

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Jim France

Steve Phelps

Rick Hendrick

Jim Campbell

Pierre Fillon

John Doonan

Stu Grant

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. We are going to have some fun and excitement here today. It's an announcement, it's the beginning of something really, really special, and a whole lot of fun.

As you know over the decades, Sebring has been its own unique event. It's been the longest standing running endurance sports car event in the United States. But it's also been a traditional lead-up to the 24 Hours of Le Mans, a hard hit out before the teams head to France. That is particularly poignant for the group we have assembled today. We have these crucial participants assembled today for what today is all about.

Let's kick it off, welcome Steve Phelps, president of NASCAR.

Chairman and CEO of NASCAR and IMSA, Jim France.

Rick Hendrick, the owner of Hendrick Motorsports.

Jim Campbell, the U.S. vice president of Chevrolet Performance and Motorsports.

Stu Grant, the General Manager of Global Racing Tires for Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company.

Mr. Pierre Fillon, the president of ACO.

Of course, president of IMSA, Mr. John Doonan.

Are we ready to let the genie out of the bottle? Our sport is maybe one of the worst for keeping secrets. For those in



the know, they've done very well at keeping their lips nice and tight.

I'll draw your attention to the video screens here in the room. This is what today is all about.

(Video Shown.)

THE MODERATOR: This is going to be a fun, fun ride. A lot of work, a tremendous amount of work, but it's going to be a fun ride because it's something different. Has it been done before? Yes, Jim's father did it, in the modern era, 50 years apart from the last time it was done.

As we know in the Cup Series, the next generation car has stimulated a lot of excitement, interest, with the coupe-like design. Its sleek, more like its road-going counterparts. Now it's ready to take the next step. It is a big next step.

I know there are many of you in this room have been to Le Mans. For those of you who haven't, there's nothing like it. I was just talking to Chad Knaus before. He went last June. He was blown away. Nothing else on the planet quite like Le Mans.

Went there 12 times, had the fortune of calling it 10 years in a row. It surprises you with how much it evolves, how much it changes. The one thing that never changes is the task at hand. It's quite daunting.

With that being said, NASCAR has collaborated with, as we said, the 14-time champions Hendrick Motorsports to form what is a super team of partners with Chevrolet, with Goodyear, with the ACO, with IMSA, to say, All right, let's attack this, create something special not only for us and NASCAR but for the motor racing world as well.

It will be Garage 56. Monsieur Fillon, as you are almost ready to celebrate your 10th year as president of the ACO, Garage 56 is celebrating its 10 years. Garage 56 is a special project. That garage is allocated each year for different initiatives. I remember when we had the diesel-powered prototype, the delta wing, so many different types of cars. That's what this is all about, something different to entertain sports car and racing enthusiasts all over the world.

Jim France, with that being said, what is the motivation?



What is the motivation behind this? I haven't seen you this giddy and this excited in quite a while. Give us what the driver is.

JIM FRANCE: Well, it's been almost 50 years since my father took NASCAR over to Le Mans. I remember when Dick Brooks came back, he was one of the drivers. I asked him what his thoughts were on it. He said, Number one, the fans love the car. Number two, it was a fantastic experience. Number three, it was a hell of a challenge.

You can look at the folks at this table. They all like big challenges, good experiences. Really we want to expose Pierre's great fan base to our NASCAR cars and drivers.

It was an opportunity. I talked to Pierre when he had the Garage 56, if there was a possibility we could bring our new car over. He said he would work on it. We got together last August. He said he could try and make that happen for us.

I talked to Rick along the way if it would be something that he would be interested in doing. He's our champion team, winningest team in our Cup Series. I felt like it would be very, very important if he would represent our sport in this big event.

I'm thrilled to say we're sitting up here together.

THE MODERATOR: It's really great. Further evidence, too, Steve, NASCAR, Daytona, Le Mans, IMSA coming together in a more collaborative effort. Heading up NASCAR, what does it mean to NASCAR? You're always looking at new and different ways to spread the message and the fan base.

STEVE PHELPS: Yeah, it's a pleasure to be here.

This is a huge opportunity for us. I think if you think about where NASCAR is, the momentum we had in '20 and '21, but for those of you who have been at the racetrack in '22, there's a new sense of energy and enthusiasm to the sport that the sport hasn't had in a long, long time, as evidenced by what happened at the Busch Light Clash at the Coliseum.

