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AUTO ACTION'S 2023 PRE SEASON SUPERCARS TEAM BY TEAM EVENT GUIDE

The Supercars class of 2023 ranges from highly-rated rookies to fading stars in the twilight of their career. With the start of a new era, Paul Gover and Andrew Clarke put their thoughts together for the season start.

The new Gen3 regulations promise to mix-and-match the drivers, and their teams, in a new way.

Andre Heimgartner has already shone and Jack Smith, normally closer to the bottom of the grid, also put in a solid top-10 performance as Brad Jones Racing starred at the pre-season test at Sydney Motorsport Park.

Will that form carry over to Newcastle, or on to Bathurst, or the final championship placings?

Perhaps, but . . . Rating the field before the start of the first Gen3 season is more about the experience and enthusiasm of the drivers.

A veteran with a youthful approach – think new dad James Courtney – could spring a surprise.

A highly-rated rookie – think Super2 champion Declan Fraser – could inject uncertainty and surprise results.

The bottom line?

We don't know and neither, really, do the teams. Triple Eight and DJR should have an edge in the early races because they have been the 'homologation' teams for the Gen3 regulations and have the most experience after fielding the Supercars prototypes through the test-and-evalution process.

So, once again, Shane van Gisbergen looks like the one to beat and it's the same story for T8 in the teams' title fight.

Newcastle will provide the first signpost, and is certain to spark the early action with the Camaro and Mustang, but it's only a signpost and not the final destination.

The new Gen3 Supercars have hit the track on the streets of Newcastle

The Newcastle 500 makes a popular return to the calendar after a four-year hiatus. Following its maiden race in 2017, the street race grew a reputation for creating controversy and action. With tight corners and close-in concrete walls, the track located on the edge of the Newcastle CBD and harbour offers stunning views and no margin for error.

TRACK FACTS

DOUBLE TAP TO ZOOM

TRACK LENGTH:
2.63KM

DIRECTION:
ANTI-CLOCKWISE
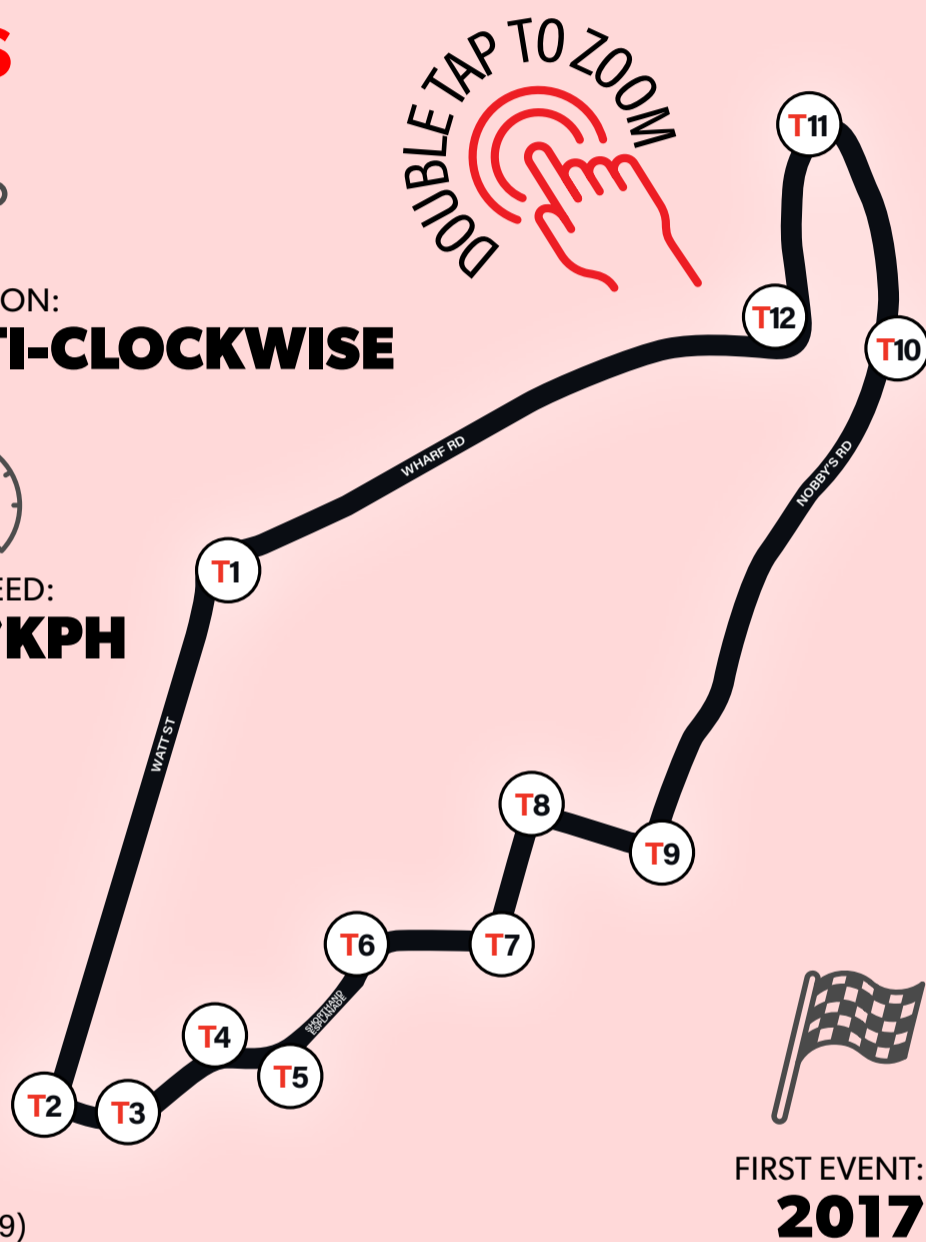
AVERAGE SPEED:
133KPH

