

## Final sprint for Blancpain GT World Challenge Europe titles gets underway at the Nürburgring

- Capacity 28-car grid confirmed for penultimate GT World Challenge Europe contest
- German event followed one week later by Hungaroring finale
- Competitive weekend in store as multiple titles go up for grabs



The 2019 Blancpain GT World Challenge Europe campaign begins its deciding phase next weekend when another capacity grid contests the season's penultimate round at the Nürburgring.

28 cars will tackle the 5.1km German venue, where local brands Audi and Mercedes-AMG will do battle with the likes of Lamborghini, Ferrari and Aston Martin.

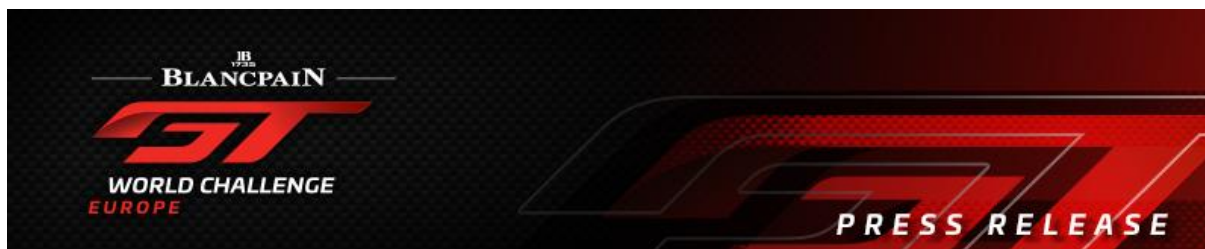
Set amid the scenic Eifel mountains, the track has been firmly established on the Blancpain GT Series calendar since 2012. It holds the distinction of being the only circuit to host Sprint and Endurance events in the same season, having welcomed both disciplines in 2016, and acted as the Sprint finale in 2017 and 2018.

This term it will stage the first of back-to-back events, beginning a final dash for the 2019 Blancpain GT World Challenge Europe titles that will culminate just one week later at the Hungaroring. Titles remain up for grabs in each class, creating the potential for a thrilling weekend of racing at Germany's premier motorsport facility.

### Four crews lead the charge for Pro glory

Following highly competitive events at Brands Hatch, Misano and Zandvoort, the battle for championship glory in the top-tier Pro class remains wide open. No crew has managed more than a single victory thus far, with six winners from as many races ensuring an ultra-close contest.

Heading to Germany, local squad Black Falcon leads the way. Luca Stolz and Maro Engel (#4 Mercedes-AMG) have been ultra-consistent this year, finishing each race among the top-four and



completing every lap of the campaign. Currently top of the table with 61.5 points, their victory came in the second Brands Hatch outing.

Next up it's Andrea Caldarelli and Marco Mapelli (#563 Orange1 FFF Racing Lamborghini), who are within striking distance of the leaders on 53 points and earned their win on home turf at Misano. The Italian duo have four podium finishes to their name – more than anyone else – and appear to be the best-placed to take the fight to Engel and Stolz.

On raw pace, however, that tag might belong to AKKA ASP duo Vincent Abril and Raffaele Marciello. The #88 Mercedes-AMG has lacked consistency, but its outright speed is undeniable. Victory last time out at Zandvoort has put them on the fringes of the title battle, but with a deficit of almost 20 points Abril and Marciello will need to be on form at the Nürburgring.

Zandvoort also helped the #63 Grasser Racing duo of Mirko Bortolotti and Christian Engelhart force their way into the battle. The Lamborghini crew scored a brace of runner-up finishes at the Dutch track to move within 23 points of the championship lead and will require more of the same if they are to leave the Nürburgring with their title aspirations intact.

## **Dark horses look to hit their stride in Germany**

While the leading quartet of crews are best-placed to contend for the title, an outsider could still emerge with a pair of strong results in Germany.

Of those dark horses, Dries Vanthoor looks the best-placed to challenge. He will drive the #1 Belgian Audi Club Team WRT entry alongside Ezequiel Perez Compagnon, who completed a hard-fought run to the podium at Zandvoort to cap a magnificent return from injury. There is plenty of talent in the sister #2 Audi R8 LMS as well, with youngster Charles Weerts joined by Christopher Mies, who took a race win at this event 12 months ago.

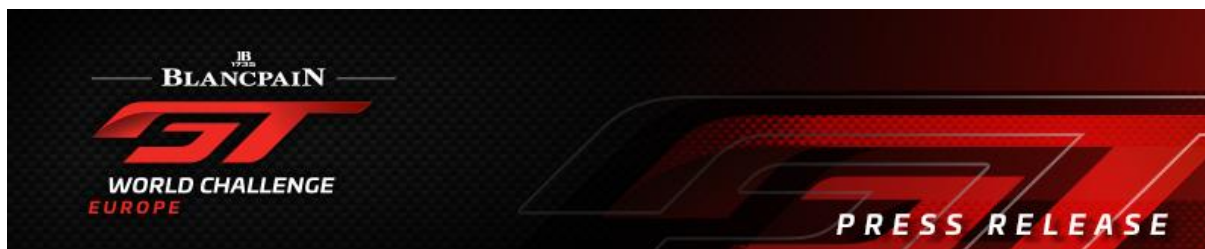
Remaining with the Audi contingent, Simon Gachet and Christopher Haase (#25 Sainteloc Racing) secured a superb victory at Zandvoort – their first in the series – and will travel to the Nürburgring full of confidence. In contrast, the sister #26 duo of Steven Palette and Markus Winkelhock have suffered considerable bad luck in 2019 and will look to register their first points of the campaign in Germany.