The centerpiece of that wasn't just that amazing venue, it was the Next Gen car. If you think about the racing we've seen with the Next Gen car in these five races, there's something special that's happening here.

We are, as a sport, trying to look at things that are unique and different, puts us apart. I think that's exactly what we're doing. That's what this opportunity is.

We have a series in Europe called the Whelen Euro Series. We know there's some enthusiasm for NASCAR, stockcar racing. But this is going to take it to a new level, right?

To Jim's point, this has been 50 years in the making to come back with this project. We're excited to partner with Rick Hendrick and his organization, Chevy, and Goodyear, and to have NASCAR come back to Le Mans.

THE MODERATOR: Rick, traveling down with you here today, you said it's very complimentary for NASCAR wanting to work with Hendrick Motorsports. You've done so much over your career, the team's career. You have the last two champions in Cup, won two of the four races this year. Why take on a project like this? What is your drive, the determination and inspiration behind this?

RICK HENDRICK: Number one, it's an honor for Jim to ask me about doing this. To be able to go to Le Mans, I never dreamed I'd go to Daytona (smiling). To be able to go represent NASCAR there, it's such a unique, kind of the epitome of racing.

It's just going to be exciting for us. To partner with Chevrolet and Goodyear, NASCAR, our guys are fired up. We want to go represent our sport. We're in a class by ourselves, but we want to compete and put the ultimate piece out there to represent NASCAR.

To me it's an honor. It's something that I never thought I'd have an opportunity to do. Our organization is excited. We plan to go show off our sport. It's going to be an exciting time.

Jim and I started talking about this in I think November of '20. It's real today. We're just really excited and honored to be able to go do this.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for underscoring it was a well-kept secret.

Jim, for you, sum up success in NASCAR competition in Chevrolet, over 800 victories? Also at the 24 hours of Le Mans, having been there myself, seeing the bright yellow Corvette racing cars, the enthusiasm it attracts, the passion not only from the French fans, all European fans, Chevrolet has a special place in the fans' hearts over there. For you to go back and experience it on a broader scale, is it almost twofold?

JIM CAMPBELL: It's going to be so special. We were really honored when Jim and Rick came to us, asked us to be part of it, as a team, along with Goodyear, working with Pierre on this very special Garage 56 opportunity.

Chevy has a long history in racing. We love racing, we love performance. A long history in NASCAR. We're proud of that, our success there. But also we've had a great run in sports car racing with IMSA and obviously very special the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

When I think about racing, the Daytona 500, the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona, the 12 Hours of Sebring, such an amazing place, the 24 Hours of Le Mans. To take the partners from all those different series, come in as one team, Garage 56, which is so special, is going to be really fun to take this challenge on and take the Next Gen Camaro with Stu and the team to Le Mans and go for 24 hours.

We have had a chance to race a Corvette in a factory format since 2021. We raced and won our class eight times. We'll bring to this effort our experience and knowledge of what we see it takes from our experience in Corvette to not only get there and compete and run and finish the race, but have a chance to really perform at the level you'd expect.

Can't wait. Proud to be part of the effort. Thanks for having us.

THE MODERATOR: Stu, you've got to a very good point in the project with the 18-inch tire for the Next Gen car. A big project. You have some energy left to take on this project?

STU GRANT: I'll tell you what, there can't be a better team of partners than people at this table. As Rick and Jim both said, everybody at Goodyear is honored to be a part of this program.

As far as the 18-inch goes, that has been a big challenge for us, certainly no doubt about it. Two, two and a half year project for us. I have to say the product, we're a couple races into the schedule, performance that I've seen, I'm really, really pleased with.

Having said that, it's still a work in progress because, I mean, it's racing, right? NASCAR is going to make changes. The teams are always making changes. We'll be making changes to keep up. Everybody is learning and improving with the NASCAR program.

As far as the Le Mans goes, Goodyear has a lot of heritage at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, one of the most prestigious motorsports events in the world. We've won the overall -- had the overall win a few times.

We've never been involved in a Garage 56 program. It's

right up our alley. We're super excited about it, can't wait to get started.

THE MODERATOR: The ACO has been running Le Mans since 1923. Pierre Fillon is the president of that. Pierre, could you detail how excited you are about this project? There's a lot of people that don't know what Garage 56 is. I'll let you elaborate on that.

