



11 April 2017

## Rounds 3 & 4 – Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix – 14 / 16 April 2017

### PREVIEW

#### TCR International Series returns to Bahrain for the F1 Grand Prix

The second race meeting of the TCR International Series takes place this weekend at the Bahrain International Circuit.

For the second consecutive year the series runs at Sakhir as a support event to the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix.

In 2016 the Lukoil Craft-Bamboo team dominated the event, with Sergey Afanasyev claiming pole position and Pepe Oriola scoring a double victory.

On Saturday night in the first race, Oriola and his SEAT León resisted a superb recovery from Gianni Morbidelli in the WestCoast Racing Honda Civic, while Oriola's teammates James Nash and Afanasyev finished in third and fourth positions.

Morbidelli's teammates Kevin Gleason and Aku Pellinen led the second race in its early stages, but Oriola and Nash recovered quickly after starting tenth and ninth on the reverse grid. With less than two laps to go, both Oriola and Nash overtook Gleason and gave a 1-2 finish to Lukoil Craft-Bamboo. The fight for third resulted in a collision between WestCoast Racing's Gleason and Morbidelli, the former stopped, the latter dropped back and their teammate Pellinen inherited the final place on the podium.

TCR competitors will hit the track for the first time on Friday for two twenty-minute Free Practice sessions. On Saturday they will take part in a thirty-minute Qualifying session; all drivers will run during Q1 and the fastest twelve will be allowed to participate in Q2.

The first TCR International Series race will take place on Saturday afternoon, just before the F1 Qualifying. The second race will be held on Sunday in the early afternoon as an appetizer to the F1 GP.

#### TCR in Sakhir – the event at a glance

Lap distance: 5.41 km

Race distance: 10 laps or 25 minutes

Start: standing

Grids: determined by Qualifying results (Q1+Q2) with top-10 reversed for Race 2

Timetable:	Friday, 10:45/11:05	Free Practice 1
	Friday, 15:55/16:15	Free Practice 2
	Saturday, 11:00/11:30	Qualifying (Q1 + Q2)
	Saturday, 16:30	Race 1
	Sunday, 13:00	Race 2

all times: GMT +3



## Success ballast for Kajaia, Tassi and Oriola

The Success Ballast system will be applied for the first time during the current season, on the occasion of the second race meeting at the Bahrain International Circuit.

Following the results achieved in the season's opener at Rustavi International Motorpark in Georgia, GE-Force's Davit Kajaia, M1RA's Attila Tassi and Lukoil Craft-Bamboo's Pepe Oriola will carry ballast on their cars.

Race 1 winner and current points leader Kajaia will be given the maximum 30-kilo ballast; this is the first time the Romeo Ferraris-built Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR will be laden by extra weight. In fact, the Italian car's running weight will be 1295 kilograms (1285kg minimum weight, plus 30kg of Success Ballast, minus 20kg of Balance of Performance adjustment).

A 20-kilo ballast will be imposed on Tassi's Honda Civic Type-R TCR, the second-best scoring car in Rustavi; its running weight will be 1335kg (1285 + 20 SB + 30 BoP), while Race 2 winner Oriola's SEAT León TCR will carry 10 kilos of ballast for a running weight of 1325kg (1285 + 10 + 30).

## Michela Cerruti joins GE-Force for the Bahrain event

After spending the 2016 season developing the Romeo Ferraris-built Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR, Michela Cerruti will once again sit in the Italian car for the second event of the 2017 TCR International Series.

At Bahrain International Circuit, in the frame of the Formula One Grand Prix, Cerruti will join Davit Kajaia and Dušan Borković, taking the wheel of GE-Force's third car that was driven by Shota Abkhazava during the series' opener in Georgia.

While Kajaia was on his way to claiming the Giulietta TCR's maiden win in Rustavi's Race 1, Michela Cerruti was standing on the pit wall, biting her nails.

*"I felt immense joy, even though I was not driving. It has been very emotional to celebrate a victory in a different role. The Giulietta is my baby; I played a part in its birth and growth, and I drove it when this kind of result was definitely beyond our hopes,"* said the Italian lady who was the first driver to reach the podium with the car, finishing second in the TCR Middle East series at Dubai in January; a result that was matched by Kajaia one month later in Abu Dhabi.

*"After my podium in Dubai and the outstanding performance of Davit and Dušan in Georgia, I can't wait to be at the wheel myself once again although, for the time being, we are considering it as a one-off appearance. But I will try and do my best to help the team to score more points in the championship,"* Michela concluded.

## The forces at play – a round up after the opening event

The 2017 TCR International Series successfully got under way ten days ago at Rustavi International Motorpark in what was the first international motorsport event ever hosted by Georgia.

Local fans responded with enthusiasm, flocking to the track in their thousands and crowding the grandstand to full capacity in spite of pouring rain.



They were rewarded by Davit Kajaia's triumph in a thrilling first race that offered a five-way fight between the Georgian's Alfa Romeo Giulietta, Ferenc Ficza's SEAT León, Stefano Comini's Audi RS3 LMS and the Honda Civic Type-R cars of Attila Tassi and Roberto Colciago.

