC GTE Pro; #95 Aston Martin Racing Vantage GTE
Blancpain GT Series; R-Motorsport
British GT Championship; TF Sport

Darren Turner (GB)

FIA WEC GTE Pro; #95 Aston Martin Racing Vantage GTE
British GT Championship, Beechdean AMR

Jonny Adam (GB)

FIA WEC GTE Pro; #97 Aston Martin Racing Vantage GTE
British GT Championship; Optimum Motorsport

Alex Lynn (GB)

FIA WEC GTE Pro; #97 Aston Martin Racing Vantage GTE

Maxime Martin (B)

FIA WEC GTE Pro; #97 Aston Martin Racing Vantage GTE
Blancpain GT Series; R-Motorsport
British GT Championship; Jetstream Motorsport

Pedro Lamy (P)

FIA WEC GTE Am; #98 Aston Martin Racing V8 Vantage GTE

Paul Dalla Lana (CDN)

FIA WEC GTE Am; #98 Aston Martin Racing V8 Vantage GTE

Mathias Lauda (A)

FIA WEC GTE Am; #98 Aston Martin Racing V8 Vantage GTE

Ross Gunn (GB)

FIA WEC GTE reserve driver
Chinese GT Championship