



28 March 2017

## Rounds 1 & 2 – Rustavi International Motopark, Georgia – 1 / 2 April 2017

### PREVIEW

#### The TCR International Series kicks off in Georgia An historical event for local motorsport fans

The third season of the TCR International Series kicks off this weekend at Rustavi International Motopark, in an event that makes history for Georgia's motor sport. In fact, TCR brings international racing to the Country for the first time ever, to the delight of the many local fans.

The event is supported by the governmental agency MIA Force the president of which, Archil Talakvadze said: *"With this race meeting, Georgia claims its position on the world map of automobile racing. This will be a spectacular season opener for those who wish to attend exciting action on the track and discover the stunning landscapes, ancient culture and hospitality of Georgia at the same time."*

TCR promoter Marcello Lotti commented: *"We are proud and honoured that the Government of Georgia has chosen TCR as the first international series ever to visit their beautiful country. I have personally discovered Georgia's sights and the warm hospitality of its people when I was in Tbilisi last year, so I am sure that Rustavi will become one of the favourite destinations of our teams."*

TCR competitors will hit the track for the first time on Friday for a two-hour free test session, while official activities will begin on Saturday with two thirty-minute Free Practices and a thirty-minute Qualifying; all drivers will run during Q1 and the fastest twelve will be allowed to participate in Q2.

The first two races of the 2017 TCR International Series will take place on Sunday in the early afternoon.

#### TCR in Rustavi – the event at a glance

Lap distance: 4.14 km

Race distance: 15 laps

Start: standing

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

Timetable:	Saturday, 10:00/10:30	Free Practice 1
	Saturday, 12:10/12:49	Free Practice 2
	Saturday, 15:00/15:35	Qualifying (Q1 + Q2)
	Sunday, 13:35	Race 1
	Sunday, 15:35	Race 2

all times: GMT +4



## Three titles are at stake: Drivers', Teams' and Model of the Year

The 2017 TCR International Series will award three titles at the end of the season. Stefano Comini, Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing and the SEAT León TCR are the reigning champions in the Drivers' and Team's Championships and the Model of the Year award respectively.

The scoring system is the same for all three classifications: 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 points awarded to the best five classified in the Qualifying final results; 25, 18, 15, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2 and 1 points awarded to the best ten classified in each race.

In the Team's Championship and the Model of the Year award, the best two cars classified of each team and model score points.

## The forces at play – round up of the opening event

Though twenty competitors have entered the International Series for the full season, only sixteen of them will take part in the opening race meeting at Rustavi International Motopark.

TCR promoter Marcello Lotti explained why: *"The deadline that was fixed to ship the cars to Georgia was very close to the Balance of Performance test, which made life difficult for the teams in the preparation of their programmes. As a result, some of the cars could not be delivered in time for the shipping."*

These are the second cars of Comtoyoy Racing, Leopard Racing and Icarus Motorsport, plus both the Zengő Motorsport's KIA cee'd cars.

The full field will hit the track on the occasion of the third race meeting of the season, at Spa-Francorchamps with the FIA World Endurance Championship, while eighteen cars will take part in the second event at Bahrain International Circuit.

The Balance of Performance's Technical Bulletin will be released on Wednesday, 29 March.

### Comini in an Audi RS 3 LMS run by Comtoyoy Racing

Double TCR International champion Stefano Comini will defend his title at the wheel of an Audi RS 3 LMS run by Comtoyoy Racing.

*"I received a number of offers, including the one from Comtoyoy Racing. Team principal Jean-Michel Baert has hired François Verbist, whom I know well since we worked together in 2016 and this convinced me this was the best option. This project has been launched at the last-minute and we go to Georgia with very little preparation. I must say that trying to conquer a third crown in a row, with a third different car brand, is a very exciting challenge!"* said Comini.

### Leopard Racing confirmed Jean-Karl Vernay

Following its successful maiden season in 2016, Leopard Racing Team confirmed its commitment with the aim to defend its title in the Drivers' Championship.

The team continues to work together with WRT that provides its experienced and professional structure and runs Volkswagen Golf GTi cars once again.



Jean-Karl Vernay, who was classified third in the 2016 TCR International Series has been confirmed at the wheel of the team's first car: *"I am very pleased to race in the series once again and with the same team. This is a nice change for me, because it's the first time in that I'm able to take part in the same championship in two consecutive seasons. It is definitely a good thing, because it will make my life easier and will help me to be competitive straight away."*

### **A dream-trio for Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing**

Craft-Bamboo Racing continues its long-standing partnership with Lukoil and SEAT Sport after clinching the teams' title in 2016 and narrowly missing out the drivers' title twice in 2015 and 2016.

