



# Eighth Century

In 2024, Century Motorsport returns for its eighth shot at the Hankook 24H DUBAI, no doubt hoping to replicate its class win, on debut, in 2016. Can the BMW M4 GT3, fresh from its maiden race in Kuwait, be a contender on the British team's first run in GT3 in Dubai? CREVENTIC sat down with team boss Nathan Freke to find out.

Images – Nico Mombaerts / Petr Fryba

Though it was perhaps not the result the team had wanted, 3rd at the Hankook 12H KUWAIT was still a promising start to Century Motorsport's first GT3 campaign with CREVENTIC.

After falling just half a second shy of pole, the #22 BMW M4 GT3, driven by Porsche Carrera Cup race winner Lewis Plato, waltzed into an early lead and had already pulled close-to 20 seconds clear before the first round of pit stops. Two costly spins however, plus a couple of Code 60 refuels that didn't quite go Century's way, meant the #22 BMW eventually finished 55 seconds behind an epic fight to the flag between CP Racing and Manamauri Energy by Ebimotors. One wonders, without those delays, whether the British team would have left Kuwait celebrating its first outright win in the 24H SERIES.

For round three of the 2023/2024 24H SERIES Middle East Trophy on 12-13-14 January, Century heads to the UAE for its eighth shot at the Hankook 24H DUBAI, now the traditional home for the British team's winter testing program.

"We've been doing this now since 2016, and the selling point for our customers is a winter test program that helps them prepare for the European season," Century Motorsport team boss Nathan Freke

explains to CREVENTIC. "For the drivers, it offers seat time, good weather, and it's actual racing experience. And from the team, it's great because in the UK, motor racing is very seasonal from April through to October. So it's good for them to have a revenue stream and another program they can enjoy through the winter."

Given the M4's demonstrative pace, expectations for Dubai are arguably higher than they were in Kuwait. Bar a pandemic-related absence in 2021 after all, Century Motorsport has contested the event every year since 2016, and already has a class victory and five additional class podiums to its name, plus two category wins at the short-lived Hankook 3X3H DUBAI. A formidable Ginetta Supercup record, plus two overall British GT Championships, similarly prove Century Motorsport can get the job done on the big stage. And, for the first time ever in Dubai, Century is fielding a three-car entry at the event: a second-generation 'G82'-spec BMW M4 GT4, and two BMW M4 GT3s. Strength in numbers.

It's not unreasonable to think then that the Century Motorsport M4 GT3s could be in the mix for class victory in January. Even if, ironically, the team owner won't be leading the charge from the GT3 hot seat himself... ➔



2016 DUBAI.  
SP3 victory with  
the Ginetta G55



2023 DUBAI.  
3rd in GT4 class  
with the M4 GT4

"I don't think I'm going to be in the GT3 car, sadly," Nathan continues. "The way that the driver line-ups have come together, it looks like I'm being 'demoted' to GT4 again. But there's a small chance I might be in the car for Abu Dhabi."

2006 British Formula Ford champion and 2009 Ginetta G50 Cup winner Nathan looks set to compete alongside David Holloway, Piers Johnson and Nick Halstead aboard Century Motorsport's second-gen BMW M4 GT4.

Of course, and as the very experienced Nathan surmises, succeeding in the GT3 class at the Hankook 24H DUBAI is no easy task. In 2024 alone, the 30-plus GT3 entries registered for the event include four former outright winners (Team WRT, Herberth Motorsport, Land Motorsport, and Car Collection Motorsport), four former outright series champions (Herberth again, Hofer Racing, Leipert Motorsport, and CP Racing), three reigning class champions (CP again, Haas RT, and Manamauri Energy by Ebimotors), and a five-time class winner on home turf (Dragon Racing). A daunting prospect...

"No, not really. I haven't thought about what the competition is going to be like too much because we tend to just turn up, do the best job we can, and what happens at the end of it happens at the end of it."

