

press release



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Rounds 1 & 2 – Dubai Autodrome – 12 / 13 January 2017

PREVIEW

TCR Middle East to kick off in Dubai on Friday

The inaugural season of the TCR Middle East Series will kick off Friday at the Dubai Autodrome in the United Arab Emirates, within the frame of the 24H Dubai event.

The TCR Middle East Series was officially launched during a media and test day at the Bahrain International Circuit on 2 December 2016. After the opening meeting in Dubai, two further rounds will follow, at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina Circuit on February 9/10 and Bahrain International Circuit on March 9/10.

News, results and pictures are available at www.middleeast.tcr-series.com.

The upcoming weekend will be packed with action, as the TCR Middle East Series shares the bill with the 24H Dubai – first round of the 24H Series – and the 3x3H Dubai – promotional event of the 24H Proto Series.

The TCR Middle East Series will hit the track on Thursday, with two 30-minute Practice sessions and a 35-minute Qualifying.

The two back-to-back 60-kilometre races will take place on Friday morning.

TCR in Dubai – the event at a glance

Lap distance: 5.29 km

Race distance: 12 laps

Timetable:	Thursday, 09:00/09:30	Free Practice 1
	Thursday, 11:30/12:00	Free Practice 2
	Thursday, 15:40/16:15	Qualifying
	Friday, 09:00	Race 1
	Friday, 11:00	Race 2

all times: GMT +4

Michela Cerruti at Dubai in the 2017 Giulietta

Mulsanne Racing will run the 2017-spec Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR in the opening round of the TCR Middle East series next week at the Dubai Autodrome.

A number of improvements have been made to the Italian car by the Romeo Ferraris engineering as are explained by team manager Claudio Bortoletto: *"There were many things that were possible to develop, in the chassis, suspension, electronics and so on. We tested the updated car at Vallelunga before Christmas and were very happy with the lap times. Now we need to replace the 1.7-litre engine with the new 2-litre from the Giulia, and we expect to do it by March."*

Mulsanne Racing regular Michela Cerruti will drive in Dubai; this will be her comeback to racing after she was sidelined six months on medical grounds.

A strong five-car line-up for Liqui Moly Team Engstler

The Liqui Moly Team Engstler has entered a strong five-car line-up for the event in Dubai. The German outfit's Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR cars will be driven by an array of drivers that span from very experienced to rookies.

TCR International Series race winner Mat'ò Homola is surely the team's point man, though he faces his first appearance in the Golf.

Homola declared: *"I'm glad that the TCR family grows with a new championship, which for me is an opportunity to stay in shape and prepare myself for the upcoming season in the International Series. I am looking forward to racing in the Volkswagen Golf that is new to me, even though it has many points in common with the SEAT I drove last year. I tried the Dubai circuit on the simulator and I really like it, as it is full of long fast corners that suit my driving style."*

Homola joins a trio of TCR rookies: Luca Engstler, Brandon Gdovic and Stefan Goede.

The son of Touring Car veteran Franz Engstler, the 16-year old Luca looks at the Middle East series as a preparation to for his commitments in the ADAC TCR Germany series: *"It will be my first ever race in a touring car and, of course, I am a bit nervous. But this will be a perfect training for TCR Germany and my goal is to learn as much as possible during these three events."*

Gdovic, 24 years old from Pittsburgh, has competed in different NASCAR series before successfully switching to the Lamborghini Super Trofeo in 2015. *"I'm really excited to be racing in Dubai for the first time and getting the opportunity to race in the TCR series. It will be a lot of firsts for me, but I'm looking forward to it and hoping for some good results,"* he said.

Goede, 31 years old from Bavaria, has only approached motor racing in recent years and from 2013 he became a regular competitor in the Austrian Histo-Cup. *"I look at TCR as a big challenge and a learning experience. I am looking forward to working with an extremely professional race team managed by a touring car legend such as Franz Engstler,"* he said.

Homola's Slovak countryman Filip Sládecka, with past experience in the FIA European Touring Car Cup, completes the team's line-up.

The Top-Run Subaru in the hands of Luigi Ferrara

Top-Run Motorsport will rely on the experienced Luigi Ferrara to drive the Subaru WRX TCR in Dubai.

The Japanese car has been thoroughly updated since its most recent appearance, at Buriram in the TCR International Series. Ferrara was able to finish third at Monza in the TCR Italy series' Race 1 and was then eliminated in an incident at the start of the second race.

"The car was significantly improved between our last appearance in the International Series in Thailand and the Monza event," explained team manager Renato Russo. "We can now consider this as the final evolution step. Our main concern was the engine reliability, so we focused our work on this and I have to say that we are happy with the results."