TOP SPEED:
227KPH

TRACK STATS

QUALIFYING LAP RECORD:
- Cam Waters **1:10.1095**
- Tickford Racing
- Ford Mustang GT (2017)

RACE LAP RECORD:
- James Courtney **1:10.7377**
- Walkinshaw Andretti United
- Holden Commodore ZB (2019)

FIRST EVENT:
2017

Track map labels: T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, WHARF RD, NOBBY'S RD, WATT ST

TRACK SCHEDULE (ALL TIMES AEST)

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

TIME	CATEGORY	SESSION
0905-0925	Touring Car Masters	Practice
0935-0955	Aussie Racing Cars	Practice 1
1010-1100	Dunlop Series	Practice 1
1115-1200	Supercars	Practice 1
1205-1215	Events	Demonstration
1220-1240	Touring Car Masters	Qualifying
1250-1330	Dunlop Series	Practice 2
1345-1430	Supercars	Practice 2
1430-1440	Events	Demonstration
1445-1505	Aussie Racing Cars	Practice 2
1515-1535	Touring Car Masters	Trophy Race
1550-1635	Supercars	Practice 3
1650-1700	Supercars	TV Track Time
1700-1720	Dunlop Series	Event Rides
1730-1800	Supercars	Event Rides

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

TIME	CATEGORY	SESSION
0915-0935	Touring Car Masters	Race 1
0940-0950	Events	Demonstration
0955-1010	Aussie Racing Cars	Qualifying
1025-1055	Dunlop Series	Qualifying
1115-1135	Supercars	Qualifying
1140-1155	Events	Demonstration
1200-1220	Touring Car Masters	Race 2
1235-1300	Supercars	Shootout
1315-1335	Aussie Racing Cars	Race 1
1350-1420	Dunlop Series	Race 1
1420-1430	Events	Demonstration
1520	Supercars	Race 1

SUNDAY, MARCH 12

TIME	CATEGORY	SESSION
0915-0935	Aussie Racing Cars	Race 2
0940-0950	Events	Demonstration
0950-1010	Events	Drivers Parade
1025-1055	Dunlop Series	Qualifying
1115-1135	Supercars	Qualifying
1140-1155	Events	Demonstration
1200-1220	Aussie Racing Cars	Race 3
1235-1300	Supercars	Shootout
1315-1335	Touring Car Masters	Race 3
1350-1420	Dunlop Series	Race 2
1420-1430	Events	Demonstration
1520	Supercars	Race 2