PIERRE FILLON: This announcement is great news, especially in this year we are celebrating many anniversaries. It's exactly 10 years we introduce the Garage 56 in Le Mans.

What is Garage 56? Garage 56 is a car dedicated to innovative. This is the only car, no point, is not in the championship. We need something innovative.

When Jim told me there will be a new generation of cars in NASCAR, with using a hybrid system, he had this crazy idea to enter this car as a Garage 56 in 2023, I was immediately enthusiastic.

I think this new generation of NASCAR with the hybrid system is innovative. This is the future of NASCAR. This car will bring some wonderful memories to the fans. Remember 1976 and 1982 with two Camaros in the starting.

Finally, this is another big symbol of the strong partnership we have with Jim, between Le Mans and Daytona. 2023 will be the centenary of Le Mans. We will have the most prestigious manufacturer brands in Le Mans. Thank you for the convergence we did together. This is a great achievement.

We have to convince the Selection Committee in 2023, but I'm sure with a high-level team behind this project, you will take on this challenge. I'm very confident.

THE MODERATOR: Pierre brings up a good point. We should mention it is the intention of this group to race at Le Mans next year. The invitations don't officially come out until January. Pierre also brings up another point. That is that for those of you, you know. Garage 56, you are not racing anybody. You're in your own unique class. It offers that to showcase, to highlight the innovation that you are bringing to the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Have you kept this secret the best, John Doonan?

JOHN DOONAN: Last August we had the opportunity to be with Pierre, Jim, myself, Ed Bennett. We were able to announce a 10-year extension on our strategic alliance agreement between IMSA and the ACO.



That was a proud moment because I think it says exactly what we've been trying to do all these years, and that's collaboration, to find a way for manufacturers to use the same car here in IMSA as well as in Le Mans and the World Endurance Championship, manufacturers, partners, to be able to come together and celebrate and do what's right for our sport.

Today is another step for me in this process of collaboration, in doing the best to put both NASCAR in front of a tremendous audience as Le Mans. I think vice versa, our NASCAR fans are very passionate and very loyal. For them to be able to experience endurance sports car racing, the ultimate test of human and machine, is pretty incredible.

THE MODERATOR: If you would like to ask the group any questions.

Q. Jim, obviously there are questions about drivers. Can you see a situation where you would have a 2023 Cup schedule where Cup drivers would be available to go over and do this?

JIM FRANCE: You should talk to Steve on that (laughter).

STEVE PHELPS: I think we would have to figure out what it would look like obviously from a scheduling standpoint. The good news is we're not here to talk about announcing drivers. Obviously that will be Rick and his team to try to figure out where that would be. From a scheduling standpoint nothing has been determined at this point.

Q. Rick, any clues on driving this car, if active Cup drivers are allowed, would you like to put active Cup drivers in if it didn't have a scheduling conflict?

RICK HENDRICK: I think it would be nice to have a mix. We've talked about it a lot. If the calendar works out. We'll just wait and see what's available.

But we've got from the IMSA drivers a lot of drivers that have Le Mans experience. Especially with Chevrolet's involvement, we'll be covered with drivers.

But we would like to see a Cup driver in the system if we could.

Q. Is Jimmie Johnson on your list? Will this be an ally car?

RICK HENDRICK: We're going to put Gordon on a diet (laughter).

Q. Is that a yes for Jimmie?

RICK HENDRICK: I haven't talked to Jimmie yet. I'm sure he would do it if he didn't have a conflict.

Q. About the car, Garage 56 traditionally has been like alternate proportion type stuff with biofuels. Will this car have some elements of hybridization or electrification?

JOHN DOONAN: I'd be happy to take that one on.

At the moment, like drivers, we're going to have an opportunity to talk about the exact specs of the car down the road here.

What Steve Phelps, Steve O'Donnell, John Probst has done with the Next Gen car, it provides tremendous versatility not only for the manufacturers with all the branding, specifically in this case the team at Chevy, their design team have done, but we'll talk about specs and engines and all the dimensions of the car here in the coming weeks and months.

A lot of work to be done yet.

THE MODERATOR: This is the excitement we anticipated. Who is driving? What is going to be powering it? What's happening?

Q. Steve, you have rules against testing and everything. Will this car be different enough that Hendrick won't be seen as getting an advantage? How would you work through that?

STEVE PHELPS: Yeah, that's a good question.

Obviously we don't want to have one team have an advantage over another team. It's something we have to look at for sure.

