

Official ELMS Tests and FIA WEC Prologue  
Circuit Paul Ricard (Le Castellet, France)

### ***Michelin's partner teams show pre-season form at Le Castellet***

Endurance racing's winter break ended with a week of European Le Mans Series (ELMS) and FIA World Endurance Championship (FIA WEC) pre-season testing at Le Castellet, France, on March 22-23 (ELMS) and March 25-26 (FIA WEC). After the close-season's different development programmes, there was much that was new on display in the south of France and Michelin, which has revised practically its entire range of endurance racing tyres for 2016, was eager for the official session to get under way in order to sign off its recent work.

#### **New cars and a more competitive field**

Michelin Motorsport focused its energy on two main areas over the winter. On the one hand, its engineers worked to match the changes made to its partners' latest-evolution cars, notably in the LM P1 and LM GTE classes, while at the same time making the French tyres more competitive as the opposition hots up, as is the case in LM P2, for example. Michelin has comprehensively revised its range for its partners in this class in the ELMS and at Le Mans. The performance of its LM P2 tyres has progressed particularly in dry conditions, showing an improvement of more than one second per lap compared with last year.

Considerable work has also gone into Michelin's LM P1 tyres, since Toyota has developed a new car (the TS050 Hybrid, now with V6 power instead of the former V8) and Audi has significantly revised the R18 which has a new aero package. Meanwhile, Porsche has improved last year's FIA WEC title-winning 919 Hybrid in light of the expected fiercer competition. Michelin carried out tyre development sessions with all three manufacturers over the winter.

In LM GTE, Ferrari has introduced its new 488 GTE, Ford has its sights set on victory with its brand new GT, while Porsche and Corvette have also made progress, and all these changes necessitated extensive tyre development work in this class, too.

#### **A successful test in ELMS for Michelin**

The official ELMS test took the form of five sessions over a period of two days and proved very positive for Michelin's partners, notably in the LM P2 class where all its partner teams registered performance gains over last year.

The fastest time was the work of Frenchman Olivier Pla at the wheel of the Krohn Racing Ligier JS P2-Nissan which lapped the 5.791km circuit in 1m48.100s on the very first morning.

The test also saw Panis Barthez Compétition (Ligier JS P2-Nissan) celebrate its debut in the ELMS premier category with some consistently fast times, imitated by Pegasus Racing and IDEC Sport Racing, another LM P2 debutant.



**Jérôme Mondain**, the manager of Michelin's endurance racing programmes was pleased with the performance of the French firm's latest tyres: *"We achieved our goals in every class. In addition to the performance gains we saw in LM P2, we were able to rubber stamp our tyres for the LM P3 prototypes. We were very pleased with the new fronts we had at Le Castellet."*

The official ELMS test also enabled Frédéric Sausset and his team-mates to mix it with their championship rivals in the SRT41 Morgan ahead of the 2016 championship's opener at Silverstone.

### **FIA WEC Prologue: performance improvements**

Despite the introduction of more restrictive technical regulations, the LM P1 teams posted identical, if not better times compared with last season to underline the value and quality of their respective programmes over the winter.

Michelin Motorsport director **Pascal Couasnon** explains how the firm's competitions department has been working closely with its partners as the rivalry at the sharp end reaches new levels: "At the end of 2015, all the manufacturers presented their respective development programmes to us; they were all very ambitious. Their priorities for 2016 included optimising the contributions our tyres make to their overall performance packages, so we were involved in the latest cars' development from the outset.

"These are busy, exciting times, but the coherence of the work carried out by Audi, Porsche and Toyota means we were able to develop tyres that are adapted to each car but which are based on the same core selection."

The FIA WEC Prologue provided Michelin's specialists with a chance to analyse its new tyres in LM GTE, too. Although Corvette, Ferrari, Ford and Porsche have all already run their respective cars in the 2016 IMSA WeatherTech United SportsCar Championship (Rolex 24 at Daytona, 12 Hours of Sebring), their Michelin tyres at these races were developed especially for American circuits and are different to those designed for the FIA WEC.

"The Prologue went very well and all our partners were pleased with our contribution. Lap times over the two days were up to a second faster than this time last year, and the long runs revealed that our latest endurance racing tyres are both consistent and durable," concludes Pascal Couasnon.

The fastest time of the Prologue was recorded by the N°1 Porsche 919 Hybrid (Bernhard/Webber/Hartley) which clocked a 1m37.445s during the final session on Saturday afternoon (March 26). The fastest LM GTE Pro car was the Ferrari 488 GTE of Bruni/Calado (1m57.808s), while the LM GTE Am timesheet was topped by the Larbre Compétition Corvette C7 Z06 which posted a 1m58.268s on Friday morning.