The team fields an impressive trio of Touring Car specialists: Hugo Valente, James Nash and Pepe Oriola.

New to the team, Valente said: *"I'm very excited for this new challenge. For me it was important to get back to the front end of the field, as I wanted to be able to fight for podiums and victory at every event. I've seen the way Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing works, and to me it's possibly the best opportunity that I've been given in the past couple of years."*

A runner up in last year's Drivers' Championship, Nash commented: *"2016 was a great season and despite making many errors we still won the teams' title and finished second in the drivers'. Obviously I would like to go one better this year and staying in the same environment gives me that opportunity."*

Oriola, vice-champion in 2015, added: *"It's my third year with the team and it feels like a real family. With my two teammates I hope we can win the teams' championship and finally win the drivers title too!"*

### **WestCoast Racing and Morbidelli switched to VW**

WestCoast Racing will campaign two Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR cars for the Italian pairing of Gianni Morbidelli and the 16-year old Giacomo Altoè.

The Swedish team has been a successful front-runner in the series since its inception in 2015 taking 14 race wins in the first two seasons with Honda Civic cars.

Morbidelli is in his third season with the team: *"I'm really happy and excited to stay with WestCoast Racing. For this year, we have big expectations and the pressure that comes with that. We're running a new car and we all have to get up to speed as soon as possible. I'm glad to be back, after two seasons I know the potential and the guys. Overall I'm looking forward to it!"*

### **Michelisz launched M1RA for title assault**

Hungarian motorsport hero Norbert Michelisz has launched his own team M1RA that runs a pair of Honda Civic TCR cars for Attila Tassi and Roberto Colciago.

Despite his young age (17) Tassi has proved his skill in last year's TCR International Series in which he was classified 11<sup>th</sup> and took a deserved podium finish in Sochi, while the experienced Colciago has amassed a sizeable number of championship titles and now, aged 48, he is the reigning TCR Italy champion and was a race winner in TCR International in Malaysia last year.



Michelisz explained: *“For many years I have had ambitions of creating my own race team, but had always assumed that this would come at the end of my driving career. However, at the end of 2016, all the ingredients were in place to create M1RA. The right people, the right car and the right programme in TCR International, were all available, so this was the ideal time. We evaluated a number of different series, but for now, TCR International provided the best fit for our aims and objectives. We aim to win the championship. I know that sounds very ambitious for our first season, but I genuinely think that we have all the ingredients necessary to mount a serious challenge.”*

Colciago said: *“When I was offered the programme in the 2016 TCR Italy series, I was happy to accept. I just wanted to do well, but then things evolved quite quickly and unexpectedly. Here I am, facing my return to an international top-level series, with plenty of motivation. It is odd that I drive for a team that belongs to another driver, but strangest feeling is to have a teammate (Tassi) who is the same age as my daughter!”*

### **Corthals and Homola in DG Sport’s Opel Astra cars**

DG Sport Compétition announced Pierre-Yves Corthals and Mat’o Homola as the drivers of the two Opel Astra TCR cars entered for its maiden season in the International Series.

The 22-year old Homola has established himself as one of the most competitive young Touring Car drivers; last year he was one of the title contenders in the TCR International Series, claiming one race win and ranking 5<sup>th</sup> in the Drivers’ Championship. *“I’m excited to race again in this series and I’m pleased to be part of DG Sport, an experienced team that claimed the TCR European Trophy in 2016. I believe there is a huge potential in the combination between the team and the new Opel Astra TCR”*

Corthals has been confirmed by the team after last year’s successful campaign that saw ‘Pilou’ winning the TCR European Trophy and finishing runner-up in the TCR Benelux. The Belgian driver has also worked together with the Opel Motorsport technicians to develop the 2017 version of the Astra. He said: *“I am very pleased to take part in the International Series. Because I know well the potential of the car, I think that we have all the cards to be able to compete for the top positions. The fact that nobody knows the Rustavi track and that we have a very professional team makes it an ideal context to start the season.”*

### **Kajaia and Borković teammates in Alfa Romeo cars**

Georgia’s Davit Kajaia and Serbia’s Dušan Borković team up at the wheel of Alfa Romeo Giulietta cars run by the new Georgia-based GE-Force team.

