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## The American Le Mans Series believes in green power

by Amyot Bachand , Auto123.com

American Le Mans Series executives took advantage of the North American International Auto Show in Detroit to present a new face of auto racing.

They're committed to implementing a new set of rules and regulations to encourage manufacturers to develop new, more efficient technologies so as to improve fuel economy and reduce emissions. They're hoping to see a new generation of clean powertrains, like Audi's diesel V10.



This open-mindedness from endurance race organizations is proof that auto racing and environmental protection can go hand in hand. You don't see that in F1, Champ Car, IRL or even NASCAR, which still run on exotic fuels.

### Relevance

Scott Atherton, President and CEO of ALMS, told the media that performance and fuel-efficiency will now be combined in a best-of-both-worlds scenario. The goal is to stimulate efforts to improve technologies and help change attitudes.

He particularly talked about the "relevance" of motorsport technologies in today's world. "In the past, manufacturers developed breakthrough technologies for automobiles that consumers would ultimately buy and drive, he said. However, people seem to have lost this focus, and that's what we're trying to recapture."

### **Partnership with government agencies**

The surprising news might be the partnership between the ALMS and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Energy (DoE) and the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE).

According to Margo T. Oge, Director of the Office of Transportation and Air Quality at the EPA, “the agency is supporting this initiative because the ALMS is truly committed and not just being well-intentioned. We also appreciate the open-mindedness and the possibility to use different technologies to reach the same goal.”

In this regard, Atherton clearly opened the door to various energy alternatives to power ALMS cars, whether it's ethanol, low-emission diesel or electric-hybrid technology. He firmly believes that the Series must encourage manufacturers to develop and put new, relevant and practical automotive technologies to the test in order to improve the situation.

### **The manufacturers' point of view**

All of them are motivated by varying interests. General Motors will certainly be banking on E85 (up to 85 percent ethanol). After all, more than 85 percent of GM vehicles will be able to run on this eco-friendly fuel by 2011, compared to 25 percent in 2008.

In the GT1 Class, the Corvettes will run on E85, while other automakers using gasoline engines, including Porsche, will rely on E10 (10 percent ethanol, 90 percent gasoline).

At Mazda, during the introduction of the Furai Concept, company executives announced their plans to launch a new, ethanol-compatible, triple-rotor rotary engine. Mazda races in the LMS2 Class. With the collaboration of British Petroleum, this powerplant could get the green light for the upcoming season. Meanwhile, German manufacturer Audi will resume LMS1 competition with its diesel-powered R10s.

### **A new series**

This year, the ALMS is launching an all-new class called “Green Racing Challenge” in which manufacturers and teams will be rewarded for using green technologies.

In addition, this new competition will be an incremental element of the Series' signature event -- the 1,000-mile Petit Le Mans race to be held on October 4 at Road Atlanta. Protocols and criteria for the Green Racing Challenge are being developed by the EPA and DoE along SAE International and the ALMS; they will be announced later this spring.

### **What to think of it**

The ALMS won't go from gold to green overnight, but the willingness and efforts are tangible. Once again, it's a matter of technology in the service of the daily car -- the familiar connection between the race track and the showroom floor.

Developing the future technology that will answer today's problems will be the new goal of this prestigious series. Here's hoping this partnership proves successful and fruitful.

Photo Credit : Philippe Champoux