LIST OF RACE RESULTS

2017
R1 - P1: Scott McLaughlin
P2: Fabian Coulthard
P3: Tim Slade
R2 - P1: Jamie Whincup
P2: Shane van Gisbergen
P3: David Reynolds

2019
R1 - Shane van Gisbergen
P2: Scott McLaughlin
P3: Fabian Coulthard
R2 - Jamie Whincup
P2: Fabian Coulthard
P3: Tim Slade

2018
R1 - P1: Scott McLaughlin
P2: David Reynolds
P3: Jamie Whincup
R2 - P1: David Reynolds
P2: Scott McLaughlin
P3: Jamie Whincup

LIST OF POLE POSITIONS

2017
R1: Scot McLaughlin
R2: Scott McLaughlin

2018
R1: Shane van Gisbergen
R2: David Reynolds

2019
R1: Shane van Gisbergen
R2: Jamie Whincup

MOST WINS
2 Shane van Gisbergen, Jamie Whincup

MOST POLES
2 Shane van Gisbergen, Scott McLaughlin

MOST PODIUMS
4 Jamie Whincup, Scott McLaughlin

TRIPLE EIGHT RACE ENGINEERING // TEAM PRINCIPAL: JAMIE WHINCUP

SHANE VAN GISBERGEN - CHEVROLET CAMARO

97

ENGINEER: Andrew Edwards
AGE: 33
DEBUT: Oran Park 2007
STARTS: 483
BEST QUAL: 1st (x45)
PODIUMS: 166
BEST RESULT: 1st (x75)
BEST CHAMP POS: 1st (16, 21, 22)

He's been the class of the field for three years, but he's also had a significant car advantage. How will he go if that advantage is wiped? That said, he's performed well in various cars so he remains the one to beat. Copped Bathurst snub in the 12-hour, but we think he'll have forgotten that by now. AC

SVG is the driver anyone who wants to take this year's Supercars title will have to go over – or through. But he's at the top of his game, he knows how to sprint and also to play the long game, so it will take something special to take him down. The odds-on favourite for the crown. *PG*

BROC FEENEY - CHEVROLET CAMARO

88
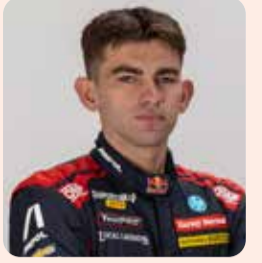
ENGINEER: Martin Short
AGE: 20
DEBUT: BATH 2020
STARTS: 36
BEST QUAL: 2nd (x2)
PODIUMS: 3
BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 6th (22)

Cracking rookie season, but now he has to learn something completely new and show us what he can do. How he copes with the pressure is the key. AC

A future champion? Everything points that way, especially after his breakthrough first win in Adelaide, but the second season can often be the toughest one for youngsters on their way to the top. He needs to ignore van Gisbergen across the garage and concentrate on beating everyone else first. *PG*

DICK JOHNSON RACING // TEAM PRINCIPAL: BEN CROKE

ANTON DE PASQUALE - FORD MUSTANG

11

ENGINEER: Ludo Lacroix
AGE: 27
DEBUT: Adel 2018
STARTS: 154
BEST QUAL: 1st (x15)
PODIUMS: 29
BEST RESULT: 1st (x8)
BEST CHAMP POS: 4th (22)

A disappointing second season with DJR – we'll need to see the 2021 speed again consistently to be convinced he is what they say he is. AC

He went missing in the midfield for too much of last year and was outclassed by his teammate Will Davison despite his youth and speed. He needs to get the wagon back on track this year to deliver on the potential that earned him one of the most-coveted rides on the grid. *PG*

WILL DAVISON - FORD MUSTANG

17

ENGINEER: Richard Harris
AGE: 40
DEBUT: Winton 2004
STARTS: 518
BEST QUAL: 1st (x28)
PODIUMS: 78
BEST RESULT: 1st (x22)
BEST CHAMP POS: 2nd (09)

Age does not weary him, but he does need to find a little more mongrel. Superfast and smooth as anyone, the sky is the limit and can do an Ingall and take it when everyone is focused on his age. AC

About to be a first-time dad and that could put him in the happy place where he is most settled and dangerous. There were lots of good results last year, especially for an 'old-timer', and he knows he needs another stand-out year to avoid relegation to the co-driver ranks. Don't bet against him.

