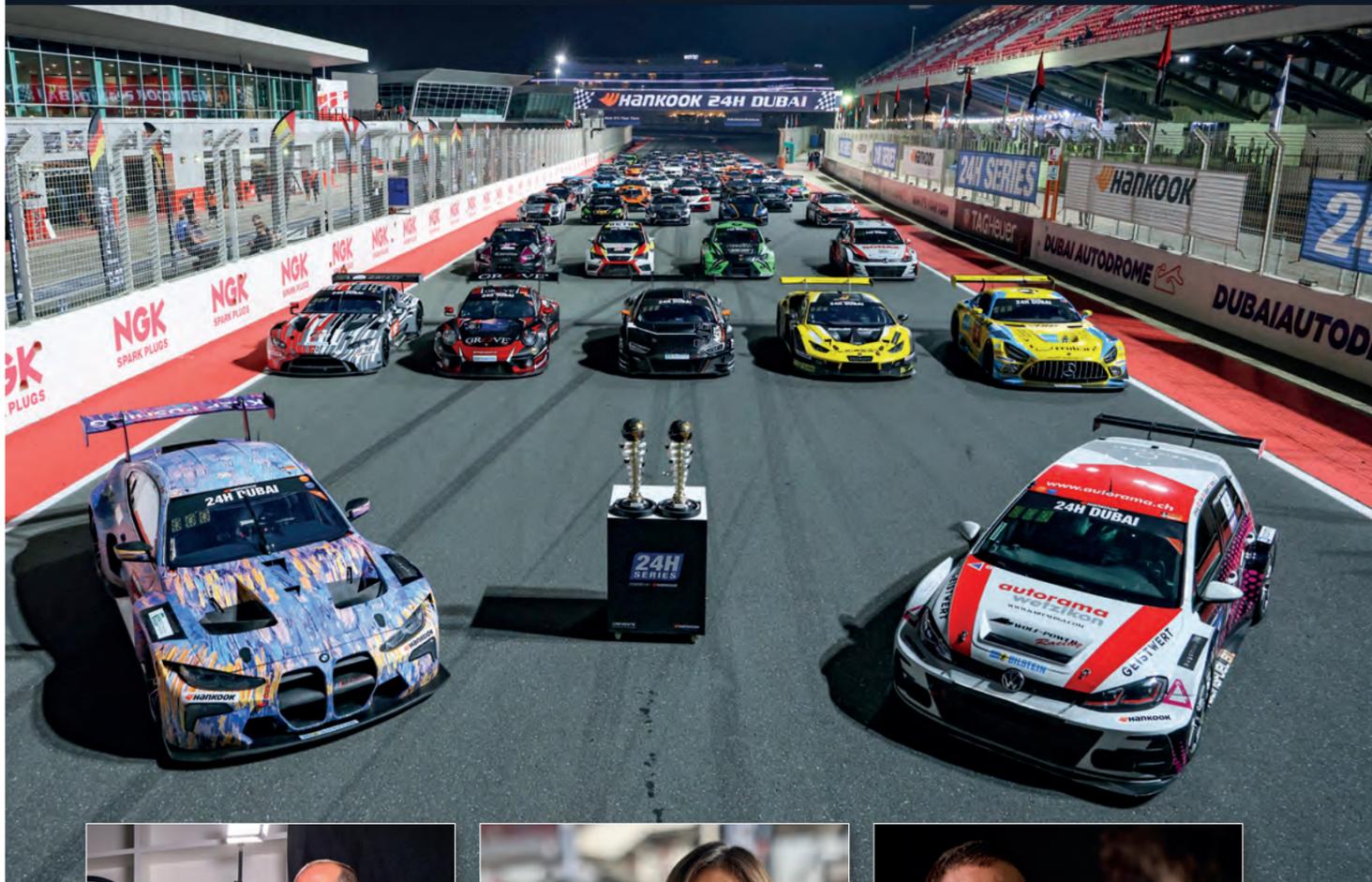


#ThisIs24HSERIES. Behind the Scenes

In preparation for two documentaries CREVENTIC is currently filming – one on the 24H SERIES as a whole, the other more specifically on the Hankook 24H DUBAI – we spoke with myriad drivers, team bosses and series personnel at the Dubai Autodrome for their individual insights. But what happens behind the scenes?



“This is quite the setup you guys have here!”

Our makeshift studio – a not-quite finished suite overlooking the Dubai Autodrome start-finish straight – has clearly impressed Jeroen Bleekemolen. So much so that, like Alfred Renauer before him, the Dutchman takes a few moments before his interview to check out the view and take a few smartphone images of the flurry of headlights flashing past.

Daan, our camera operator and director, is happy to wait, as it gives him the opportunity to double-double check his lights, the blackout curtain pinned to the wall that acts as our backdrop, and the collapsible reflector inelegantly propped up on one of three chairs we hiked across from the paddock earlier that day.

Truth be told, I'm also happy for this short break to run through my questions again. Jeroen is a three-time winner of the Hankook 24H DUBAI – there's only two other men on the planet that can also make that claim! – and he's only missed the race once since 2008. He's going to have some great stories to tell.