To John's point, not sure what the powerplant is going to be. A lot of things to be ironed out in the coming weeks and months.

I think obviously having one team have some type of advantage over another is not something we'd be interested in having.

Q. About the technology, sorry to push it, would Le Mans next year be a good chance to sort of test the hybrid system that's coming in '24 in one of the most grueling environments possible? Would it be too good an opportunity to turn down?

JOHN DOONAN: I'd be happy to take a stab at that as well.

Le Mans, events like the Rolex 24 at Daytona, certainly what's going to happen here tomorrow with the World Endurance Championship race, what's happening on Saturday with the 12-hour race, these events are absolutely a place to test man, woman and machine. The technology, whether it's power train, whether it's new fuels, whether it's tires, whether it's potential hybrids, things like that.

There's no question that these events are laboratories for the auto industry. I think over the course of time, there's been innovations that have been tested at the racetrack that end up being in road cars.

Jim and his team at Chevrolet have been a shining example of that over the years, specifically with the Corvette I'd say. Others, too, but that Corvette has been an absolute laboratory for a road car.

Q. Could there be a Next Gen class at Daytona someday? Any discussions?

JIM FRANCE: We know everybody there. We could probably work something out (laughter).

Q. So maybe?

THE MODERATOR: Next Gen class at Daytona? We'll see.

Q. Rick, do you have a group of people dedicated to this project already? Do you have some kind of estimate on the cost of this thing?

RICK HENDRICK: It's going to be expensive, I know that (smiling).

No, Chad Knaus will kind of be the team manager. I guess that's the term, not the crew chief. We are going to bring in some additional people. Chevrolet has got some folks. We're assembling all that right now. We don't want it to interfere with the Cup program we have going on.

But we do have a lot of folks that know how to do it. We're not building the chassis anymore. We've got a lot of extra folks. Chad and Jeff Andrews, along with Jim Campbell and his group, we're assembling the team now. We're excited about it. We want to put our best effort forward.

The good news about being this group of people, with John, with IMSA, we can cherry pick a lot of the talented people to put on this project, and we've already started.

Q. Jim Campbell, Corvette's future at Le Mans is a little bit uncertain because the GTE pro class is ending we believe in '23. Could this potentially be a temporary replacement for Corvette racing at Le Mans or are you expecting this to be a parallel program?

JIM CAMPBELL: That's a good question. If we get the invitation here for Garage 56, which we're hopeful of, we will be all in to make sure we represent NASCAR, the Camaro, Hendrick, Goodyear to the best degree possible. It will be a great moment for all of us.

In terms of Corvette, we'll work with Pierre and his team on exactly what's going to happen in GTE. If it's only amateur, it gives us an option. We're obviously committed to building a GT3. We're in that process right now. Of course, our sister brand, Cadillac, we hope to earn an invitation for the hyper car class, what we call GTP here in IMSA.

From our perspective, we'll have a lot of areas of focus at Le Mans in '23. Cadillac will be in the top class, Corvette potentially will decide what we do in the GTM or GT3. Obviously Garage 56, if the invitation comes through, it will be a great moment for Chevrolet and for our company overall.

Q. Both Jims, I don't think either car in '76 made it halfway through the race. I know you're not really competing, but what might be a competitive or a success metric for what this car can do?

JIM FRANCE: From my perspective, and I think Rick can give you his here in a minute also, but the goal is to finish the race and not be last (smiling).

RICK HENDRICK: We're not taking this lightly. This is a full bore, full blown effort to run 24 hours and to run competitive times. Our guys are working aero, weight, horsepower. We're looking at different classes. They've told us kind of where we'd like to be.

But we're not going over there to ride around. We're going to put the best effort out there and run very competitively and finish the race. That's a tall order.

I feel strongly that we can do it.

JIM CAMPBELL: I would add the experience we have going to Le Mans, Corvette is an example, but also our experience in IMSA with both Cadillac and Corvette, preparation is everything. We will be all in preparing as a team to run the 24 hours. That will be the focus.

We'll bring our experience in IMSA and also running at the 24 Hours of Le Mans with Corvette to bear on that as we prepare. We've been through the process many times. We've learned the things we need to do, the things we don't need to do. We'll bring our best thinking and experience to the table here.

Q. Jim, when you announced the LMDh conversions a couple years ago at Daytona, you were very eloquent about how that brings back the Ford versus Ferrari. How does this dovetail with that?