Kajaia has already had the opportunity to drive the Romeo Ferraris-built Giulietta TCR quite recently in the TCR Middle East series, showing promising performance of the Italian car.

Michela Cerruti, who developed the Giulietta for the Italian engineering company during the past season, explained: *“In the last two years we have been working hard to bring Alfa Romeo back to its success in motorsport. Today we are very excited and proud, because the Georgian Government and MIA Force have decided to invest in our product and support Kajaia. On top of this, the choice of calling Borković to drive the second car is another guarantee to achieve important results during the season.”*

Borković added: *“GE-Force and Romeo Ferraris have set a plan that was really trustworthy and appealing to me. They have long-term ambitions that make me confident. I feel a great responsibility and a challenge, as we aim for improving and upgrading the car throughout the upcoming season.”*

The team has also entered a third car for the two first events of the season.



### The first American team in TCR: Icarus Motorsports

Icarus Motorsports – the first American team to join TCR – entered the International Series with two SEAT León TCR cars.

Duncan Ende, co-founder of the team, is also the first driver: *“We started the team specifically for the TCR International Series and we are thrilled to be joining the championship with SEAT Sport. The TCR formula is enjoying tremendous success worldwide and Touring Cars were one of my first loves when I discovered racing, so I’m chomping at the bit to get out there myself after ten years racing GTs and prototypes!”*

### Ferenc Ficza starts the season with Zele Racing

Hungarian youngster Ferenc Ficza has been the first driver signed by Zengő Motorsport to race one of the two STARD-built KIA cee’d TCR cars that will hit the track on the occasion of the third event of the season at Spa-Francorchamps.

In order not to miss the opportunity to score some valuable points in the first two events of the season, Ficza will be driving a SEAT León TCR run by Zele Racing at Rustavi and Bahrain.

## A full live coverage from Rustavi International Motopark

Fans will be able to follow live on the Internet the whole action of the TCR International Series opening races from Rustavi International Motopark on [www.tcr-series.com](http://www.tcr-series.com) and [www.tcr-series.tv](http://www.tcr-series.tv) according to the following timetable.

Saturday, 09:55 (07:55 CET) – Free Practice 1, **timing and streaming**

Saturday, 12:05 (10:05 CET) – Free Practice 2, **timing and streaming**

Saturday, 14:55 (12:55 CET) – Qualifying, **timing and streaming**

Sunday, 13:23 (11:23 CET) – Race 1, **timing and streaming**

Sunday, 15:28 (13:28 CET) – Race 2, **timing and streaming**

(all times local, GMT +4)

### 2017 TCR International Series – calendar

2 April – Rustavi International Motopark, Georgia

16 April – Bahrain International Circuit (F1 event)

6 May – Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium (WEC event)

14 May – Autodromo di Monza, Italy (ELMS event)

11 June – Salzburgring, Austria

2 July – Hungaroring, Budapest (GT Open event)

9 July – Motorsport Arena Oschersleben, Germany (with ADAC TCR Germany)

3 September – Chang International Circuit, Buriram (with TCR Thailand)

8 October – Zhejiang International Circuit, China (with TCR China)

26 November – Yas Marina Circuit, Abu Dhabi (F1 event)

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#	team	driver	car
1	Comtoyou Racing	Stefano Comini (SUI)	Audi RS3 LMS
2	Leopard Racing Team WRT	Jean-Karl Vernay (FRA)	Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR
5	M1RA	Roberto Colciago (ITA)	Honda Civic TCR
7	Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing	Hugo Valente (FRA)	SEAT León TCR
9	M1RA	Attila Tassi (HUN)	Honda Civic TCR
10	West Coast Racing	Gianni Morbidelli (ITA)	Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR
15	GE-Force	Guest driver - TBA	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR
16	GE-Force	Davit Kajaia (GEO)	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR
18	Icarus Motorsports	Duncan Ende (USA)	SEAT León TCR
21	West Coast Racing	Giacomo Altoè (ITA)	Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR
23	DG Sport Compétition	Pierre-Yves Corthals (BEL)	Opel Astra TCR
54	Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing	James Nash (GBR)	SEAT León TCR
55	Zele Racing	Ferenc Ficza (HUN)	SEAT León TCR
62	GE-Force	Dušan Borković (SRB)	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR
70	DG Sport Compétition	Mat'ò Homola (SVK)	Opel Astra TCR
74	Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing	Pepe Oriola (ESP)	SEAT León TCR