

Hong Kong Revs Up for Le Mans

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([PRWEB](#)) April 23, 2005 -- A Hong Kong team is poised to make history by flying the bauhinia flag at the world's greatest sports car race – the Le Mans 24 Hours.

It will be the first time ever that a car owned and sponsored by SAR companies and piloted by Hong Kong drivers has gone wheel to wheel with the world's best in the famous endurance classic.

The ambitious HK\$12 million project is being spearheaded by Hong Kong driver and reigning Porsche Infineon Carrera Cup Asia champion Matthew Marsh.

“It’s all systems go – we have an agreement for the car, we have secured the bulk of the sponsorship and we are in the process of finalising the three-man driving team,” Marsh told the South China Morning Post.

“We intend to prove that Hong Kong can compete on the world stage. It is an enormous challenge, but we have the drive, the ambition and the talent to succeed.”

Marsh’s team, Noble Group-GruppeM Racing, will be driving a Porsche GT3 RSR with a distinctive yellow, white and red livery that features a large bauhinia on the roof.

Marsh expects to announce his two co-drivers within the next few weeks. Those in the frame include Hong Kong racing legend Charles Kwan Siu-cheung, current Formula BMW Asia champion Marchy Lee Ying-kin, Hong Kong-based Porsche driver Darryl O’Young, Chinese racing sensation Tung Ho-pin and Macau driver Andre Couto, who finished second last year in the Japan GT Championship.

Marsh is hopeful former Porsche champion Kwan will put off retirement plans to be involved in the most exciting project in the history of Hong Kong motorsport.

The duo teamed up successfully in a Ferrari for last November’s FIA GT season-ending race at Zhuhai and Marsh is anxious to renew the partnership. “Charles would bring invaluable driving ability and experience to the team,” he said. “I’m hoping the Le Mans campaign will stoke his competitive fires to such a degree that he can’t resist joining us!”

The road to Le Mans will begin with four races this year in the Le Mans Endurance Series in Europe – each event is 1,000km and lasts about six hours – followed by a trip to the 12 Hours of Sebring race in Florida next March. Good results in those five outings will be enough to secure an invitation to the Le Mans 24 Hours in June 2006.

The project has been made possible by the support and enthusiasm of two Hong Kong companies – Noble Group and the William E Connor Group – and the Chinese-owned GruppeM Racing team.

Noble Group, a global commodities firm, has been heavily involved in motorsport since 2001, when it joined



forces with the GR Asia team at the Macau Grand Prix. Most famously, the Noble Group-GR Asia Honda touring car driven by Simon Harrison challenged BMW for victory in the Guia race of 2003.

"We are delighted to be a part of the Le Mans project which will make history for Hong Kong and Chinese motorsport," said Noble Group CEO Richard Elman. "It's a logical extension of our continuing involvement at Macau. We look forward to flying the flag for Hong Kong at Le Mans and showing the world that Hong Kong-style initiative, innovation and entrepreneurship can compete with the very best."

GR Asia owner and Hong Kong shipbroker Tim Huxley, who was instrumental in bringing Marsh's team together, added: "This is more than just a race, it's a massive adventure which we hope all Hong Kong's sports car enthusiasts will get behind."

"Our priority has been to put together the most competitive and professional package possible, and we believe we have achieved that. Over the course of this year, the team will gain the experience and credibility to do the job at Le Mans next June."

The William E Connor Group, one of the world's largest privately held trading firms dealing in consumer goods and commodities, is the team patron.

CEO William E Chip Connor, in addition to being an avid racer of vintage cars and a participant in this year's Porsche Infineon Carrera Cup Asia series, was team principal in Barron Connor Racing, which last year fielded two Ferrari 575GTCs in the 12 Hours of Sebring, the Le Mans 24 Hours and the Le Mans Endurance Series, finishing second in the GTS class. Connor brings to the team support, experience and the Porsche GT3 RSR which the team will use.

The car will be prepared and run by UK-based GruppeM Racing – one of only two teams worldwide to carry Porsche factory supported status and winners of last year's British GT Championship.

"We are pleased to be closely involved with, and to invest in, this project. I am always interested to make a little bit of history in motor racing. With the support from Noble Group and the William E Connor Group, I am sure this will be a successful project," said GruppeM Racing owner Kenny Chen, a Chinese property developer who has lived in the UK for the past 18 years.

Marsh, a 14-year Hong Kong resident, has endurance racing credentials. He helped drive a BMW Z3 M to finish top of its class, and fifth place overall, in Australia's Bathurst 24 Hours in 2002 and was part of a three-man team that piloted a BMW M3 to second in its class at Germany's famous Nurburgring 24 Hours in 2000.

"Le Mans is the ultimate test for a sports car driver," said the 36-year-old Briton. "It will be a dream come true for me personally but, more importantly, it will be a team effort. This project will put Hong Kong motorsport in the global spotlight."

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