In the second race, Pepe Oriola continued his tradition of winning during the season's opening event. The Spaniard led home his teammate Hugo Valente who was later demoted for overtaking under yellow flags, which promoted Tassi and Jean-Karl Vernay to second and third respectively.

Thanks to a sixth place in Race 2, Kajaia emerged as the championship leader with a margin of six points ahead of Tassi; Oriola lies third, one further point adrift.

### **GE-Force: Kajaia wins and Borković scores**

Georgia's local hero Davit Kajaia and his Romeo Ferraris-built Alfa Romeo Giulietta run by the GE-Force team claimed a fantastic victory after a close fight that involved five drivers representing four different brands of car manufacturers.

After sprinting from pole position, Kajaia pushed to the limit and created a gap in the first half of the race. He then was able to control the race from the front, keeping his competitors at bay. Eventually the crowd roared when Kajaia crossed the finish line with a slim margin ahead of Ficza, while Comini kept third place despite Colciago's last-gasp effort.

*"It was so great to win my first race at home! The race was very tough. My start was good and I could build a gap, but as from lap 6, my front tyres started to suffer and then I had to fight to keep Ficza at bay,"* Kajaia said.

His teammate Dušan Borković made up for a disappointing Qualifying performance by pocketing an encouraging fifth place in Race 2 that became fourth after Valente's penalty.

The Serbian commented: *"I was not satisfied with my speed, but I used my skills to recover positions in both races. It was good to score points twice after a disappointing qualifying."*

### **Lukoil Craft-Bamboo: Oriola does it again!**

For the third consecutive year Pepe Oriola opened the season with a victory and so established himself as a candidate for the title fight once again. The young Spaniard and his SEAT León dominated the second race in Rustavi after snatching the lead from Giacomo Altoè during the first lap. *"It was really nice to win a race after the difficult event we had, with a bad qualifying and lots of trouble. My start wasn't great, because I was on a line that was still humid and my wheels were spinning but I could keep Hugo behind, then I pushed hard to try to build an advantage,"* Oriola said.

His two teammates were less lucky. Hugo Valente finished the race in second position, but was later demoted to ninth by a 30-second time penalty for overtaking under yellow flags. He argued: *"It was a decision that I didn't fully understand. The two drivers in front overtook each other in the chicane, they had a bad exit and I was able to gain a position. I got a penalty for that. It was a mystery to me."*

Last year's championship runner-up James Nash struggled to be on the pace. Out of the points in Race 1, he inherited fifth in Race 2 after penalties for Valente and Colciago. He explained: *"It was a tough weekend for me. In Race 1 I did what I could starting from 11<sup>th</sup>. In the second I was able to utilize the car's performance to a much greater degree and gain some points."*

**M1RA: Tassi and Colciago fight for top places**

The Honda Civic Type-R cars run by M1RA were fighting for the top positions in Georgia. Despite their performance, Attila Tassi and Roberto Colciago were left with regrets as both had the possibility to achieve better results.

Being part of the leading quintet in Race 1, they missed the podium by inches: Colciago fourth and Tassi fifth. In Race 2 they crossed the line third and sixth respectively, but had different fortunes, as Tassi was promoted to second by Valente's penalty, while Colciago dropped out of the points as he received a similar penalty himself.

Tassi said: *"I was happy with the podium and my performance. I could not hope on such results before the weekend started, considering that I was driving the Honda for the first time."*

**Zeke Racing: Ficza impresses with his speed**

Thanks to a last-minute deal, Ferenc Ficza was signed by Zeke Racing to drive the Austrian team's SEAT León for the first two race meetings. From Spa onwards Ficza will switch to Zengő Motorsport to race one of the two new STARD-built KIA cee'd cars.

In Rustavi the Hungarian youngster did not waste the opportunity to shine and was arguably the most impressive driver over the Georgian weekend, which granted him the first TCR Fan Award of the season.

Throughout the first race he chased Kajaia and finished runner-up to the Georgian by a mere three tenths. He was well on his way to also finish the second race in the points, but he was eliminated after contact with Colciago.

*"I was very happy with second in Race 1, it was a good result. My start wasn't that great, then I could pass Tassi, but Comini's car was getting larger and larger in my mirrors. At the same time, we were reducing the gap to Kajaia and got really close but there was no way to pass him,"* he said.

**Comtoy Racing: encouraging results for Comini**

Comtoy Racing and Stefano Comini arrived in Rustavi without having completed a single lap in their brand new Audi RS 3 LMS. This resulted in them struggling to find the pace in Practice and Qualifying.

However, when it went down to the races, the double TCR champion proved that whoever wants to be next to sit on the International Series throne cannot count him out.

In Race 1 the Swiss claimed a third position that was totally unexpected after the disappointing pace he had shown earlier. Unfortunately for him, the consequences of contact with Vernay after the end of the first race forced him to retire in the second.

*"To finish on the podium in our first race as a team and with the Audi was an excellent result."* Comini declared.

