24h Spa-Francorchamps

**Highlight in the Ardennes: BMW M6 GT3 set for its debut at the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps.**

Munich (DE), 25th July 2016. The iconic Belgian circuit at Spa-Francorchamps (BE) hosts the next highlight of the 2016 endurance season this weekend. The 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps will see the BMW M6 GT3 take on the challenging 7.004-kilometre circuit in competitive conditions for the first time. BMW returns to the Ardennes as defending champion, after the BMW Z4 GT3 triumphed last year on its final appearance at a major 24-hour race. Three BMW teams will take their place on the starting grid when the endurance classic is held for the 68th time. At the wheel of the BMW M6 GT3 will once again be a host of BMW works drivers.

The marathon at the “Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps” is a permanent fixture on the international race calendar and, in BMW, has a regular winner. BMW cars have crossed the finish line first on 22 occasions. The first overall victory came in 1965, courtesy of local favourites Pascal Ickx (BE) and Gérard Langlois (BE) in a BMW 1800 ti. Nick Catsburg (NL), Lucas Luhr (DE) and Markus Palttala (FI) were at the wheel of a BMW Z4 GT3 for the latest success in 2015.

“After the marathon at the Nürburgring, the 24-hour race in Spa is another highlight of the endurance season. This year, the standard of the field is once again incredibly high,” said BMW Motorsport Director Jens Marquardt. “The fans can look forward to an exciting race at a wonderful circuit. We have a few irons in the fire, who all want to have a say in the battle for top results. It is hard to predict who will succeed in this quest at a 24-hour race. The BMW M6 GT3 has certainly proven on several occasions already that it is utterly competitive. I am confident that this will also be the case when the car makes its debut at Spa-Francorchamps.”

As at the 24-hour race at the Nürburgring-Nordschleife (DE), the ROWE Racing team will field two BMW M6 GT3s. Both cars boast strong driver line-ups. At the wheel of the number 98 car will be last year’s winner Catsburg (NL), Stef Dusseldorp (NL) and BMW works driver Dirk Werner (DE). The cockpit of the number 99 BMW M6 GT3 will be shared by Maxime Martin (BE), Philipp Eng (AT) and Alexander Sims (GB). Eng and Sims have formed a regular pairing for ROWE Racing throughout this season’s Blancpain GT Series, while the race is a home outing for Belgian BMW DTM driver Martin.

Unlike Martin, fellow DTM driver Martin Tomczyk (DE) will be making his debut at Spa-Francorchamps: this is the first time the experienced German has driven at the 24-hour classic. He is supporting BMW Team Italia and its team principal Roberto Ravaglia (IT). Tomczyk is hoping for a successful race in the number 15 BMW M6 GT3, alongside Stefano Colombo (IT), Giorgio Roda (IT) and Max Koebolt (NL). The Boutsen Ginion team also lines up in the same class, with drivers Karim Ojjeh (SA), Julian Darras (FR) and Olivier Grotz (LU).

The 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps also forms the highlight of the season in the Blancpain GT Series. The BMW drivers will leave the pit lane for free practice at 13:20 on Thursday. That is followed in the evening by the first real highlight of the event: the two-hour night qualifying. The top grid positions will be determined in the Super Pole competition from 18:00 to 18:30 on Friday. Following the warm-up in the morning, the race gets underway at 16:30 on Saturday. 24 hours later, we will know the winner of the 68th staging of this endurance classic.

**Quotes ahead of the 24-hour race at Spa-Francorchamps.**

**Nick Catsburg (#98 BMW M6 GT3, ROWE Racing):**
“The BMW M6 GT3 is a really great car and we have a fantastic team. This car is still in its first season, but I believe we have what it takes to mix it with the very fastest in the field. It would be fantastic if I could repeat last year’s win, but that will be anything but easy. Since the victory in 2015, this race has always had a special place in my heart. Spa-Francorchamps is a special track, with high-speed and flowing corners. I think every racing driver likes the circuit. It is just a really cool event.”

**Dirk Werner (#98 BMW M6 GT3, ROWE Racing):**
“I am really looking forward to this race and hope we can challenge for a place on the podium. I have a good feeling. I already know the ROWE Racing team from the Nürburgring 24 Hours, where they made a very positive impression. We are well positioned for Spa, as far as the car, team and drivers are concerned. The BMW M6 GT3 has already proven on the Nordschleife that it is competitive. Spa is one of my favourite tracks. I really enjoy driving there, particularly in this special race with so many GT3 cars.”

**Stef Dusseldorp (#98 BMW M6 GT3, ROWE Racing):**
“The standard is pretty high in Spa. All the manufacturers turn up with good teams and good drivers. As such, it will not be easy to make it onto the podium. However, we are well prepared. Our performance was good in recent races. I think the circuit ought to suit the BMW M6 GT3.”

**Maxime Martin (#99 BMW M6 GT3, ROWE Racing):**
“I love Spa, although I have never really had much luck at my home race so far. I have always been in with a chance of winning, but it was simply never meant to be. I hope that changes this year. We obviously have a new car in the BMW M6 GT3, so we don’t really know where we stand on this track. Furthermore, the race is really tough. However, I am hugely looking forward to it. The atmosphere at the circuit is unique and the fans are fantastic.”

**Philipp Eng (#99 BMW M6 GT3, ROWE Racing):**
“Probably the greatest GT3 race in the world awaits us at Spa-Francorchamps. The field consists of over 60 cars and the standard is immense. It would obviously be awesome if we could repeat BMW’s victory from last year. However, that will be extremely difficult. The BMW M6 GT3 is good-natured to drive. That helps, as it takes a lot of pressure off the driver, as you need not always be absolutely on the limit, but can instead focus on the traffic. That is important in Spa. Despite this, the race is still physically tiring. Every lap of this track is a new challenge.”

**Alexander Sims (#99 BMW M6 GT3, ROWE Racing):**
“It will be very exciting to drive the BMW M6 GT3 for the first time in Spa. BMW is always very strong there, and I hope we can continue that with the new car this year. I have raced in the Pro-Am class for the past two years, and made it onto the podium on both occasions. It would be great to push for a top finish in the overall standings this time. However, we will have to wait and see what our pace is like. Only then will we be able to realistically evaluate our chances.”

**Martin Tomczyk (#15 BMW M6 GT3, BMW Team Italia):**
“It is simply awesome to be involved in the 24 Hours of Spa for the first time in my career – and with BMW legend Roberto Ravaglia’s team to boot. The first test with BMW Team Italia went superbly and was very promising. The performance of the car was good. I like the fact that Roberto and his team have clear goals for this 24-hour classic: we want to be in contention at the head of the field in the Pro-Am Cup. I am obviously proud to have been involved in both the 24-hour races that are so important to BMW, at the Nürburgring-Nordschleife in May and now in Spa.”

**Note to editors:**
In the attached media information you will find much useful information on BMW’s involvement in GT racing and the 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps 2016.

Please let us know specific interview requests with BMW Motorsport Director Jens Marquardt in advance via email at: daniela.maier@bmw.de.

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