WEC

Sebring to open 2012 WEC as a 'trial'

THE SEBRING 12 HOURS WILL BE a round of the new-for-2012 FIA World Endurance Championship.

There had been doubts that the traditional American Le Mans Series opener would continue as a round of the Automobile Club de l'Ouest-promoted series, which this year is known as the Intercontinental Le Mans Cup.

The confirmation of its place on the inaugural WEC calendar follows the agreement last month of a new, long-term deal for the ALMS to continue using the Le Mans name.

ALMS boss Scott Atherton described the move as a trial and explained that there would be no problem accommodating the ALMS and the WEC entries, which is set to grow to up to 35 cars in 2012, in the long term.

"This is an experiment," he said, "but I believe that the ACO want to be there as badly as we want them to be there."

Atherton said that the latest contract would give the ALMS new freedom when implementing ACO rules. He stated that cars from his series would be able to run in ALMS specification when they compete at Sebring next March.

That comment has been contradicted by the ACO.

ACO president Jean-Claude Plassart said: "Sebring will be 100 percent WEC rules. There will be no GTC cars, for example. They are not in the rules."

Atherton said he believed there was still a 50-50 chance that Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta would be on the 2012 WEC calendar.

Sebring will open 2012 WEC season

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

GARY WATKINS
INTERNATIONAL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

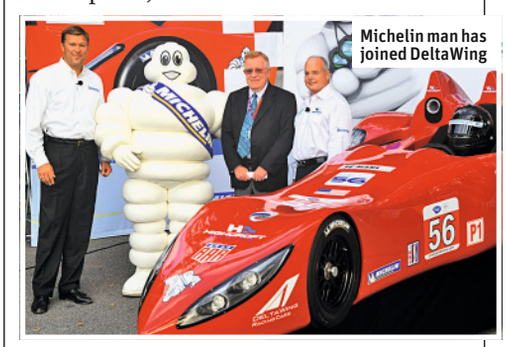
Hands up who thought the DeltaWing would never work? I'll happily stick my own arm in the air, because I was a doubter, and rightly so to my mind. I know what a racing car looks like and the DeltaWing doesn't look like any racing car I know.

But I stress that I *was* a sceptic. That changed last week when it became clear that Michelin was about to announce a deal that made it a technical partner in the project.

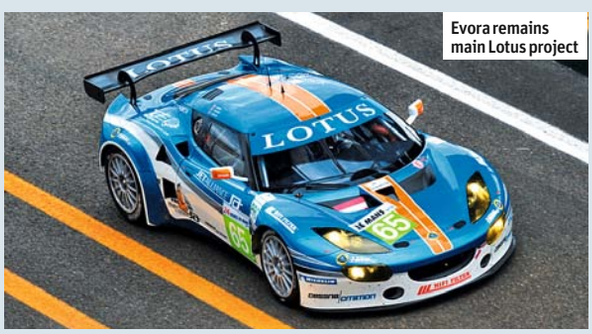
The French company wouldn't have announced that it was lending its name to something that was never going to work, nor for that matter develop bespoke tyres at significant cost.

The brains behind the DeltaWing, Ben Bowlby, has pedigree in IndyCar racing, sportscars and touring cars. He is an articulate chap who talks a good race, but would he be able to pull the wool over the eyes of Mr Bibendum? Clearly not.

So if the tyre supplier that has won the Le Mans 24 Hours every year since 1998 reckons the DeltaWing can hit its target and get around the Circuit de la Sarthe at LMP1 speeds, then who am I to doubt it?



Michelin man has joined DeltaWing



Evora remains main Lotus project

LMP2

Lotus halts LMP2 plan indefinitely

LOTUS HAS PUT ITS LMP2 prototype contender on hold.

The British manufacturer had already put back the car's Le Mans 24 Hours debut from 2012 to 2013 when it decided against using the Evora GTE's Toyota-based V6 in favour the five-litre V8 developed for the new-for-2013 Esprit. Now, Lotus has decided to put the LMP2 on the backburner while it focuses on its other sportscar programmes.

Lotus Motorsport boss Claudio Berro said: "It is on hold at the moment. The first problem is the engine – the road version has only been on the dyno since August.

"The second problem is the budget; we need to focus our resources on the Evora, not just the GTE car but other versions as well. We have the GT4, the endurance car and we are also studying a GT3 car."

Berro insisted that the project was not dead, but admitted that no timescale was in place for its revival.

TRANS-AM

Trans-Am to be reborn

THE REVIVAL OF THE GLORY DAYS OF the US Trans-Am series is the stated aim of a new group that is to take over the running of the championship next season.

The Trans-Am Race Company, which is owned by a group of entrants in the series, has taken over the rights to the series from the Sports Car Club of America. The new group is hoping to attract interest from traditional Trans-Am manufacturers Ford, Dodge and Chevrolet.

New series boss John Claggett, who also ran Trans-Am when it was controlled by the Panoz/Sanchez Group and then Champ Car in 2000-05, said: "The SCCA acknowledged that it did not have the resources to revitalise Trans-Am. This is a long-term project to rebuild an American icon – the building blocks are there."

Claggett ran series until '05

REMEMBER WHEN...

...the late Mark Donohue dominated the classic era of Trans-Am? Pictured in an AMC Javelin in 1971, Donohue won 29 races in a fruitful spell between 1969 and '71

PICS: GIBSON, ABBOTT, STALEY, BLOXHAM, BOYD/LAT