

Season Review 2012

February 17th 2012

Soon it will be time to feel the thunder once again as the 2012 European Late Model Series gets under way at it's spiritual home of Warneton on the weekend of the 8th / 9th April

The European Late Model Series is still the only series where you can see American Stock Cars racing door to door around the ovals of Europe. But before we start revving engines and bending sheet metal, let's look at the runners and riders.

Last year was a difficult one for the European Late Model Series as it mourned the passing of its creator, Tony Roots. The driver of the #77 and owner of Roots V8 Racing lost his battle with cancer early on in the season. He would still have enjoyed the 2011 season, though, as the cars headed for the new 1km track at Venray in the Netherlands. 2011 was a vintage season for the Late Models which eventually crowned Jean Vasseur Champion, in the #07 Profil+ Ford Fusion.

Last year also saw one of the founder members of the Late Models, Bruce Andrews, retire and go back to the states to enjoy a bit more sun. Though he is much missed, "Jeff" Gordon Barnes took over the #17. Gordon spent some time in the #08 Race Car Direct-UK car in the early part of the season before choosing to run himself and will be entering 2012 as the #24 Chevrolet Impala. It will be a steep learning curve for Gordon, but he has shown promise and you can expect to see some early wins from the Essex man this season. In a recent chat, Gordon played down his chances; *"My main goal is to aim to do the season and just gain experience - finish all the races, get faster and aim to be more competitive by the end of the season. I suspect I'll be learning a lot this year."* adding that he will be looking forward to racing at his home track, Ipswich's Foxhall Heath Stadium in August

Little is known of Raptor Racing's movements this season but it is safe to assume that the Belgium team is expecting to make good progress this year after changes to the workshop personnel.

Roots V8 Racing is currently in the process of restoring Tony Roots original #77 machine. Chris Roots and Kelvin Hassell are expected to fly the team's flag, along with several other part-time racing drivers in the team's European Late Model fleet of cars.

RCD-UK unveiled their new car late last year and displayed the car at Autosport International in January. The new addition to the stable makes RCD-UK a three car team. Keith Whalley is back in the #88 with drivers of the other two cars still to be announced.

Wim Moonen Racing is looking forward to a) collecting his award for winning the 2011 CAMSO V8 Championship and b) Defending it and perhaps picking up the European title as well. The popular Dutchman had a fantastic 2011 season and should be able to give Vasseur a run for his money in 2012. And someone needs to. Jean Vasseur has dominated the European title for two years. The Frenchman has even out-performed the establishment at his weaker tracks, such as Ipswich and Lydden. Vasseur is a gambling man's favorite to win the title again in 2012.

One person who could throw a spanner in the works is former champion Gary Ellis. Ellis didn't look like a contender for 2012 when he announced that the #95 Wizard Racing machine would not be on track until Venray. However, a late deal with Revolution Racing has put Ellis in the #51 machine for the first round of the series. Ellis will need to peddle hard to score enough points in those early races to challenge for the title when the #95 is finally ready.

The #51 car is one of two coming from the Revolution Racing stable. Regular driver Kieran Dynes has picked up sponsorship from Dutch energy drink Space Power. Space Power also run Marc Stegmeijer, who is rumoured to be changing to the Howe chassis/LS7 engine combination for this season. How these two teams will manage their co-existence remains to be seen.

The second car from Revolution is Chris Richardson's in a paint scheme that will be familiar to the older ASCAR fans. Chris will be running with rock band The Darkness adorning the #99 machine.

Monster Racing may not have an answer to Space Power's announcement, with lead driver Rodger Twikler announcing earlier this week that he will be unable to attend all the European Late Model races. Wim Verloo will be left to fight Monster Energy Drinks corner unless a replacement driver can be found to fill the spot.

Biggelaar Motors are the newest team to join the European Late Model Series. They purchased two Roots V8 Racing cars last season and have already been winning races. Patrick D Biggellar and Frank Wouters may well be two dark horses for the championship title.

Paul Bowman should be back after a sabbatical, in the #39 ASBF Chevy. Also look out for two talented French drivers. Vincent Lehouck, would be up there in the points, if he was able to attend every round. Bertrand Zore should be making a come back after a year away from the series.

All in all 2012 is set to be a classic season for the European Late Model Series. Make sure you are at Warneton in April to watch the action unfold.

It's going to be an epic season, look out!