Points have not been a problem for the #76 R-Motorsport Aston Martin, which has grown more competitive at each event this season. Indeed, Marvin Kirchhöfer and Ricky Collard will have serious ambitions of giving the new Vantage AMR its maiden Blancpain GT World Challenge Europe podium at the Nürburgring.

Attempto Racing will field its brace of Audi R8 LMS machines, with Nick Foster and Steijn Schothorst chasing a return to the podium aboard the #55 car while the #66 crew of Kelvin van der Linde and Clemens Schmid hunt their first top-three finish of 2019.

At fellow Audi squad Phoenix Racing, Finlay Hutchinson and Frederic Vervisch will look to extend a run of five successive points-scoring finishes aboard their #11 R8 LMS. In the sister #5 machine Kim Luis Schraam will be joined by his third different teammate of the season as Audi factory ace Jamie Green slots in alongside the German youngster.

Finally, Tech 1 Racing will once again field its #23 Lexus RC F for Aurelien Panis and Jack Hawksworth. The French squad made its Blancpain GT World Challenge Europe debut at Zandvoort and will look to build on that experience with a second outing at the Nürburgring.



## **Class title battles reach crucial final phase**

In addition to a strong Pro class competing at the Nürburgring, a further 14 entrants will be split over the Silver Cup, Pro-Am and Am Cup categories.

Seven of those will compete for Silver honours. Class leaders Nico Bastian and Thomas Neubauer (#89 AKKA ASP Mercedes-AMG) hold an advantage of 15 points, the biggest cushion of any championship-leading crew. But they cannot afford to relax, as a double victory at Zandvoort vaulted Hugo de Sadeleer and Aaro Vainio (#62 R-Motorsport Aston Martin) into the title battle. A second AKKA ASP car, driven by Timur Boguslavsky and Felipe Fraga, is also a clear victory contender.

Milan Dontje and Mattia Drudi have frequently shown pace in the #56 Attempto Racing Audi and will target a breakthrough win in Germany. There will be a further brace of R8 LMS entries thanks to Belgian Audi Club Team WRT, which will field the #10 for Rik Breukers and Oscar Tunjo, and the #17 for Tom Gamble and Shae Davies. Orange1 FFF Racing completes the Silver Cup field, with Taylor Proto and Diego Menchaca piloting its #555 Lamborghini.

The battle for Pro-Am honours appears to be narrowing to a two-horse race. In the Lamborghini camp, Orange1 FFF Racing duo Hiroshi Hamaguchi and Phil Keen lead the way on 78.5 points; on the Ferrari side, Rinat Salikhov and David Perel (#333 Rinaldi Racing) are within striking distance on 68. There is a strong outside bet, too, as the experienced pairing of Andrea Bertolini and Louis Machiels (#52 AF Corse Ferrari) must also be considered a contender for the crown.

The other two crews will be hunting their first win of the 2019 campaign, though both have been regular podium visitors. In the #24 Sainteloc Racing Audi, reigning class champion Nyls Stievenart will resume his partnership with the vastly experienced Stephane Ortelli. At AKKA ASP Team, the #87 Mercedes-AMG will be piloted by Jim Pla and Mauro Ricci.

Finally, in the Am Cup category, full-season squad HB Racing will be joined at the Nürburgring by series returnee Kessel Racing. The experienced Swiss outfit will field a Ferrari 488 for 2017 class champion Stephen Earle, who will partner Finnish racer Rory Penttinen.

## **Mercedes-AMG in control of global battle; GT and single-seater support action in store**

Heading into the Nürburgring weekend, Mercedes-AMG holds a commanding advantage at the top of the global Blancpain GT World Challenge table. The German marque has scored 9,256 points across Europe, Asia and America this term, establishing a clear lead over Ferrari (6,812 points).

The Nürburgring contest will kick off with two 80-minute free practice sessions on Friday, the first at 09.45 and another at 14.35. Qualifying takes place at 09.30 on Saturday morning, with the opening 60-minute race following at 14.05. The weekend will conclude on Sunday at 15.30 when, for the first time this season, the Blancpain GT World Challenge Europe titles could be decided.

A strong support package is led by the GT4 European Series, which stages its deciding round of the 2019 campaign at the Nürburgring. There will be further GT action courtesy of Lamborghini Super Trofeo, while leading junior category Formula Renault Eurocup stages its sixth event of the season at the German venue.

With the Blancpain GT World Challenge Europe title battles taking centre stage, it promises to be an action-packed weekend of international motorsport.

— **BLANCPAIN** —  
**GT**  
WORLD CHALLENGE  
EUROPE

**PRESS RELEASE**