TICKFORD RACING // TEAM PRINCIPAL: TIM EDWARDS

JAMES COURTNEY - FORD MUSTANG

5

ENGINEER: Sam Scaffidi
AGE: 42
DEBUT: Sand 2005
STARTS: 528
BEST QUAL: 1st (x10)
PODIUMS: 64
BEST RESULT: 1st (x15)
BEST CHAMP POS: 1st (10)

He still has it, but we need to see it more often. Last year he struggled with qualifying – and we know this is a qualifying category, so he has to learn from Waters on how to get a Tickford car to come alive after one lap. AC

Closing in on the end of his career, but doing it with style and the personality missing from much of the field. As 'wingman' for Cam Waters, he showed maturity and speed in '22, but he needs more to satisfy himself before he signs off as a full-timer. A new wife and baby mean he is happier and looking younger than he has in the past. *PG*

CAM WATERS - FORD MUSTANG

6

ENGINEER: Sam Potter
AGE: 28
DEBUT: BATH 2011
STARTS: 223
BEST QUAL: 1st (x19)
PODIUMS: 42
BEST RESULT: 1st (x8)
BEST CHAMP POS: 2nd (20, 22)

The new cars should cure Tickford's past weaknesses, which have stopped him from hunting down the title. He is a serious contender in 2023, but Tickford is going to have to get it right. AC

The driver most likely to lead the new Mustang runners and take the fight to Shane van Gisbergen. He has all the right ingredients, from talent to hunger, and just needs to find the right mix for an epic recipe. But Tickford also needs to be spot-on in the garage and pitlane to provide the support he needs. *PG*

THOMAS RANDLE - FORD MUSTANG

55

ENGINEER: Ray Lau
AGE: 26
DEBUT: Bend 2019
STARTS: 51
BEST QUAL: 2nd (x1)
PODIUMS: 1
BEST RESULT: 3rd (x1)
BETS CHAMP POS: 23rd (22)

Somehow, we expected more from his rookie season; he has all the attributes to win races and needs to do that this year. The Bend crash was bigger than we all understand. AC

Another driver in a make-or-break year. He now has all the knowledge he needs to get on with the job as a Top 10 regular, and everything else is up to his hunger and speed – and the ability of Tickford to provide him with the right car. Cannot afford any mistakes. *PG*

DECLAN FRASER - FORD MUSTANG

56

ENGINEER: Chris Stuckey
AGE: 23
DEBUT: Bath 2022
STARTS: 1
BEST QUAL: N/A
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 8th (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 36th (x1)

The reigning Super2 Champion was a late call-up to Tickford, but he's well-equipped to deliver. Step 1, be the best rookie. Step 2, beat a Tickford driver across the season. He's good enough to do both. AC

Definitely one to watch after his Super2 title and his classy work with Triple Eight at Bathurst. Tickford was smart to swoop on the youngster, but he will need to get his elbows out on the track and also in the crowded Tickford garage. *PG*

WALKINSHAW ANDRETTI UNITED // TEAM PRINCIPAL: BRUCE STEWART

NICK PERCAT - FORD MUSTANG

2

ENGINEER - Adam Austin
AGE: 34
DEBUT: PI 2010
STARTS: 288
BEST QUAL: 1st (x2)
PODIUMS: 6
BEST RESULT: 1st (x2)
BEST CHAMP POS: 7th (20, 21)

I'm not sure he lost that much confidence, but the shoulders will slump quickly if there is a repeat of last season. I'm backing him to rise. AC

The first year alongside Mostert did not go as planned, and he was demoralised by the end of season '22. Needs a quick reset and early results to restore his confidence. The switch to Mustangs at WAU will not be as challenging with Gen3 as it would have in the past. *PG*

