

GT3 Is The Magic Number



GT3 will provide a category for competitors who might otherwise be left out in top end GT racing.

The FIA GT3 European Championship was officially launched in Monaco on December 2, with a display of the cars in front of the prestigious Hotel de Paris in Casino Square.

In attendance were FIA President Max Mosley, Deputy President for Sport Marco Piccinini and Stephane Ratel, chairman of SRO, the promoter of the new series. Ratel believes that GT3, which is open to all non-professional drivers competing in road-worthy GT cars, will fill a gap in the market.

Ratel said: "We felt there was a need for a more accessible international series, with all the famous brands of GT cars. There has been an evolution throughout the years of GT2, and GT1, with the sport getting more and more professional. This has precluded a lot of gentlemen drivers, or keen enthusiasts, who were there just for the fun of it. I thought there was a need for a more accessible formula, with cars which will be less expensive to run, to purchase, and to enjoy."

The line-up of cars at the launch included the Ascari KW01, Aston Martin DBRS9, Lamborghini Gallardo, Lotus Exige, Maserati Gran Sport Light and Venturi Heritage. These potential GT3 entrants are normal GT cars which are able to be used legally on an open road and adapted for racing on circuits.

Ratel said: "You just come with what you have: a Porsche, a Ferrari, a Maserati." The performance of the cars will be balanced with weight handicaps, a system used to great effect in the thrilling 2005 FIA GT1 Championship.

GT3 is also aimed at bringing the

five races in the first year to take into account higher starting costs for the teams. Six races are planned in the second year, with more in future seasons.

Ratel thanked the FIA for the full help and support it has given to get the series off the ground. He said: "Many people believe that the FIA is only interested in Formula One, and I can tell you, from my personal experience, that this is not true. The FIA really has a great interest in GT racing from the start, and I have always received fantastic support from President Mosley and I would really like to thank him publicly for that."

FIA President Max Mosley commented: "I think the FIA GT3 European Championship is an excellent idea and we at the FIA are very pleased about it. It provides the possibility of very good and very entertaining racing for a category of driver and competitor who might otherwise be left out in the ever more professional top end of GT racing."

The press conference was followed by the first official test day, at the nearby Paul Ricard High-Tech Test Track, where the GT3 concept was met with glowing praise from the manufacturers.

Maserati Corse director Claudio Berro said: "For me, GT3 is a very fantastic idea. It was a very good idea of Stephane's to organise this series, to show that you can have endurance

enthusiasts back into the sport. It will not be open to drivers who have been involved in Formula One or other top level racing.

However, just because it is a series for non-professional drivers that does not mean it will be less well organised than the GT1 or GT2 championships, which are also promoted by SRO. As Ratel he says: "We wanted to be for amateurs, but we wanted to be professional about it."

The calendar will follow most of the European events of the FIA GT Championship. It has been limited to

without the cost."

AMR commercial director James Turner said: "GT3 seems to us to be a great series, with close, exciting racing, a bedrock for international Sportscar racing, sensible budgets, nice cars and hopefully some good parties as well."

Chris Arnold, general for Lotus Sport, added: "We are very keen on GT3, as I was brought up in the 60's and 70's, when Elans and Elites were chasing Astons and so on around the circuits. I really hope this Championship can get back to that sort of racing in 2006."