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Le Mans 24 Hours Karting preview, 26th edition, 3-4 September 2011

The biggest Karting endurance race in the world

The 26th edition of Le Mans' 24 Hours Karting will take place next weekend at the famous Alain Prost 1200-meter racetrack. The event is organised by the ACO (Automobile Club de l'Ouest) with KMO as a promoter. The greatest endurance race for karts in the world attracted 35 teams, with a mix of different chassis, engines and nationalities.

History: The inaugural edition was held in 1986 and won by the Colin brothers and Lesage who completed 1434 laps at the wheel of a 100cc Mach1/KZH.

Records: Wilfrid Lecarpentier won 8 times out of 15 participations, just like Tom Kristensen did it in the Le Mans 24 Hours. "Le Mans Racing" magazine Chief Editor François Hurel, who won in 1989, currently holds the record for the most Le Mans' 24 Hours Karting appearances at 24. "Kart mag" Managing Editor and Le Mans' 24 Hours Karting promoter Jacky Foulatier and team-mates Frédéric Johais, Jérémy Iglesias and Wilfrid Lecarpentier hold the distance record with 1670 laps (2004 km), established in 2006. The smallest gap was recorded in 1995, with only 6'943 between PKS in 1st and La Manche Kart mag in 2nd position under the flag.

Famous names: in 1996, Sébastien Bourdais (2nd overall in the 2007 and 2009 Le Mans 24 Hours) won Le Mans' 24 Hours Karting. In the same 11th edition, Romain Dumas and Benoît Tréluyer were not as lucky. They came home 16th and 28th respectively, fourteen and fifteen years before they went on to win Le Mans 24 Hours in an Audi.

Championship: The event is the 6th and the 7th round of the Euro Endurance Series. The championship was launched in 2003 and resulted in a massive growth of the entry. The teams will be awarded points at the end of the 12th hour and at the end of the race.

Favourites: Sarthe RTKF 1 (Sodi-Parilla) is the reigning team and aims to repeat its 2010 success. It was crowned Euro Endurance Series and FFSA French champion last season and also won the Le Mans 6 Hours earlier this year. Three former winners (Lecarpentier, Fiault, Poulain) will share driving duties with a rookie, Antoine Lepsqueux. Cotentin Intermarché's Birel-Parilla and La Manche Kart mag's Tony Vortex are the other teams to watch.

Categories: The Group 1 gathers the sophisticated karts of the international KF2 category (2-stroke, water-cooled 125cc engines, 15.000 rpm, 34hp, 162 kg including driver). They are supposed to fight for the overall victory, but year after year, the single-make Group 2 karts (Rotax Max, 2-stroke, water-cooled 125cc engines, 13.500 rpm, 29,5hp, 162 kg including driver) became potential podium finishers. Last year, Douvrin-Technikart's Kosmic-Rotax took the Group 2 honours and finished second overall.

Women: Isabelle Fleury is the only female driver with a podium finish to her name. Nineteen years later, three drivers out of 140 are women. The 2009 French Female Karting Cup winner Aurore Launay returns with La Hague DSM team (CRG-Rotax Group 2). Two girls are part of the n°35 MG-Rotax crew: Alizée Guilmain and Alice Colin, who is the daughter of one of the first and second edition's winners.

International entries: The 2011 edition of Le Mans' 24 Hours Karting attracted drivers from Italy, Great Britain, Portugal and the USA, as well as one Italian and four British teams. Two Rotax Max legends, Martin Pierce and Ben Cooper, will be racing with Brands Hatch-Screenvyn. This team accumulated several Euro Endurance Series class win, but hasn't succeeded yet in the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Support races and concerts: On Saturday morning, the kids of the Mini-Kart category (7 to 10 years old) will compete in the now traditional 24-Minute race, followed by the fantastic Vintage, Classic and Historic karts of "Kart Legend". Just like in the Le Mans 24 Hours, concerts will be organised during the Karting event. The local rock band "Shuffle" and the soul singer Sarah Bessie will perform live from 9pm on Saturday evening.

TV: live streaming videos will be available at the ACO's website (www.lemans.org) and at LM TV's website (Le Mans TV www.lmtv.fr). Live TV schedule (local time): Saturday 3rd September 12:00/13:00, 14:30/16:30, 19:00/20:00, 22:00/00:00, Sunday 4th September 09:00/11:00, 14:00/15:30.

Starter: Pescarolo team driver, 1988 Karting World Champion, Le Mans 24 Hours overall runner-up and class winner Emmanuel Collard will waive the starter's flag next Saturday at 15:00 for the 24 Hours Karting.

Euro Endurance Series' website : www.euro-endurance.com

Kart mag's website : www.kartmag.fr

ACO's website : www.lemans.org

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