



Dual Dynasty



**TUDOR JOINS THE USCC TO LAUNCH
A NEW ERA IN SPORTS CAR RACING**

BY JAN TEGLER

TUDOR THIS SEPTEMBER WAS officially re-launched in the U.S., returning the Swiss maker known for value and reliability to our shores for the first time in more than a decade. Significantly, Brand Manager Russell Kelly chose the very event at which he introduced the reinvigorated manufacturer to make an equally exciting announcement.

Tudor is going racing in America as the “entitlement partner” of the newly formed United Sports Car Championship (USCC). The five-year sponsorship deal signed between the series’ sanctioning body, IMSA (International Motor Sports Association) and Tudor, the Geneva-based brother to Rolex, puts it front and center in the organization’s identity, now officially known as the Tudor United Sports Car Championship.

The twelve-race championship will begin with the renowned 24 Hours of Daytona at Daytona International Speedway next January 25-26. Also known as the “Rolex 24”, the American endurance classic will continue with Rolex as its title sponsor, a partnership Hans Wilsdorf’s legendary brand has had with the race since 1992.

SINCE THE 1930S

ROLEX’S TIES TO MOTORSPORTS and Daytona reach back to the early 1930s when Rolex ambassador, Sir Malcom Campbell, set multiple land speed records in his Bluebird LSR cars on the beach at Daytona, Florida while wearing a Rolex Oyster.

But the renowned Cosmograph, a chronograph launched by the firm in 1963, exemplifies the association between sports car racing and Rolex most prominently. A partner with Daytona International Speedway since 1959, Rolex affixed Daytona to its timepiece in 1965 as a tribute to the endurance race that began in 1962 as the Daytona Continental, later becoming the 24 Hours of Daytona.

The relationship expanded further with the long-standing custom of presenting 24-Hour class winners with Cosmograph Daytonas and, ultimately, in Rolex Watch USA becoming the title sponsor of the Grand-Am Road Racing’s Rolex Sports Car Series in 2001.

Founded in 1999 by NASCAR heir Jim France, the series grew from the ashes of the United States Road Racing Championship – itself a product of the upheaval in sports car racing both domestically and internationally.

Grand-Am took a distinctly American approach to professional sports car racing. Cost control, managed competition and limited manufacturer participation were key components of its philosophy, resulting in the launch of a new class of nearly-spec prototype sports cars known as the Daytona Prototype. These heavily-regulated prototypes have raced alongside Grand-Am’s GT Class (GT3-spec) since 2003.

Just before Grand-Am was formed, pharmaceuti-



cal/resort-millionaire, Don Panoz, launched the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) in 1999. The ALMS, which derived its name from the world’s most famous endurance, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, took a more open, international approach to sports car racing, aligning itself with the Automobile Club de l’Ouest (ACO), the body which governs the Le Mans 24.

Five classes of cars competed in the domestic championship including technologically advanced LMP1 (Le Mans Prototype, the fastest sports cars globally) and LMP2 racers, LMPC (spec-prototypes), and two classes of GT cars – GTE and GTC. The open formula attracted major manufacturers to both the prototype and GT classes which also competed at Le Mans and America’s oldest endurance classic, the 12 Hours of Sebring.

The two vastly different series effectively sliced American sports car racing in half, dividing fans and the racing community itself as rival organizations. Each had varying levels of success but as the first decade of the twenty-first century closed, the two organizations realized something had to change.

NASCAR BACKING

IN 2012 IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT the two series would merge under the auspices of IMSA with financial backing from NASCAR. The resultant Tudor United Sports Car Championship is a historic blending of the two series and their different philosophies. It represents a new dawn for sports car racing in the U.S. with great potential.

Four classes – LMP2/DP, LMPC, GT Le Mans and GT Daytona – will race, representing the best of both series in a new blend that allows for open and managed competition. It also represents the hand-off of sports car support in the U.S. from Rolex to Tudor – a natural and exciting transition.

Already a sponsor of the global sports car racing series, the World Endurance Championship, and premium high performance motorcycle maker Ducati, Tudor is now partnered in an effort which lifts American sports car racing to a higher level.

“For years Tudor has been inspired by motorsports,” said Kelly. “This new partnership between Tudor and IMSA allows us to elevate our commitment to sports car racing. This is the perfect alignment between partners dedicated to performance and precision.”

Look for Tudor to capitalize on the partnership with new timepieces. Perhaps a new counterpart to the Cosmograph will be born, continuing the dynasty. ☺

Top: Audi R8 at the Tudor IMSA announcement in September. The Tudor United SportsCar Championship logo will be featured on every sports car, on the front and back of each driver’s uniform and branded on all the tracks, tents and trucks at each of the races.

Second from top: Tudor Grantour Chrono Flyback, Russell Kelly, Tudor Brand Manager US, Tudor Fast Rider Black Shield (left)