

Autosport International 2007



LNT Automotive's presence was certainly noticed at Birmingham's NEC last week at the world's biggest motorsport exhibition.



The flashing disco floor and promotional girls dressed in lycra were only part of the attraction to stand number 8340 aside from the Le Mans winning Panoz Esperante, new Ginetta Junior and Ginetta G20 race cars.

Following weeks of preparation (and setting up on the Tuesday and Wednesday) the curtain lifted on the 2007 show last Thursday morning. LNT Automotive's Managing Director, Richard Dean made the first announcement to the press and trade visitors a little after 10am:



Tom Milner will be driving for Team LNT in one of the Panoz Esperante's defending the GT2 title at Le Mans 24 hour and partnering existing GT2 title-holder Tom Kimber-Smith.



Virginia-based Milner has previously raced Panoz cars at the Panoz Racing School in the USA, in the Multimatics Motorsport Panoz in the American Le Mans Series and is to remain in ALMS for the 2007 season.

"We're very excited to announce that Tom Milner will be driving for us at Le Mans, with Tom Kimber-Smith," said Richard Dean. "In fact we'd love to have him in one of our cars for the Le Mans Series too – but there are some date clashes with the ALMS, where he has a commitment already."



Tom Kimber-Smith will contest in the Le Mans Series around Europe with Team LNT - his team-mates have yet to be confirmed. However, Le Mans Series and 24h Le Mans isn't enough for the aspirational 22 year-old.

"I've been testing a Daytona Prototype in Florida with Samax Motorsport" said Kimber-Smith. He'll be driving the #7 car at Daytona 24hour on January 27 - 28th with Tomas Enge and Jeff Bucknum.



Speaking in his new Lico 2007 - spec. race suit, Kimber-Smith explained "I did the Homestead test before Christmas, so I was familiar with the Riley before the Daytona test days. I was doing long runs last week, while Enge did a low fuel run on new rubber at the end, but I was as quick as him in similar conditions. The traffic was a nightmare, and some of the GT drivers don't see you coming. But I'd like to stay with the team and do the Grand Am year."



Furthermore, Sebring and Petit Le Mans will be added to Kimber-Smith's 2007 curriculum vitae. Panoz Team PTG will run him over in the USA for the two events.



Dan Panoz flew into Birmingham Airport to join Team LNT and guests on the stand at 1.30pm for a 'Celebration of Le Mans'.

Reiterating the Team's GT2 success at Le Mans 24hr race last June, the president of Panoz Auto Developments said "Let's not forget these guys started out as a privateer team and for a privateer to come and do this in their first year racing a new car [to them] is just amazing.



Now Chad Racing will have a couple of Panoz cars out there mixing it up with the likes of Porsches and Ferraris - it's really great for the sport and I'm really thankful for all that Lawrence and his guys are doing."



As a mark of thanks, Dan had a painting of the LNT Panoz at Le Mans created in the USA and brought it to the show for a surprise presentation to Lawrence.

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Friday was a day of Ginetta launches and announcements led by commentator David Addison.



First up: the PlayStation Ginetta Junior Championship. David Wilson from Sony PlayStation was present to announce the electronics games console's continued sponsorship of the Championship. James Bailey from Dunlop Great and British launched the 2007 calendar - the Junior Championship will run on the Dunlop package once again.



Finally, David Wilson presented James Harrison and Jordan Williams with their Championship trophies for coming first and second respectively in the 2006 championship.



The launch of the 'Senior' Ginetta Championship began by the announcement of new title sponsor Texaco Havoline and the unveiling of a newly branded Ginetta G20 race car.



John Jackson of Texaco Havoline said: "We have many opportunities offered to us in regard to motorsport sponsorship and given our long association with Richard Dean and his LNT team, we see the sponsorship of this up and coming series as an ideal fit for ourselves and our Texaco and Havoline brands."

As recognition of the support Texaco Havoline gave Team LNT in 2006, Richard Dean presented a framed montage of photos from Le Mans.



Following the release of the 2007 calendar, Formula 1 pundit Tony Jardine shared his experience of racing a Ginetta car. "It's great fun" he said. "I've quite a few memories racing [a Ginetta] and always loved it. It's a great car, it's a great championship and I'm glad to be part of it." Jardine will be driving a Ginetta car later this year in the Celebrity car.



The none-trade days on Saturday and Sunday attracted further attention to the cars on display and aroused more interest in the Ginetta Championships - a testament to the fact that it is Europe's most popular one-make racing series.



"As a branding exercise for LNT Automotive and everything the company encompasses, Autosport International was a must for us" said Dean.



"Our team set out to show a strong presence as Panoz European agents and to show that in Ginetta, Britain still has a thriving sports car company in safe hands. We didn't actually expect to sell cars at the show, more to promote the series, but our order books were full by Friday afternoon.



"We have orders for 34 new cars and due to delivery deadlines for the first round of our championship in April, we had to turn orders away. It is an unusual position to be in, we certainly didn't expect to have to turn orders away and we quite clearly have to gear up to satisfy the increased demand. Our Swedish agent has now sold 21 left hand drive G20's and has a waiting list for another 5.



"In summary, an unrivalled success, a sign of an exciting year ahead and a hugely satisfying show for all our team here in Yorkshire, I am immensely proud of them all".

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