CHAZ MOSTERT - FORD MUSTANG

25

ENGINEER - Adam de Borre
AGE: 30
DEBUT: Perth 2013
STARTS: 296
BEST QUAL: 23
PODIUMS: 81
BEST RESULT: 1st (x21)
BEST CHAMP POS: 3rd (21,22)

We know he has elbows, and he will fight with his old mate Cam Waters to be the top of the Ford pile, but will that be enough? AC

The fan favourite has a silly side that can mask the intensity and talent of one of the top three drivers in Supercars. If he and his engineering anchor Adam De Borre can click with their new Ford Mustang, they could easily go on a championship rampage. But that question is one of the biggest ones to be answered in 2023. *PG*

GROVE RACING // TEAM PRINCIPAL: DAVID CAUCHI

MATT PAYNE - FORD MUSTANG

19

ENGINEER: Jack Bell
AGE: 20
DEBUT: Bath 2022
STARTS: 1
BEST QUAL: N/A
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 6th (x1)
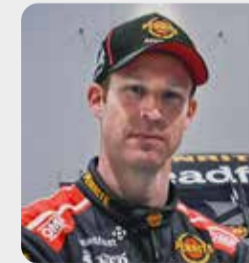BEST CHAMP POS: 34th (22)

One of three rookies, the battle is first to be the best of those. He was good at Bathurst, and the Groves believe in him, but we are yet to see why. Show us why. AC

The highly-touted rookie will have everything he needs at the rapidly-improving Grove outfit, including hard-nosed Garth Tander as his mentor. He has shown lots of potential, but this is 'go time' for the youngster, and he has more pressure than most, with no excuses. *PG*

DAVID REYNOLDS - FORD MUSTANG

26

ENGINEER: Alistair McVean
AGE: 37
DEBUT: Sand 2007
STARTS: 404
BEST QUAL: 1st (x15)
PODIUMS: 38
BEST RESULT: 1st (x7)
BEST CHAMP POS: 3rd (15)

The sport needs Reynolds to be winning, and the Groves are doing everything to make that possible. Two poles last year; expect more this year – he can win races. AC

His star has lost some of its shine in recent years, but it won't take much of a polish to get it looking good. The pocket rocket should have no excuses with the emerging Grove team and is looking forward to the challenge – and rewards – of driving for an outfit looking to get to the top of the order. *PG*

EREBUS MOTORSPORT // TEAM PRINCIPAL: BARRY RYAN

WILL BROWN - CHEVROLET CAMARO

9

ENGINEER: Tom Moore
AGE: 24
DEBUT: Sand 2018
STARTS: 74
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 5
BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 8th (21)

In reality, this is crunch time for Brown. Whether he makes up the numbers or is a contender is on his shoulders alone. Where is his head at? And can he stay focused for the season and not get distracted by shiny objects? AC

Last year was underwhelming by his high standards. Brown looks like a happy chappy, but he has a burning will to win, and he is desperate to rebound in the first year of the Camaro, which he can do if Erebus is on track with its new cars. *PG*

BRODIE KOSTECKI - CHEVROLET CAMARO

99

ENGINEER: George Commins
AGE: 25
DEBUT: Bath 2019
STARTS: 71
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 5
BEST RESULT: 2nd (x2)
BEST CHAMP POS: 7th (22)

A racer's racer. A little bit of NASCAR and Trans-Am here and there, he's well-equipped to take advantage of the new cars, and he leaves nothing on the table, which is good and bad. - AC

Like Brown, he wilted last year and craves a return to his earlier form. No one doubts his raw pace and commitment, but only he and Erebus know what went awry last year. Supercars and its fans need him back at the sharp end.

