

Communiqués

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Volvo unveils S60 ETCC challenger

For immediate release

Volvo Cars has unveiled its S60 Super 2000 car which will compete in this year's European Touring Car Championship (ETCC).

Volvo will be running two cars in 2002. The first will be driven by the experienced Swede and former British Touring Car champion, Rickard Rydell. James Hanson, the young British driver who competed in the ETCC Super Production series last year in an Edenbridge-prepared BMW, will pilot the second car. Despite Rydell's relative seniority and experience, both drivers will have equal equipment and status in the team.

The car, which has been developed by the British company Prodrive, will see Volvo's return to the ETCC where it successfully competed in the 1980s with the 240 Turbo, beating much larger cars like the Rover 3500 V8 and Jaguar XJ12. During the 1990s, Volvo participated in the British Touring Car Championship with its 850 and S40 models, clinching the championship in 1998 for Rydell. Since 1999, Volvo has not participated in international touring car racing, but is now focusing on the new FIA European Championship with the new Super 2000 rules.

Prodrive has been working on the development of the new car since early last year and the first prototype ran in August. However, a late ratification of the rules forced a complete redesign of the engine, gearbox and suspension, significantly reducing the time available to develop the car.

"We have not done as much testing and development work as we would have liked," said Dave Benbow, Volvo team principal at Prodrive.

"Since October, the team's engineers have had to redirect their efforts towards developing a new five-speed H-gate gearbox from scratch, specifically for this car. We are confident though that the car will still be competitive from the start and will improve during the year," said Benbow.

The front-wheel-drive Volvos will be competing against seven Alfa Romeo 156s, eight BMW 320s as well as some privately entered Nissan Primeras and Honda Civics. The rear-wheel-drive BMWs should have a distinct advantage pulling away from the grid start and exiting slow corners. However, the 30kg weight penalty for rear wheel drive should help compensate for this, but tire wear on the front wheel drive cars could be an issue towards the end of the races.

Volvo's motorsport director, Olle Odsell, believes this year's championship will be very open. "There are at least 10 drivers who are capable of winning this year's championship," said Odsell. "However, because of the lack of head-to-head tests to date, with what will be the final specification of cars, it won't be until we get to the first race at Magny Cours that we will know exactly where our cars and drivers stand against the competition."

2002 ETCC program:

April 21 France Magny Cours

May 5 UK Silverstone

May 19 Czech Republic Brno

June 2 Spain Jarama

June 30 Sweden Anderstorp

July 14 Germany Oschersleben

August 3 Belgium Spa
Sept 22 Italy Pergusa
October 6 UK Donington Park
October 20 Portugal Estoril

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