



MIRACLES OF THE LE MANS 24 HOURS

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LE MANS 24 HOURS **TECHNICAL DEBRIEF**

MAKING A MARK

The International Business Days, held on the Tuesday and Wednesday prior to the 24-hour race, are attracting increasing numbers of attendees

AFTER FOUR years the International Business Days event at Le Mans is establishing itself as a useful motorsport business opportunity even if it has been an uphill struggle for the organisers. However, their perseverance and hard work is paying off.

What marked quite a big difference this year was the number of local French companies that had discovered the merits of the event, François Lassalle, one of the founding partners, declaring himself very pleased with the inclusion of so many local companies. These included rapid prototyping company AFPR, the French arm of software company Altair, coatings company EMC and Induct, the manufacturer of robotised vehicles.

As usual, there was also a good foreign contingent with Spanish rapid prototyping company Idelt attending for the first time,

Swedish materials company Oxeon and Tital from Germany. Altogether there were 54 companies present from 10 countries.

Another first time attendee was Paul Sanders from British company IS Clarendon, the distributor of high quality fasteners, components and seals to various industries, including motorsport. "It's a good event for us because we've seen the right amount of people in the right time while the location is excellent," he said. "It was also good that representatives from Peugeot Sport and Audi Sport attended the event and while they are already both customers, it was useful to catch up."

Tim Henson, managing director of the House of Composites, was also experiencing his first IBD. He was keen to expand the horizons of a company that has been focusing on motorsport since it

was formed in 2005.

"I started by visiting local race tracks and asking whether the companies there were using carbon fibre composites to see if there was any market and found that there was, but it had to be at the high end to justify producing the parts in an expensive country like Denmark," he recounted. "This meant that we had to concentrate on both quality and speed, two essential components if you are going to supply the motorsport industry."

Initially started as a part-time venture, the House of Composites now employs 10 people supplying Formula One, Le Mans and other high-end teams.

"We started out doing parts like bumpers for teams in the British Touring Car Championship," says Henson, "but our emphasis on producing the best possible part, which at first didn't help us make much money, brought us to the notice of the Formula One teams."

"Not resting on our laurels, though, we have developed a new manufacturing process which makes it possible to increase the stiffness by 10 per cent without adding weight, something that the teams cannot do themselves. We are a small company and have to justify why companies need to use us which is why we put a great deal of effort into research and development."

Henson commented that the location and timing of the event were perfect, which led to him making the decision to attend.

"This was another good vintage," was Lassalle's verdict on this year's International Business Days. "Apart from the number of people who attended the one-on-one meetings on the second day, it was also very pleasing that the number of table top exhibitors increased from the five of last year to 18 this year. However, we want to avoid the event becoming an exhibition so while we need to have exhibition space, the important aspect is the meetings which are very much appreciated by the companies."

"Another item is Audi which sent a buyer along, as did Peugeot Sport and Oak Racing, but my aim is to have the involvement of 10 teams which means that we have to increase the communication and contact with them. I do realise, though, that while the days are wonderful for the participating companies, they are really difficult for the teams which are busily putting their cars on the track for qualifying at that time."

"We were also very pleased that the UK Trade & Investment came along as an exhibitor as they can be an important agent for us in the UK along with the Motorsport Industry Association." **RT**

BELOW The business days present an important networking opportunity

