

Yifei Ye

Q: You are the reigning LMP2 Champion, welcome back. But back this time with a new team for you with Cool Racing. Why did you choose Cool Racing over the rest of the LMP2 teams on this grid?

YY: “It’s great to be back here in the European Le Mans Series after a successful championship last year. It was a decision about what’s going to be coming out for me next year. And then we’re also looking around for teams. Cool Racing has been running very competitively by the second half of the season. And for sure, in the race, they had a gentleman in the car. So, to fight for the overall podium was always difficult, but I’ve seen promising results from them and then they have also seen my potential.

“So, we have done some testing after the decision and we have come up with you similar objectives, which is to try to win the championship this year in the Pro category. Now we’re here for the first race and everything has gone pretty well so far in testing; we’ve just had FP1 this morning. Now we’ll just keep on pushing and working to prepare for the qualifying tomorrow and for the whole season of course, trying to fight for the top of the podium and defend my championship.”

Q: This is your third season of LMP2 racing, once in Asia, once in Europe and now back here again. And you’ve won both those titles. We’ve got a huge field, the biggest prototype racing field in the world outside of the Le Mans 24 hours here between LMP2 and LMP3. When you look up and down this paddock and indeed up and down this row. Where do you see the threats coming to from you making a perfect three out of three?

YY: “I think it looks a lot easier than it is in real life to win a championship and especially to win it in a row. We have put many things together last year in my Asian Le Mans Series and European Le Mans Series championship. To try to win for sure we have to have a good coverage and we have a good line-up. And the fascinating thing is that we always have strong field in the European Le Mans Series, especially LMP2 category.

“We have newcomers like Prema Racing, we have the teams which have participated in the championship for years. We have Panis, we have IDEC, Algarve Pro, for whom I have driven for in Asia Le Mans Series last year. So, there are many strong teams around and many newcomers. And we have to always keep humble, we have to try always to look for more performance and then to be top of the game.”

Q: In the offseason you were named as Porsche motorsport Asia Pacific's nominated professional driver for this season. Just how important is that kind of recognition to a young driver with ambition to drive forward your career?

YY: “I think towards the second half of last season where I had really good momentum, we got recognised and we had talks with different manufacturers. In the end, we came to a mutual

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agreement with Porsche, especially in the Asian Pacific region. They are really supporting me; they want me to succeed, and we want to write a great story together.

“So now I'm in the fancy Hugo Boss outfit and I think this season will be important. I have proven that I was able to win a championship last year. Now coming into a new team, it will be not easy to do it again. But I'll try to do my best and try to prepare myself in the best way possible.”

Sophia Floersch

Q: Welcome to your first full season in the European Le Mans Series aboard the no19 Algarve Pro Racing Oreca in LMP2. You are already part of ELMS history after a brilliant run at Portimão with APR and the first ever female racer. We'll talk a little bit about that in a moment to stand on the overall podium with Ferdi Habsburg and Richard Bradley. You're back this year with the same team, but with a new teammate Bent Viscaal. What's the goal this year in what we've already recognised here as being a hugely competitive LMP2 category?

SF: “The end of season last year that the final for Algarve Pro Racing with Richard and Ferdi. We had a really good weekend; we finished on the podium and it's just a lot of fun. We had many talks with different teams. But I had the trust in Algarve Pro Racing and that's why we decided to go with them for the whole ELMS season and also for the 24 Hours of Le Mans and with the WEC. We're just two drivers in our car, in car number 19 with Bent together, but, I guess, that's more driving time. So, we will enjoy it and the goal is always to win, obviously. But there's many really competitive teams, with very good line-ups. So, the race on Sunday is going to be long for us, but we will try our best and see where we end up.”

Q: I think we all hope everybody in the room hopes we will get to a point in history where we don't have to ask a question that focuses on your gender. But we will ask about that because here you are breaking ground. Again, you've been part of one of those breakthrough, all female crews. But now, in your own right, you're part of a top line LMP2 squad in the general population of the ELMS. That must feel pretty good in terms of step forward?

SF: In the past two years, I was racing with Richard Mille Racing and we were all female crew first in the ELMS, then the 24 Hours Le Mans and then the WEC. I think we proved that we can be quick, but I think it was time for change for me, I think in a mixed line-up and not having the whole focus on women. We're still performing a little bit better. So, for me, it was important to focus on performance this year. That's also the reason why we decided to continue with Algarve Pro Racing, try to get some more podiums and some more spraying of champagne this year.

Pietro Fittipaldi

Q: You're part of a very famous motorsport dynasty, but there is a gap in that history amongst your family members and that is Le Mans. How much does that mean as you come up this pyramid of sports car racing through the ELMS?

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PF: “I think both my uncles raced at Le Mans Christian and Max Papis and I grew up watching them race the Daytona 24 hours. That's kind of the race I would always go to every year when I was young to watch them race. And that's what got me into racing. I'm very excited to be racing the 24 hours of Le Mans. So, it's going to be my first year. And representing my family also, it's always an honour.

“I think we have a strong line-up to be able to do well, but it's so competitive. The ELMS is competitive, the World Endurance Championship as well. There are so many cars; I think there's 17 on the grid here, and even more for Le Mans. So, it's going to be pretty crazy, but, I think, it's going to be great. I always hear great things about Le Mans.:

Q: Tell us a little bit about the Inter Europol team. It's a very much a multi-national affair. I think we lose count of how many different nationalities feature, not just in the cars, but also in the back room. How have you found the welcome there and the preparation there for the season?