"From a team's point of view, we know that we regularly do a good job to keep the cars running, and the drivers just need to do what they can do. It's not about being the fastest car in Dubai. It's about traffic management, reliability, and not making mistakes or receiving penalties. There's a lot of things that need to come together."

"It's also nice that we go into Dubai with drivers we've already worked with." - Century's Hankook 12H KUWAIT line-up, Carl Cavers, Lewis Plato and Jack Barlow, reunites in Dubai alongside Faisal Al-Faisal. Cavers and Plato also finished 3rd in-class in 2023 with Michael Johnston and Chris Salkeld, who will team with Darren Leung in the sister M4 GT4. - "They know the team well and they know the car well, so whilst the 24H is a new experience for a couple of them" - Johnson, Halstead and Al-Faisal make their 24-hour debuts in Dubai - "I think they're in the best environment they can be to get the best results."

Confident in his own team's ability (and rightly so), Nathan's praise for the M4 GT3 is also resolute. Thanks to strong links with BMW, a team partner since 2018, Century was the first, and for a while, only, team based in the UK to own and operate an M4 GT3 upon its arrival in 2022, and has been a British GT Championship frontrunner ever since. Further afield, BMW's new GT3 flagship finished 1st and 3rd overall at the 2023 Hankook 24H DUBAI. Even despite the enormous GT3 mountain to climb in Dubai, Nathan is all-too aware of the car's potential.

"The car's fantastic! Reliability has been very good for us, we've had no issues at all. Drivability is also very good, and I think the Dubai Autodrome in particular is a circuit that really suits the car. I mean, we don't expect to go there and win because we haven't got PRO line-ups, but I think we have a good chance to fight for podiums in our categories."

"We obviously want to win - that's high on our list - but higher than that is to make sure the car is reliable, that our drivers get plenty of seat time, and that they enjoy their experience."

Realism dictates that 'class wins' are talked down during our chat, but it's clear that Nathan badly wants a second win for his team in Dubai. Amazingly, on Century's event debut in 2016, Nathan, together with then-reigning Ginetta GT4 Supercup champion Tom Oliphant (also secured with Century), Anna Walewska and Aleksander Schjerpen overcame brake pad failure and a fuel tank issue to take SP3 victory with its Ginetta G55.

"It's funny, 2016 was the first year we did [the Hankook 24H DUBAI], and we won it! That was absolutely amazing. We've come close, since, to winning it again, but it's a long race, and things happen. You could be leading the race with an hour to go and then have issues."

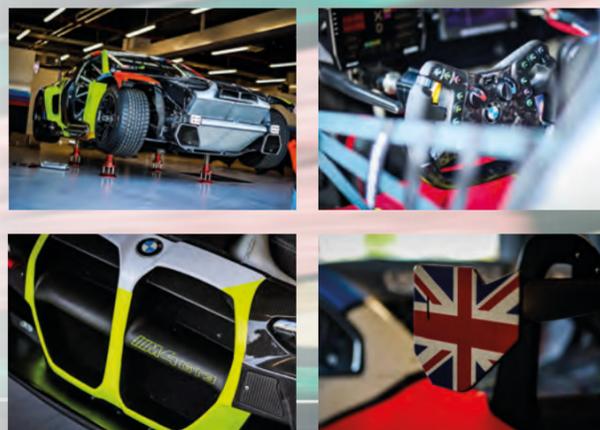
It's a statement all the more apt given that, on its second Hankook 24H DUBAI outing in 2017, Century Motorsport went from 5th to 2nd during the final hour when CWS Engineering suffered technical problems, PROsport Performance went off at turn one, and GDL Racing landed a time penalty for overshooting its driver stint times. And this despite Century losing five laps early on to a snapped rear track rod and bent a front upright.

