



Team Toyota GB And GT86 In At The Deep End

18 September 2012

No motor-sporting debut is easy but this weekend's first outing for the reformed Team Toyota GB and its all-new Toyota GT86 production racer will be one of the hardest – straight in at the deep end in the UK's toughest race, the Britcar 24 Hours at Silverstone, which gets under way on Saturday afternoon.

The GT86 will have a crew of four, led by a famous name from the team's past, double British Touring Car Champion Chris Hodgetts. Chris's son, Stefan, will drive also, and the squad is completed by *evo* magazine journalist Richard Meaden and historic sports car racer – and Travis drummer – Neil Primrose.

Hodgetts father and son gave the new Toyota its shakedown test at Silverstone last week. Further fine-tuning is scheduled for Wednesday, when Meaden and Primrose will sample the GT86 for the first time, ahead of Friday's official qualifying sessions for the Britcar 24 Hours, the only round-the-clock race held in Britain for sports and GT cars.

The GT86 has been built in the Buckingham workshops of GPRM, the race preparation outfit which developed the Toyota Avensis 'Next Generation Touring Car' BTCC concept. Transformation from road car to race weapon has gone smoothly, says GPRM's Gary Blackham: "The first test went very well – the GT86 had a very good run, and there were no issues at all. It was quick straight out of the box."

Nonetheless, Blackham is maintaining a cautious attitude given the rigours of the event: "To finish the race is the main aim. I don't want to raise any expectations of where we might finish, because the GT86 has never raced before and we simply don't know what to expect."

Hodgetts Senior, 61, enjoyed his first taste of the new Toyota and is looking forward to the race: "It was very good first time out; Stefan loved the car too. They were cautious 'installation' laps, just making sure everything was OK, but I started to get a move on later on. It was very quick through the Becketts complex, which was pleasing. There is more work to do to get it how we want it, but the basics are there and I can't wait to get going at the weekend."

Hodgetts was the BTCC victor in 1986 and '87 in a Toyota Corolla GT; he has not competed for 13 years and last raced a Toyota in 1988, but has kept up his racing licence and is on track nearly every day as an instructor.

Chris and Stefan, 30, face a busy time as they shuttle on a motorcycle the 42 miles between Northamptonshire's two circuits, Silverstone and Rockingham, where Stefan is also racing this weekend in a BTCC supporting event and Chris is on driver-coach duty.

Powered by a 16-valve double overhead cam horizontally opposed 'boxer' engine delivering 197bhp,

the Toyota GT86 captures some of the best elements of three models from Toyota's rich sporting heritage: the Sports 800, 2000GT and Corolla GT (AE86). It went on sale in the UK to critical acclaim at the beginning of July.

Team Toyota GB earned fame in the 1980s and '90s thanks to championship victories with the Corolla in the British Touring Car Championship and UK rallying. The team's last appearance was in the BTCC in 1995 with the Carina E raced by Julian Bailey and Tim Sugden.

Britcar 24 Hours provisional timetable

Friday 21 Sep: 1300-1400 & 1900-2100 qualifying

Saturday 22 Sep: 1145 warm-up; 1530 race