PF: “It's been great. Actually, my great grandmother's polish. So, I have a little bit of polish blood. I fit in well with the team. I met my teammates last week, so it was quite late. I met Fabio and David, they're great guys to work with, both very fast. I'm sure that line-up is going to be good. The engineering as well; it's very strong. This is the first race of the of the year, we didn't have that much time for preparation, but I think we will be competitive.”

Q: You've been part of some really, truly world class grids in your motorsport career so far. You know how tough it is to win races and win titles. How tough does this one look at this point this season?

“This one's definitely tough. I mean, like I said, there's 17 cars, but I'd say there's around seven or eight that can win. And with endurance racing, anything can happen at any time. You could be leading a race and then have a reliability issue. And the guy in second ends up winning, so a lot can happen. It's very competitive as always, but I'm sure we're going to be up there. I think we will have a good package for this weekend.

Antoine Doquin

Q: You had a great season with Cool Racing last year, with Josh Skelton winning at spa and three pole positions. You are stepping up now into the ELMS with Cool Racing and some great times in testing as well. What's the biggest difference in that step from the Michelin Le Mans Cup paddock and over here into the big pit lane?

AD: “The biggest difference between the Le Mans Cup and the ELMS is the LMP2 traffic, we have to manage a lot because they overtake is quite hard. So, we have to manage it and also the GTS because they are faster than the GT3 last year; so that's quite difficult. But I will say that the most difficult difference is the traffic.”

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Q: You're one young driver looking to use LMP3 to come up a career ladder. What would you say to other young drivers, wherever they are in the motorsports career at the moment, about the opportunities that are here in sports car racing, and particularly with the step on the ladder, that LMP3 offers now?

AD: "I think now a lot of young drivers want to go to Formula One is their own goal. But there is also endurance, which is very beautiful, you can start from the Le Mans Cup and step up to the ELMS. It's quite a good thing to start from Le Mans Cup and step up to the ELMS. I learned a lot of things last year with Cool Racing and the Le Mans Cup. So I am very happy to step up this year in ELMS."

Q: We saw some great times from LMP2 cars and LM3 cars topping the times and the final session in both classes. What's been going on at Cool Racing to arrive here in such good shape?

AD: "Since I started motorsport, I have been with Cool Racing. I did my first race with them. So now it's a bit like my family. So, I'm very happy to step up with them, it's such a good team. They showed it last year with people in LMP2 and also in LMP3. So now I think I'm in one of the best teams in LMP3, so we can do even better than last year because they just lost the championship by one point. So, we're going to try to do better this year."

Michael Fassbender

Q: Welcome back, Michael, a third season in the ELMS and arriving here on the back of a spectacular race for you in Portimão at the end of last year. Tell us what you've learned about the challenges here in those first two years. How are you going to apply that with a third season now with Proton?

MF: "It was nice to get the result in Portimão because we're kind of knocking on the door for a while. I suppose the first season for me it was such a baptism of fire stepping into ELMS. Just because of the traffic, you know, dealing with the LMP2 and LMP3 cars. Just processing all of that mentally. I found that quite exhausting. So, the first year was very tricky and thankfully Proton Competition they're such an experienced team, and very successful team. So really surrounded by the best people.

"And then just trying to make progress. Obviously trying to get faster and try and sort of just understand the traffic management better. And, you know, have a clean race. Portimão worked out pretty well, which was just trying to hang on to the leading pack and wait for opportunities."

Q: It's often been reported your ambition with this programme is Le Mans. Is that entirely true? Or is the more that you want to achieve on this kind of journey before you get there?

MF: Well, I don't know what else there would be to achieve than Le Mans. I think that was always the goal, that's the dream, and this year it's being realised. So, it's pretty scary, but also very exciting. I managed to get a test in the Prologue last year, so I did about ten laps running

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around the famous circuit. I didn't realise until I was on the track doing laps, just how sort of special it is, and what sort of allure it has. As soon as I left the track, I just wanted to get back on and do some more laps.

“So, I’m really excited to go there this year. Obviously, a lot to learn and a lot of prep before we get there. I just finished filming about two weeks ago, so I haven't had a chance to step into a car since Portimão. So, we've got a lot of catching up to do, but very excited.”

Q: Millions are going to be able to watch that journey. And they're going to be able to watch that appearance at Le Mans with the excellent YouTube series that's been following your progress with Porsche. Are you surprised by the sustained level of interest in this journey?

MF: “You know, we started off doing something really sort of raw. The idea was to have a series that shows everything, and the boys are always following us around even when you know it's moments where you wouldn't necessarily like a camera in your face. But that that was always the spirit of it, and the essence of it, that we could really sort of get a fly in the wall idea of what it's like for somebody like me coming in with little to no experience and starting from the ground level up.

“I have to say, the team that we have is fantastic. The guys are doing a great job. They're running around the place. There's only three of them. And the footage that they get is pretty spectacular. Yes, I'm surprised and really happy that people have responded the way they have. I suppose it's a great thing that we've been allowed to just sort of do it, as I say, our own way. And when we sort of just built it each season. I feel like it's getting better and better. I'm very proud of the boys in the job they've done.”

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