

V8 COUNTDOWN | Champion targets repeat achievement

Whincup wants more

TODD BALYM
SYDNEY

V8 SUPERCAR champion Jamie Whincup says desire to become the sport's first back-to-back series winner in five years is fuelling his motivation in 2009.

Not since Marcos Ambrose (2003-04) has the V8 series winner successfully defended his crown in the cut-throat motor racing championship and the 25-year-old is determined to be the sport's next multiple winner.

With Ambrose now racing in the NASCAR series in the U.S. and

former champion Mark Skaife retired, Whincup's Team Vodafone team-mate Craig Lowndes is the only multiple title winner in the 27-car field.

Whincup knows defending a title brings added pressure but is confident he can do what Russell Ingall (2005), Rick Kelly (2006) and Garth Tander (2007) all failed to achieve, with back-to-back series wins.

"I understand that defending a title is probably 20 per cent harder than actually trying to win it," Whincup said.

"I have got a big job to do this

year but I am really looking forward to it."

Whincup is only just back into his pre-season training for the V8 series ahead of the Clipsal 500 Adelaide from March 19.

He initially feared a lack of motivation for this year, but insists the long break with his family over Christmas helped recharge his batteries for the campaign ahead.

"I mentioned in the paper last year that I may have a motivation problem moving forward," Whincup said.

"See, I run on emotion and chal-

lenges. Last year's challenge was to win Indy (the Gold Coast round) and the championship, mainly because those were the two big things I hadn't done before.

"But to be honest, the thought of going back-to-back for the championship gives me more motivation than ever.

"We still have a great car and a great team so it's going to be up to me to drive it like I stole it."

Whincup has yet to see his new Ford FG Falcon, as it is still being built by Triple Eight Racing in its garages in Queensland.

It is one of five new Falcons in production, alongside cars for Lowndes, Jim Beam Racing's James Courtney and Steven Johnson, and Wilson Security Racing's Fabian Coulthard.

Whincup says his new car, which will carry the number 1 in 2009 instead of his regular 88, will be ready in time for a testing session at Queensland Raceway early next month.

Meanwhile, fierce rival Mark Winterbottom and Ford Performance Racing team-mate Steven Richards will unveil new liveries on their Falcons tomorrow.

Rally aces ready for big year

STUART INNES

REPORTS of the death of car rallying are greatly exaggerated - given the driver line-up at tomorrow's opening round of the Australian Rally Championship in Tasmania.

Rally Tasmania will be the first of six rounds of the ARC this year.

That includes the Sprint Auto Parts Rally in South Australia from July 31 to August 2.

Tasmania's is a tarmac rally, allowing it to be the first of three rounds of a new Australian Classic Tarmac Championship which will count in WA's Targa West in August and Classic Adelaide in November.

Rally Tasmania will be centred at Burnie, on the north coast.

It begins tomorrow with three competitive stages and has eight more, each on Saturday and on Sunday.

A "home-track" advantage might be held by young gun Brendan Reeves, 20, who will drive for Tasmania-based Les Walkden Rallying in a Subaru Impreza WRX STi.

"I know some of the stages really well," he said.

"It's a great area to compete in."

The ARC field includes Simon Evans and Neal Bates in Toyota Corolla



IN TOP FORM: Brendan Reeves in the Les Walkden Rallying Subaru Impreza WRX STi preparing for the opening round of the 2009 Australian Rally Championship.

S2000 cars previously run by Toyota as a factory-backed team.

That now has ceased, leaving Bates with the cars and trying to get to events on a tight budget.

Bates is reigning champion and Evans was 2006 and 2007 champion.

Last year's ARC runner-up Eli Evans will drive his Impreza STi, Pacific

Rally champion Dean Herridge has a similar car and Spencer Lowndes will pilot a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo 9.

Another Impreza is in the hands of Tony Sullens, a twice Targa Tasmania winner.

In the pre-1982 Classic section, Adelaide's Kevin Weeks is in the 1974 Porsche 911 in which he won the

Classic Adelaide three months ago. SA's Roger Patterson and Rob Black are in similar models.

In the post-1981 section are multiple Targa Tasmania and Bathurst 1000 ace Jim Richards (Porsche) and fellow Bathurst champion Tony Longhurst (Impreza STi). Adelaide professional co-driver Naomi Tillett will guide Tony Quinn in a Nissan GT-R.

Formula One on notice

McLAREN boss Ron Dennis, who received the Palme d'Or award from motorsport's world governing body, FIA, in Paris yesterday in the company of world champion Lewis Hamilton, said Formula One costs would be vastly reduced this season.

The sport has been on edge since the impact of the world economic crisis but Dennis was optimistic a round of pragmatic cost-cutting would enable teams to remain financially viable.

"I think the top teams will manage to reduce their costs from between 10 and 50 per cent," Dennis said at the International Automobile Festival. "But for the smaller teams it will be more dramatic, to the order of 30 to 50 per cent."

"We are certainly going to take into account the smaller teams, who will be able to make the most of cheaper engines and gearboxes."

"Major efforts have been made to make Formula One viable," said the McLaren boss. "We mustn't damage the DNA of the sport, its showbiz side."

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