BRAD JONES RACING // TEAM PRINCIPAL: BRAD JONES

JACK SMITH - CHEVROLET CAMARO

4

ENGINEER: Julian Stannard
AGE: 23
DEBUT: Tas 2019
STARTS: 105
BEST QUAL: 10th (x2)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 10th (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 21st (21)

Surprised us at the test day – maybe the new cars will suit him. He cannot continue to be the lowest qualifier if he wants to get anywhere, so his first task is to get up the grid. AC

This is the time, and this is the year. Smith clearly has some talent and speed but needs to hit every track at full pace from the first lap. He takes too long to get up to speed, and that's his biggest weakness. *PG*

ANDRE HEIMGARTNER - CHEVROLET CAMARO

8

ENGINEER: Tony Woodward
AGE: 27
DEBUT: Bath 2014
STARTS: 216
BEST QUAL: 1st (x2)
PODIUMS: 9
BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 10th (22)

Emerging and fast, and big technical change always works well for BJR. His test day speed will prove no fluke, but he'll need a little luck to run an entire season with the big boys. AC

The potential breakout star of 2023. He looks happy and at home with the Brad Jones crew, and a happy driver is a successful racer. He made the right move with the trip to Albury last year and has already shown impressive speed in the pre-season testing. Watch him go. *PG*

BRYCE FULLWOOD - CHEVROLET CAMARO

14

ENGINEER: Phil Keed
AGE: 24
DEBUT: Sand 2018
STARTS: 101
BEST QUAL: 4th (x1)
PODIUMS: 1
BEST RESULT: 3rd (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 14th (21)

Yes PG, it is the brightest car in the field, but we haven't seen enough yet to understand where he sits in the pecking order. He needs to capitalise on BJR's legendary efforts with major technical changes and keep closer to Heimgartner than last year. AC

The jury is still out on the youngster, who has shown flashes of the right stuff but not enough consistency. He has speed, but that's not nearly enough to shine – despite the boldest colours of all in the Supercars business. *PG*

MACAULEY JONES - CHEVROLET CAMARO

96

ENGINEER: Andrew Donnelly
AGE: 28
DEBUT: Sand 2015
STARTS: 146
BEST QUAL: 8th (x2)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 6th (x2)
BEST CHAMP POS: 19th (20,22)

See Jack Smith – ie must qualify better to use the technical expertise at BJR best. If he's in the bottom two of qualifying again, there'll be questions from us, if not from his father. AC

Has a wise head and a super-fit body, but something is still missing as he looks to move up the field. BJR has a history of early success after technical changes and that could provide the spark he needs. *PG*

TEAM 18 // TEAM PRINCIPAL: CHARLIE SCHWERKOLT

MARK WINTERBOTTOM - CHEVROLET CAMARO

18
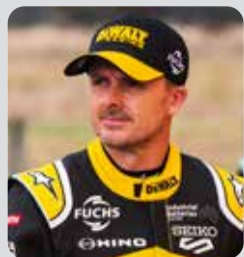
ENGINEER: Manuel Sanchez
AGE: 41
DEBUT: Sand 2003
STARTS: 593
BEST QUAL: 1st (x36)
PODIUMS: 117
BEST RESULT: 1st (x38)
BEST CHAMP POS: 1st (15)

Could get a boost with the old style of car, so I'm expecting him to run high early. He needs the team to step up, and all the signs are there that it can happen. AC

He is already making the gradual switch to management and team ambassador, but the feisty racer is never far from the surface. Frosty still fights for every position in every race and that means he is still worth watching. *PG*

SCOTT PYE - CHEVROLET CAMARO

20

ENGINEER: Richard Hollway
AGE: 33
DEBUT: Sand 2012
STARTS: 312
BEST QUAL: 1st (x1)
PODIUMS: 10
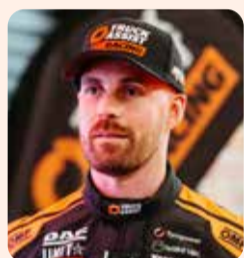BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 7th (18)

Was dogged by bad luck last year, but you can argue that you make your own luck in this sport. He needs to stay out of trouble and knock off Frosty, or the twilight may be very short. AC

Looked lost last year, not for lack of trying, and also got involved in some silly incidents. He needs to clean things up, bank the backing from Charlie Schwerkolt, and keep his eyes forward. The first job is to ensure he sends Winterbottom to the co-drivers bench by dominating as team leader. *PG*