He won't be the last either.

Sami Moutran, our first interviewee of the weekend, enjoyed talking about the 24H SERIES immensely at what has effectively been his home endurance for more than a decade. JM Littman, the ebullient series fan favourite barely paused for breath as he changed from his civvies into his racesuit for the interview – *“...the camera's off, right?!”* – and Gregg Gorski was so enthusiastic, his paddock 'entourage' had somehow doubled by the time we got to the studio.

It's an overwhelmingly positive response that, earlier, Daan, B-roll operator Martijn and I felt sure had collapsed before our eyes. The afternoon prior, our original shooting location – one of two offices attached to the Autodrome's Tech Bay at the start of the pitlane – had just been repossessed for scrutineering. A more pressing concern for the biggest 24-hour in the region than our little film, granted, but it still left us with only two, rather dismal options: a corner of the Autodrome's dining area, where the clamour of several hundred knives and forks was only slightly drowned out by myriad V8s and flat-sixes screaming down the main start-finish straight, or a storage closet off VIP suite 1. And even then we'd have had to work around the bank of modems taking up two-thirds of the floor space. Mercifully, a pleading email sent to the Autodrome's dutiful management team eventually lands us the last suite available above the main grandstand.

Done with his pics, Jeroen takes a seat in 'the chair' as Daan and I have now dubbed it, the Dutchman only slightly deterred by the surprisingly strong arc light stage left as he adjusts the microphone chord under his shirt (he's a PRO, no need to worry). Just as we're about to start, there's a soft tap at the door followed moments later by documentary producer Robin: *“sorry to interrupt, but Gustav Edelhoff's going to be in the car next and wondered if he could do his sit-down sooner. Also, radiolemans is wondering if we're still on for 6.15.”*

Jeroen's interview is now left in Robin's capable hands as I dash down the corridor to double check on radiolemans's progress – Eve, the appointed 'responsible adult', assures me that, once John Hindhaugh and Phil Anson hand over to London at 6pm, they'll be happy to talk – before making

my way back over to the paddock to re-arrange timing with Gustav. Heading into the lift, I almost clatter into Patrick, one of CREVENTIC's photographers for the weekend, who, as it happens, does have a couple of minutes to get some behind the scenes images. Just don't trip over the cable when you go in or we'll fuse the lightbox again...

Passing pit box 2B, I spot Stéphane Perrin: *“After your stint?...okay, how about 8.30?... cool, I'll come back and meet you here.”*

Actually, while I'm here, I'd better check in with Jean-Francois Brunot – Leipter Motorsport, 1C – to see if tomorrow at 11am still works. And Saif Alamer should be out of the car by now, so maybe I can grab a quick word at the RABDAN garage too.

Heading back to the studio, I almost trip over ST Racing team boss Ben Distaulo, who, as luck would have it, has a bit of time and is happy to 'do his bit to camera'. Conversation on the way to the studio covers a range of topics: *“no, apparently Jeroen doesn't get jetlagged anymore...”*

Robin's already been and gone as she also has a few final details for the podium to hammer out – she'll step back in again for Samantha Tan, Kim Holmgaard and Jasmin Preisig when I turn my attention to the post-qualifying press release – but a wry smile tells me that Daan is happy with Jeroen's animated footage. Cue microphone fumbling again as Ben gets himself ready in the chair. Oh, by the way, Mirko Bortolotti's on standby pretty much for the whole race, so we'll need to do a candid piece with him at the Barwell garage. No, it's fine, there's a 'artistic' tyre stack we could use as the backdrop, and...

“...did Robin take the laptop with her...?”

“...okay, sorry Ben, we're going to wing this one a bit.”

And so it continues, both late into the night and early the next morning, empty water bottles building up in our designated 'storage area' – the suite's not-quite-finished bathroom – as drivers and team bosses kindly dedicate their time and thoughts for the documentary. Khaled Al Qubaisi is finally tracked down early on Sunday morning and relives his finest moments at his home race, swiftly followed by Reema Juffali, Saudi Arabia's first female racing driver, who's more than happy to talk about her first endurance race.

Sadly, some drivers we can't quite manage to get into the chair. Rob Huff seemed keen enough but we could never nail down a time. Hubert Haupt had two Mercedes to worry about, so that was always going to be difficult. And we somehow lost Shane Lewis altogether between CP Racing's garage in pit box 1B and the CREVENTIC welcome centre (sorry Shane!). That a piece of loose tape meant our black backdrop ended up falling on Car Collection team manager Denis Ferleman during his interview was a little embarrassing too.

Still, give or take some re-scheduling and a heart-stopping moment when we think the 'studio' has lost power (turns out our adapter has shifted slightly in the socket when we adjust the lighting rig), shooting has gone pretty well, and we're left with almost seven hours of footage for our documentaries.

Keen to see the finished result? Keep checking our official YouTube channel for #ThisIs24HSERIES in the coming weeks. ■