JIM FRANCE: I go back to what my father was trying to accomplish 50 years ago. It's an opportunity for NASCAR, for a lot of European fans that are Le Mans fans, to experience what our NASCAR racing is like firsthand, watching the cars go around the track.

From my perspective, we've got IMSA and sports cars, but we also have a very important process for NASCAR and growing its awareness and relevance internationally, as Steve said. We're doing a lot of different things. This happens to be something that my father envisioned 50 years ago. It is still important today.

Q. Rick and Jim, what is the longest run by a Next Gen car continuously in terms of laps? Have you done any testing to that effect?

RICK HENDRICK: We've only run, what, four races with that car. I've been involved with the ally car that ran the 24 hours two years now. Gary Nelson and Chad worked together, run both of those cars. We kind of have the experience of 24 hours. I actually ran the Corvette back in '87. We didn't finish, but we sat on the pole.

No, I think the endurance part of it, we're going to have to work on it. We'll have to figure out a way to test. I'll just talk to Mr. France on that one (smiling).

But, no, seriously we can run the engines 24 hours and see what happens there. We know it's going to be different, but we know that the trans axle will take it because that's been run. There's a lot of components that have time.

I feel like we can do that and do it in a very good way.

JIM CAMPBELL: I was going to add, Rick's team definitely understands 24 hour races with the ally car. One of the things that we do together in the effort that Rick was talking about in the DPi class, we do a crossover series, that's a massive amount of simulation. We take all the very best data, this happens in our engineering shop with Mark, Jim Warren. Our whole team will work with everybody

here, Stu's tire data, we will simulate exactly what we think has to happen to perform at the levels that both Jim and Rick talked about, to have the durability to survive that race.

I will say that will be another big tool for all of us.

Q. Can you do a full brake change during a 24-hour race?

JIM CAMPBELL: 24-hour race, that is something that will happen. You're going to have driver changes, Gary Nelson and I were talking about previously. Driver changes like we do at the 12 Hours of Sebring. 12 hours of Daytona we'll do the same thing. 24 Hours of Le Mans we'll do brake changes, no question, that will definitely happen.

Q. Driver changes through the window?

JIM CAMPBELL: That has not been decided yet. That's one of the things the work group will be working on.

Q. Rick, you've mentioned you're involved a little bit with Action Express right now on the DPi front. Could you ever see that increasing from a Hendrick Motorsports standpoint in sports car racing?

RICK HENDRICK: I think I'm getting pushed over here a little bit (laughter).

We really enjoy it. Our company enjoys it. I can see us expanding, doing more of that. This is a big step for us, but I've really enjoyed the Cadillac program. It's good to see those guys win the championship. See what we can do here this weekend.

As I said, I've been in the sports car racing business, but it's been a long time ago. Our focus is still in Cup. That's where we compete, and we want to continue to win championships and races.

Big Corvette dealer, I love the sports cars, so we'll see how it develops. I have a passion for it.

Q. Rick, you work with ECR now as far as engine collaboration. Will they be involved? Will it be a joint effort as far as the powerplant?

RICK HENDRICK: Everything we do and they do, we do together. That will be something that we'll be working on together.

Q. Jim, you've mentioned your father a lot today. I hate the hypotheticals, what your father would think about this. The Next Gen has been really good for the

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sports

first month. You've now put this together. What does it mean to you? Are you doing this to honor your father in a way?

JIM FRANCE: Well, I think the best way to describe this is I'm doing it probably as my father was and my brother: as a racer. I think everybody sitting at this table is a racer. We like challenges.

It's a tremendous opportunity for the sport that my dad started to further its reach with other fans, new fans. I'm also very much into the sports car racing and road racing, as dad was.

There's no way that I can honor my dad. He was so much farther ahead than what I am. But to try and carry on some of his legacy and continue what he and my mom started, it's our family business, and we're looking forward to continuing to grow it.

THE MODERATOR: On behalf of everybody here on the panel, thank you for your attendance. I think it's another example to underscore this is our sport, we've lived through the highs and lows, some ordinary days, dark days, but some good days.

From the Daytona 500, the Rolex 24, we saw the biggest ever Supercross crowd at Daytona, what's happened in INDYCAR, Formula 1 kicks off this weekend, the Daytona 200 last week was off the charts, American Flat Track, so many good things happening in our sport this year. This is yet another example.

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