MATT STONE RACING // TEAM PRINCIPAL: PETER VALE

JACK LE BROCQ - CHEVROLET CAMARO

34

ENGINEER: Jack Bellotti
AGE: 28
DEBUT: Sand 2015
STARTS: 170
BEST QUAL: 2nd (x1)
PODIUMS: 2
BEST RESULT: 1st (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 15th (20)

He's a race winner from his days at Tickford, but outwardly Matt Stone Racing looks to be the team least able to capitalise on the change to Gen3. He can step up, but it is going to be a tough year. AC

One of the nicer guys in the pitlane but an also-ran for much of his career. He might surprise with some good results, but despite Matt Stone's commitment to his small crew, it's unlikely to be more than irregular. *PG*

CAMERON HILL - CHEVROLET CAMARO

35

ENGINEER: Paul Forgie
AGE: 26
DEBUT: Bath 2022
STARTS: 1
BEST QUAL: N/A
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 21st (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 51st (22)

The rookie was beaten in Super2 last year, but his efforts at Bathurst impressed Stone and he was signed up quite early for this season. Read comments for #34: ie A pass mark is beating his teammate and the tailenders at BJR. AC

Graduating to the main game is the biggest challenge, and Hill has shown it takes him time to give his best. He could – maybe should – have been Super2 champion after earlier successes, but he's a smart guy with a business brain and should work things out. *PG*

PREMIAIR RACING // TEAM PRINCIPAL: MATT COOK

TIM SLADE - CHEVROLET CAMARO

23

ENGINEER: Phillip De Fazio
AGE: 37
DEBUT: Adel 2009
STARTS: 399
BEST QUAL: 1st (x2)
PODIUMS: 17
BEST RESULT: 1st (x2)
BEST CHAMP POS: 5th (12)

Big move for the veteran, and we think PremiAir will be on the rise. Last year he was inconsistent, which was part car, part driver. Needs to wipe out the poor rounds and finish top 10 in the series. AC

Team owner Peter Xiberras is doing everything he can to push his revamped and revitalised squad up the rankings, and Slade is a key part of the plan. He brings experience but is still youthful and hungry. He won't have an easy run alongside James Golding but should get what he needs to prove he is more than just one of the Supercars pack.

JAMES GOLDING - CHEVROLET CAMARO

31

ENGINEER: Geoff Slater
AGE: 27
DEBUT: Sand 2016
STARTS: 71
BEST QUAL: 6th (x1)
PODIUMS: 0
BEST RESULT: 4th (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 20th (19)

I rate Golding, and he was a good mid-season pick-up for the fledgling team. A new car and greater investment raises the pressure, so we're looking for regular top-five running and a podium or two. Not much to ask, is it? AC

His mid-season injection into the tail-ender team produced immediate results, and now the challenge is to keep the momentum. Having Slade as a teammate could cut either way, but Golding has proven he has the speed to be more than just a midfield runner.

TODD HAZELWOOD - FORD MUSTANG

3

ENGINEER: Mirko De Rosa
AGE: 27
DEBUT: QR 2017
STARTS: 159
BEST QUAL: 1 (x1)
PODIUMS: 1
BEST RESULT: 3rd (x1)
BEST CHAMP POS: 13th (21)

New year and new opportunity for the likeable South Australian. Might benefit from being first on the track with the new car, but must be knocking on the door of the top 10 to regard the season as a success. AC

A team switch means a big opportunity for the youngster. Driving in a single-car team means he will be the sole focus. But it also means there will be nowhere to hide, and he won't have the data or backup from teammates to fall back on. *PG*

AND THE WILDCARDS?

In adddition to the 25 cars locked for the 2023 season, the prospect of several 'wildcard entries' promises some additional on track action. Supercheap Auto has already confirmed its entry for the Sandown 500 and the Bathurst 1000, with Craig Lowndes and Zane Goddard. Add the spice of Peter Adderton running a Boost Mobile backed Camaro. He says he wants to run Richie Stanaway in a sprint round or two. Stay tuned as the season develops.