

16 January 2018

**Rounds 1 & 2**  
**Yas Marina Circuit, Abu Dhabi - 19 / 20 January 2018**

**PREVIEW**

**TCR Middle East kicks off with two events in the Emirates**

The 2018 TCR Middle East International Series kicks off with a two back-to-back race meetings in the United Arab Emirates.

The opening event takes place this week at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina Circuit and will be followed by the second at the Dubai Autodrome next week.

The series will award two titles for Drivers and Teams that were won by Josh Files (Lap57 Motorsports Honda Civic) and Liqui Moly Team Engstler in 2017.

The event format sticks to the usual TCR pattern, but it has been adapted to the Middle East tradition that considers Saturday as race day.

Competitors will hit the track on Friday for two 30-minute Free Practice sessions, with the 30-minute Qualifying in the afternoon that will be split into Q1 (20 minutes for all the competitors) and Q2 (10 minutes for the 12 fastest drivers in Q1).

The two 60-kilometre races will be run on Saturday in the late morning and the early afternoon.

**Abu Dhabi – the event at a glance**

Lap distance: 3.12 km (North circuit)

Race distance: 20 laps

Start: standing

Grids: determined by the Qualifying results (Q1+Q2) with top 10 reversed for Race 2

Timetable:	Friday, 09:00/09:30	Free Practice 1
	Friday, 10:50/11:20	Free Practice 2
	Friday, 13:55/14:30	Qualifying (Q1 + Q2)
	Saturday, 11:00	Race 1
	Saturday, 14:25	Race 2

all times: GMT +4

**A quartet of drivers for Liqui Moly Team Engstler**

Liqui Moly Team Engstler has entered four Volkswagen Golf GTI cars with the aim of retaining the Teams' title and clinching the Drivers' title as well.

The 17-year old Luca Engstler returns to TCR Middle East after his 2017 campaign that saw him victorious in the opening round at Dubai, his very first race in a TCR car. Later on during the season, the young German successfully took part in the ADAC TCR Germany series, clinching the Rookie Trophy.

Florian Thoma, 22 years old from Switzerland, is also facing his second Touring Car season. In 2017 he was another front-runner in the ADAC TCR Germany series and scored one race win.

Last week, Engstler and Thoma won the 24H Dubai, the opening round of the 24H TCE Series, sharing a Golf TCR with Jean-Karl Vernay and Benjamin Leuchter.

The team's third driver is Kai Jordan, the experienced Touring Car racer who was twice champion in the German Production Car series and has joined the ADAC TCR Germany since 2016.

A fourth driver is due to complete the team's line up.

### **Pit Lane Competizioni to run six TCR Academy cars**

On behalf of the TCR Academy, Pit Lane Competizioni will run six cars fitted with a DSG gearbox: three Audi RS3 LMS and three Volkswagen Golf GTI.

Brothers Giacomo and Giovanni Altoè will both race Audi cars. Giacomo (19) emerged last year as one of the fastest young drivers in TCR competition, claiming brilliant results in the International, Benelux, Italy and Middle East series. His older brother made his TCR debut in the Europe Trophy in which he won the DSG class. Alberto Vescovi, a regular competitor in the Italian SEAT Cup, will drive the third RS3 LMS.

Two of the Golf cars will be driven by a well-known duo: Mat'ò Homola and Jordi Oriola.

Despite their young ages, both Homola (23) and Oriola (21) may be considered successful Touring Car veterans, with a great deal of experience in the FIA ETCC and the TCR International Series.

The team is currently in negotiations with a couple of other Touring Car experts to drive the third Golf.

### **Martin Ryba in the Brutal Fish Volkswagen**

The Brutal Fish Racing Team from the Slovak Republic has entered one Volkswagen Golf GTI for Martin Ryba.

Ryba still has limited racing experience, having only entered into competition in 2016. In his maiden seasons, the Slovak has achieved promising results in the FIA Central European Zone Challenge and the ESAT V4 Endurance Cup at the wheel of Renault Clio and SEAT León cars. Twice he finished as vice-champion in the ESET V4 Touring Car class. The TCR Middle East will mark Ryba's debut at the wheel of his 2017 Golf GTI TCR.

### **A SEAT León for Costas Papantonis**

Greek by birth, but long since transplanted to Dubai, Costas Papantonis has become a successful racing driver in the Emirates Touring Car series.

He was crowned champion in the 2007 UAE Volkswagen Golf GTI Cup and the 2009 Dubai Suzuki Swift Cup.

At the wheel of a SEAT León Supercópa he grabbed six class titles in the United Arab Emirates Touring Car Championship between 2007 and 2016. In the TCR Middle East series he will drive a SEAT León TCR V3 SEQ.

**2018 TCR Middle East Series – calendar**

19/20 January – Yas Marina Circuit, Abu Dhabi

26/27 January – Dubai Autodrome

23/24 February – Bahrain International Circuit

For further information, results and HD pictures: <http://middleeast.tcr-series.com>