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SRT Viper Set for Return to the 24 Hours of Le Mans

Chrysler Group LLC's SRT (Street and Racing Technology) Motorsports Team Returns with First Factory-Supported Effort Since 2000

May 20, 2013, Auburn Hills, Mich. - The 24 Hours of Le Mans is the world's oldest active sports car race. The first event was held in 1923 and for driver and machine, it's the ultimate test of speed, efficiency and endurance. Participation is by invitation only as the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO) selects the 56 entries. The 81st edition is set for June 22-23 at Circuit de la Sarthe in Le Mans, France.

Two identically prepared SRT Viper GTS-Rs will return to the Le Mans stage for the first time since finishing one-two in the GTS class three consecutive years – 1998-2000. SRT Motorsports accepted an invitation in February from ACO to field the two-car team in the LM GTE Pro class.

"Racing is a cornerstone of Viper's illustrious history," said Ralph Gilles, President and Chief Executive Officer – (SRT) Street and Racing Technology Brand and Motorsports, Chrysler Group LLC. "Le Mans is a world stage. The GTS-R has enjoyed great success at Le Mans in the past and we're excited to start a new chapter of Viper racing at that historic venue."

The festive atmosphere and famous location of the semi-permanent race course southwest of Paris is a perfect international stage for the SRT brand.

"Racing is a big part of everything that SRT does," said Beth Paretta, Director of Marketing and Operations – SRT Brand and Motorsports. "Racing is in our name – Street and Racing Technology – so the line is very blurred between what we do on the road and what we do on the track. We've enjoyed some past success at Le Mans, so you want to not only show well, but also run competitively on the track. The whole motorsports world is watching and it's extremely exciting for us to be part of it and a big challenge to do well."

Viper's success in motorsports has served as a symbol to owners, the brand and even the company itself.

"Having the Viper return as a flagship, American sports car in general and SRT being elevated to a separate brand within Chrysler Group, it's very symbolic for the company as a whole given the challenges we've faced over the last four years," said Paretta. "It was like a beacon while they were going through the darkest days of the company, when you weren't even sure if the company was going to exist. You had this wonderful network and group of owners who were so passionate and loved this car so much because of the community and the friends that they've made just by owning this special car. So the idea that it could have gone away was very sad for them. The fact that it survived is something that a lot of people rally around and are so happy and rightfully emotional about because it's such a big part of their lives."

"Just a few short years ago, there was a question about our existence as a company. So after a few years of hard work, not only did we survive but we're thriving. This SRT Motorsports effort is a symbol for the whole company – showing that we did fight back and we're going to be fighting in a very real sense on the track."

The Viper hasn't been on the Le Mans stage since 2000 but Paretta and the SRT Motorsports team have a good idea what to expect. They attended the race last year to formulate a plan should an invitation come.

"We went to do some research should we ever get back on the track at Le Mans and were astounded by the interest shown by the amount of fans who lined up and waited to simply get a glimpse of our SRT Viper GTS-R show car and take photos," said Paretta. People came wearing all sorts of jackets, both Viper jackets and competitor jackets and it was interesting too that they very much crave to see this American rivalry between the brands; they take such

pleasure in watching them kind of duke it out on the track. There are Viper Clubs that are very strong in Europe. They travel great distances to see races and they'll travel great distances to be together for activities such as road rallies and track days. The Viper Nation is truly a global entity."

Although Le Mans was the target, the SRT Motorsports team is somewhat surprised it came so soon. "The goal was to get to Le Mans but none of us thought that we'd get there our first year out, honestly," continued Paretta. "We're not taking any minute of it for granted because of the process of either qualifying or getting invited. Because we had a short year last year, we had to rely on a direct invitation. You can see how hard everybody is working, putting their heart and soul into this because to be there is just amazing."

It wasn't until August last year that the SRT Viper GTS-R made its official return to the track, competing in the American Le Mans Series at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington, Ohio. While Le Mans is the biggest global race, Paretta quickly points out the importance of competing here at home.

"The American Le Mans Series and what will be United SportsCar Racing (the name of the consolidation of the two main North America sports car racing entities – ALMS and Grand-AM Road Racing) is the premiere sports car racing in North America. The North American market is very important," Paretta commented. "That's why a lot of the European brands choose the American Le Mans Series and Grand-Am Road Racing to showcase their cars in the GT Class."

"We know this program is very important to SRT owners around the world. At every race, whether it's in the American Le Mans Series or at Le Mans itself, we have owner experiences where they can be with our team for the weekend to enjoy a true VIP experience. Owners get a behind-the-scenes look at what's going on, meet the drivers and ask questions of the engineers. Hopefully, we'll continue to go to Le Mans for many years to come but as a sports-car fan, if you can make the trip even once, it's worth it."

It's difficult to overlook Viper's previous success at Le Mans but SRT Racing Manager Gary Johnson points out the competition has changed since that last visit.

"The rules have changed over the years but we're going with the same commitment to do our best," said Johnson. "Our plan is to be as competitive as we can and see what happens at the end. I think it's a dream come true for anybody that's been involved in motorsports as the 24 Hours of Le Mans is the pinnacle of sports car racing."

Johnson is fully engaged in the process, even to the point of dreaming about the event. "It's kind of funny," he said. "I've been having dreams about Le Mans ever since we talked about getting invited. It's just one dream that keeps repeating in my head. I'm thinking about it 24 hours a day I guess."

From the SRT brand team to engineering, the perception of Le Mans is the same – the ultimate test.

"It means a lot to our customers because the racing pedigree of the car can largely be determined with this one annual race," said Russ Ruedisueli, Head of SRT Motorsports Engineering – Chrysler Group LLC. "For our engineering team, it's the ultimate endurance test to see how well we've developed the cars and seeing how they perform over 24 hours."

"Everybody on the current team realizes our past success and how Viper teams before us have set a high standard. We can't help but have that in the back of all of our minds, so we'll work as hard as ever to hopefully live up to that same standard."

SRT Motorsports has partnered with Riley Technologies, based in Mooresville, N.C., on the design-and-build process of the SRT Viper GTS-Rs. The two cars competed in four ALMS races in 2012 in preparation of the full 2013 season. In the first three races this year, the No. 91 has recorded three consecutive top-five finishes including a podium – third – at Long Beach. The driver stable includes Marc Goossens, Dominik Farnbacher, Jonathan Bomarito and Kuno Wittmer. They are joined by Tommy Kendall and Ryan Dalziel for the endurance events.

The Viper's successful racing heritage began in 1996 with its first racing entry, the original GTS-R, which earned five international GT championships and the 1997 to 1999 FIA GT championships in addition to the three consecutive one-two finishes at the 24 Hours of Le Mans in the GTS class.

About SRT Motorsports

The engineering expertise within SRT (Street and Racing Technology) extends well beyond its high-performance street vehicles. Technical support for the Chrysler Group's various racing programs is provided by the astute engineers at SRT Motorsports, where lessons learned on the race track directly translate to improved vehicles for the company's customers.

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