Lady luck abandoned Century altogether in 2018 when "the sheer anguish" of engine failure, and a subsequent driveline problem, dropped the Ginetta from a possible podium hat-trick to 4th. Hub failure denied Century again in 2019 (on the team's first endurance race with BMW, rather brutally), but results were consistent in the years that followed: a probable win was only lost for the newly upgraded 'Evo' M4 in 2020 when heavy rain played havoc with the event, and the new 'G82' generation M4 GT4 took hard-earned podiums in 2022 and 2023, and even 2nd in-class in collaboration with RHC Jorgensen-Strom at the 2021 Hankook 24H BARCELONA.

Save its fair share of poor luck, Century Motorsport has remained consistently in the SP3 / GT4 mix since 2016. What a story it would be if the garishly-coloured M4 GT3 (see sidebar) can finally chalk up another win for the Warwickshire-based outfit.

"It would, but getting all three cars to the end of the race is what we're focused on. It's the first time we've done Dubai with three cars, and the first time we've done it in GT3, so there will be a lot going on. But I think we're well prepared for it."

"We've always been on the hunt, and to be back on that top step would be really something quite special for us." ■



Among the most striking liveries on the Hankook 12H KUWAIT grid, Century Motorsport's vivid red, blue, yellow and white colour scheme was a far cry from the more monochrome look with which the British team has contested the 24H SERIES in the past. Credit for that goes to the BMW's owner Carl Cavers, a Ferrari Challenge and British Endurance Championship alum as well as a GT4 podium finisher in Dubai with Century in 2023.

Turns out this enthusiastic look can be traced back to one of The Netherlands' most famous abstract painters and a two-time Tour de France winning cycling team...

"The inspiration for the car is from an artist called [Piet] Modrian, a Dutch artist," Carl explains. "In the 1980s and early '90s, there was a cycling team called La Vie Claire, and they used that kind of monobloc for their kit. And it was one of the best-looking kits out there! So all I've done is take that type of design and give it some brighter colours."

"Some of these race cars, they have phenomenal liveries up close, but you don't get to appreciate them through the TV. I wanted something that people could talk about because they could see it properly through their screens, night and day."

More notable than the BMW's livery colour scheme however are the 'Solving Kid's Cancer' and 'British Racing Greats' logos on the doors and bonnet respectively. Both charities will be similarly promoted

at both the Hankook 24H DUBAI and the Hankook 6H ABU DHABI in January as part of Carl's on-going support for both organizations.

"I'm the CEO of a company called Sumo Group, and we've been connected with Solving Kid's Cancer now for over two years. It's a charity that specializes in looking after kids specifically with neuroblastoma, which is a very aggressive cancer with a very high morbidity rate. But it's also one where there's still a lot of development work to be done and immunotherapy is a big part



of that. At the moment, particularly in the UK, if a family wants to treat their child for neuroblastoma, they have to go abroad to raise funds. Which seems an unfair process.

"So, Sumo Group decided to back Solving Kid's Cancer. They've got a great CEO, and the thing that attracted us to the charity, other than the way it's run, was the fact that it's trying to solve the problem, not just address the challenges. They provide a lot of medical research support as well as raising funds to support families. No family

wants to be told the words, 'your child has cancer' - I can't imagine how hard that must be - and at a time when you really should be supporting your child, a lot of these families have to go out to raise funds. That's a very unfair, unjust system, and it's something we want to help address, in the UK and overseas."

"There's another logo on the car too called 'British Racing Greats,' which is an event we put on, a celebration of motorsports, to support two charities: Solving Kid's Cancer and Special Effects. Special Effects take games, like, say, Forza Motorsport, and modify them so paraplegics can play the game as well, through eye movement or with very slight finger movement. It's a fantastic system!"

Handily, Sumo Group's position in the video game market provides an unorthodox, though no less inspiring, avenue of support for Solving Kid's Cancer.

"Because we are supporting young children, video games resonate very well and means we can offer support in specific ways. We had a situation a couple of years ago. Unfortunately a young man was in his final months of care, and he wanted access to a video game that hadn't been released yet. And the publisher, Take-Two, which you probably know for Grand Theft Auto, moved heaven and earth to support that and give Luke access to the game. They let him test it and even put his name in the game!"

