

MOTORSPORT



Motorbase duo Luke Davenport and Martin Depper show off this year's car at Donington
Pictures: Jakob Ebrey Photography

Gearing up for title bid

By Dan Wright

Motorbase Performance bosses hope to win their first drivers' title in the British Touring Car Championship this season – but rate double champion Colin Turkington as their biggest threat.

The Wrotham-based squad, who will be sponsored by Shredded Wheat this year, will run multiple race winner Mat Jackson, former Honda driver Martin Depper and newcomer Luke Davenport in the Ford Focus.

Team owner David Bartrum hopes to claim his maiden drivers' title with Jackson but thinks works BMW

'We won two independent titles last year but we are going for the holy grail of the drivers' title'

driver Turkington – the 2009 and 2014 champion – will take some beating.

"The biggest threat will be Colin Turkington, I think he will be exceptional at BMW," Meopham-based Bartrum said.

"We won two independent titles last year but that is not what we are really



Mat Jackson puts the pedal to the metal in his Ford Focus at the Donington Park BTCC test day

there for – we are going for the holy grail of the drivers' title.

"It will be an interesting year and I am sure there will be many people in with a chance of the title come the end of the season."

The squad secured their first independent teams' trophy last season but Jackson, 35, missed out on the drivers' title by 16 points in his Ford Focus ST.

They will start their season at Brands Hatch this weekend, taking on five manufacturer-

backed teams.

Northern Irishman Turkington, 34, will handle a West Surrey Racing-prepared BMW 125i M Sport, rejoining the team that carried him to his two BTCC titles.

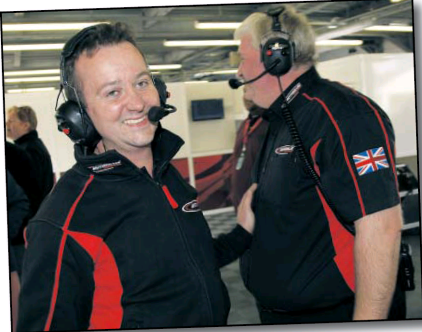
"It was a fantastic season last year – the best one for Motorbase – and the aim again is to win the overall title," team manager Oly Collins said.

"Consistency and reliability will be key this year. That has always been the case in this championship but this year it is paramount as most of the backmarkers from last year have disappeared and have been replaced by really good drivers.

"We wanted to win it outright in 2016 and we are going for the same."

■ The first three rounds of the Dunlop MSA British Touring Car Championship will be held at Brands Hatch on Sunday.

Tickets cost £34 on the gate, with under-13s going free. Visit www.brandshatch.co.uk for details.



Motorbase Performance's Oly Collins and David Bartrum are aiming high this season
Picture: PSP Photography

T20 franchise is 'inevitable,' says Clifford

Kent cricket

The controversial subject of the ECB's proposed T20 franchise competition dominated Kent's 2017 annual meeting on Tuesday. Kent and Surrey are the only two counties to publically question the introduction of an eight-team, city-based competition, set to launch in 2020 and which the ECB claim will provide each of the 18 counties with a £1.3m share of TV revenue each year.

In his final act as chairman before handing over the reins to former treasurer Simon Phillip, George Kennedy and chief executive Jamie Clifford attended an ECB meeting about the plans in London on Monday. Mr Kennedy told members at Tuesday's packed meeting: "We turned up expecting a debate but we didn't have a debate, we were lectured to. It wasn't particularly satisfactory.

"We can fight them as much as you like but it's difficult for a club this size in a David and Goliath situation."

Mr Clifford told members: "From what we have seen, there is an inevitability about this. We as a county have been less enthusiastic about the proposals than others and at times struggled to see why they were necessary.

"But we have made our point – we now have to work out how best to position ourselves to ensure Kent are not prejudiced against in the future.

"We have to get the best from the situation. It's not all bad, this club will receive more than £6m between now and 2024, significant sums of money with which we hope to be able to do some exciting things."

Members were also told about three separate battles with the ECB in 2016 with Mr Clifford claiming: "We locked horns with the ECB on regular occasions through the year and there were no shortage of matters on which we found a difference of opinion.

"In all the cases we didn't come off on the right side but we tried to maintain a constructive relationship with them."

The first case regarded the washout at Worcester, another was a suspension for Matt Coles and finally the controversial reprieve from Championship relegation for Hampshire, instead of promotion for Kent, which ended with Mr Kennedy discussing legal action.

■ Kent's Joe Denly and Darren Stevens both hit centuries on the first day of their three-day warm-up game against Leeds Bradford MCCU on Tuesday. Denly made 101 and Stevens 115 as the pair impressed ahead of Kent's Championship opener against Gloucestershire on April 7 at Canterbury.

■ Kent all-rounder Fabian Cowdrey has left the club by mutual consent. The 24-year-old, who made his debut in 2013, said: "It was not an easy decision. I am sad to be leaving but believe for the club and my own well-being it is the right time to leave."

Hill sets win target

Goudhurst's Jake Hill, 23, will enter his second full BTCC campaign at Brands Hatch this weekend.

Hill – who had only competed in one-off outings before his 2016 campaign – will race a Team HARD Racing-run Volkswagen CC.

Hill (pictured) regularly challenged the frontrunners in an ageing Toyota Avensis last season, scoring a career-high fifth-place finish at Silverstone.

"My target is to win a race, simple as that. I know I have got it in me," Hill said.