**Leopard Racing: Vernay inherits a podium result**

While Leopard Racing still has to name the second driver who will join the championship from Spa, Jean-Karl Vernay flew the team's colours in his Volkswagen Golf GTi.

In the first race at Rustavi, the French driver came off the worst following a clash with Comini and found himself heading the group that was chasing the five leaders. Eventually he finished in sixth position. In the second race, he trailed Valente and Tassi, taking the chequered flag in fourth position that became third, courtesy of Valente's penalty.

He commented: *"We scored twenty-five points, that was not bad to begin. Better than last year! It was a great job from the whole team, however I could not chase the Honda, as it has better torque when coming out of the turns."*

**WestCoast Racing: points for Morbidelli and Altoè**

WestCoast Racing's Italian pairing of the experienced Gianni Morbidelli and the 16-year old Giacomo Altoè scored points in both races at the wheel of their Volkswagen Golf GTi cars. It was Morbidelli's maiden appearance in the Golf, and Altoè's second following the TCR Middle East finale in Bahrain.

*"It was a reasonable result for us as we knew we would be somewhat on the back foot in these early races of the season with the new cars,"* said Team Manager James Nixon. *"We didn't have the raw pace in the car in race conditions, that is clear, but Gianni held on for points in both races while Giacomo enjoyed the chance to start from pole position on the reverse grid for Race 2 and led for half-a-lap on his debut, so that's a huge positive."*

Morbidelli was classified tenth and seventh in the races, while Altoè was eighth and tenth.

**DG Sport Compétition: Homola and Corthals are confident**

In its debut in the TCR International Series, DG Sport Compétition managed to score points in the Teams' Championship.

After finishing 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> in Race 1, Mat'o Homola and Pierre-Yves Corthals were aiming for better results in the second race. Homola's hopes were soon crushed when his Opel Astra was hit by Shota Abkhazava's Alfa Romeo at Turn 1 and retired; Corthals fought for a points-scoring position and crossed the line tenth before being promoted to eighth after the penalties.

Homola said: *"It was my first drive in the Astra and I'm pretty confident about the future, because it has huge potential. I'm also pleased with DG Sport Compétition, as they are professional and motivated. We worked well in the weekend and progressed during each session. Though I feel that for us this BoP is disadvantageous."*

Corthals echoed: *"We really worked hard all weekend. I gave my all without ever really having the feeling of being able to battle it out with the others on an equal footing, and that's rather frustrating."*

**Icarus Motorsports: a difficult debut for Duncan Ende**

Icarus Motorsports – the first American team to join TCR – and its driver Duncan Ende endured a difficult maiden weekend in the TCR International Series.

At the wheel of his SEAT León – the only car in the field still fitted with a DSG gearbox – Ende finished the two races in 14<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> positions.

He was not that surprised and said: *"Due to some delays with suppliers, we didn't have the chance to test before the season. So we took the event in Rustavi as just a learning weekend. I had never even driven a front-wheel drive car before the Friday test..."*

**2017 TCR International Series – calendar**

2 April – Rustavi International Motorpark, Georgia

16 April – Bahrain International Circuit (F1 event)

6 May – Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium (WEC event)

14 May – Autodromo di Monza, Italy (ELMS event)

11 June – Salzburgring, Austria

2 July – Hungaroring, Budapest (GT Open event)

9 July – Motorsport Arena Oschersleben, Germany (with ADAC TCR Germany)

3 September – Chang International Circuit, Buriram (with TCR Thailand)

8 October – Zhejiang International Circuit, China (with TCR Asia & TCR China)

26 November – Yas Marina Circuit, Abu Dhabi (F1 event)



**Rounds 3 & 4 – Formula One Bahrain Grand Prix  
15 / 16 April 2017**

#	team	driver	car
1	Comtoyou Racing	Stefano Comini (SUI)	Audi RS 3 LMS TCR
2	Leopard Racing Team WRT	Jean-Karl Vernay (FRA)	Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR
5	M1RA	Roberto Colciago (ITA)	Honda Civic Type-R TCR
7	Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing	Hugo Valente (FRA)	SEAT León TCR
9	M1RA	Attila Tassi (HUN)	Honda Civic Type-R TCR
10	West Coast Racing	Gianni Morbidelli (ITA)	Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR
16	GE-Force	Davit Kajaia (GEO)	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR
18	Icarus Motorsports	Duncan Ende (USA)	SEAT León TCR DSG
21	West Coast Racing	Giacomo Altoè (ITA)	Volkswagen Golf GTi TCR
23	DG Sport Compétition	Pierre-Yves Corthals (BEL)	Opel Astra TCR
54	Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing	James Nash (GBR)	SEAT León TCR
55	Zele Racing	Ferenc Ficza (HUN)	SEAT León TCR
62	GE-Force	Dušan Borković (SRB)	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR
70	DG Sport Compétition	Mat'ò Homola (SVK)	Opel Astra TCR
74	Lukoil Craft-Bamboo Racing	Pepe Oriola (ESP)	SEAT León TCR
88	GE-Force	Michela Cerruti (ITA)	Alfa Romeo Giulietta TCR