Just before Christmas the team completed a test at Vallelunga, where Ferrara drove a long run of 14 laps in race set-up without any problems and clocked lap times that were faster than those the TCR Italy top drivers had set during the race meeting in June.

"We were very pleased with that test. Now at Dubai we have the opportunity to check the car's performance and reliability in different weather conditions, which is very important for the upcoming season in the International Series," Russo added.

CadSpeed Racing is the first to run the Audi RS 3 LMS

CadSpeed Racing in cooperation with A Tech will be the first team to run the brand new Audi RS 3 LMS TCR. Besides entering the German sedan in the 24H Dubai – opening round of the TCR Series – the EAU-based outfit will also take part in the TCR Middle East Series inaugural event.

The Audi will be driven by touring car veteran James Kaye who amassed lots of experience during his long career.

After clinching five British titles in the Eighties – four in the Production Saloon Car Championship and one in the Ford Fiesta Cup – Kaye became a regular competitor in the British Touring Car Championship, winning the Independents' title twice (1992 and 1994) and the Production Class title once (2002). He was also a member of the Honda UK factory team.

Kaye knows that all eyes will be on him: *"It is very exciting to work in close cooperation with the people of Audi Sport. They are very keen to support us and want to collect as more data as possible to help in the final development of the car."*

CadSpeed will receive a second RS 3 by mid February. *"Our priority is the TCR class of the 24H Series. However, we have already been contacted by drivers who want to race in the TCR Middle East. So, it is quite probably that at least one of our cars will take part in the whole series."*

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TCES reigning champion to race in Dubai

Rik Breukers, the reigning champion of the Touring Car Endurance Series' TCR Class will join the TCR Middle East Series field in Dubai at the wheel of a Red Camel-Jordans.nl SEAT León TCR DSG.

The bright orange SEAT is the very same car Rik and his father Ivo drove last year to clinch the TCES title and it has also entered in the 24H Dubai – opening round of the 24H Series – that shares the bill with the TCR Middle East Series.

Despite a still short racing career, the 18-year old Dutchman has already shown talent and versatility at the wheel of very different cars like the SEAT or the Lamborghini Huracan Super Trofeo with which he was vice European championship and third in the World Final. Besides racing in the TCR Middle East Series, Rik Breukers is also driving a Lamborghini Huracan in the 24H Dubai and a Ginetta G57 in the 3x3H Dubai for prototypes.

Six TCR cars to compete in the 24H Dubai

Six teams will compete in the TCR class of the 24H Dubai, the opening round of the 24H Series.

United Arab Emirates-based Lap 57 Motorsports will run a Honda Civic TCR for local drivers Mohammed Al Owais, Abdullah Al Hammadi, Zader Zuhour and Saeed Al Mehairi. Four SEAT León cars have been entered in the endurance race, two each fitted with the DSG and the sequential gearboxes.

The 2016 Touring Car Endurance Series champion car run by Red Camel-Jordans.nl is driven by England's Kane Astin and Daniel Wheeler, Iran's Aram Martroussian and Netherlands' Christian Dijkhof. Polish young lady Gosia Rdest shares the second León DSG of Zest Racecar Engineering with Philippe Ulivieri from France and a trio of Americans: Josh Allen, JT Coupal and John Weisberg.

The two León SEQ cars have been entered by Team Bleekemolen – for the all Dutch line-up of Michael Bleekemolen, Sebastian Bleekemolen, Dennis de Borts and Aart-Jan Ringelberg – and Hong Kong's Modena Motorsports – with the Canadian pair of Wayne Shen and John Shen sharing driving duties with Francis Tjta of Netherlands and Mathias Beche of Switzerland.

However, all eyes will be on the debutante Cadspeed Racing's Audi RS 3 LMS in the hands of Touring Car veteran James Kaye and his fellow countryman Julian Griffin.

The 24-hour race will kick off Friday at 14:00 local time (11:00 CET); results, news, live timing and live streaming will be available at www.24hseries.com.

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Live streaming and timing from Dubai

The TCR Middle East event in Dubai will be covered live on the web with streaming and timing at www.middleeast.tcr-series.com and www.tcr-series.tv, according to the timetable below:

Thursday, 09:00 (06:00 CET) – Free Practice 1, **timing**
Thursday, 11:30 (08:30 CET) – Free Practice 2, **timing**
Thursday, 15:40 (12:40 CET) – Qualifying, **timing and streaming**
Friday, 08:55 (05:55 CET) – Race 1, **timing and streaming**
Friday, 10:55 (07:55 CET) – Race 2, **timing and streaming**

(all times local, GMT +4)