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Chrysler Group's SRT Brand Builds Awareness Through Racing at Le Mans

Developing the SRT Brand One Race at a Time

June 16, 2013, Auburn Hills, Mich. - With its heritage deeply rooted into the fabric of domestic and international road racing's rich history, the highly anticipated return of Viper to the 24 Hours of Le Mans stirs the souls of those who have shared in its recent rebirth and return to the ultimate test in sports car competition.

From concept to completion, the impact of racing in the 24 Hours of Le Mans is the shared passion for the SRT (Street and Racing Technology) brand, its performance vehicles and legacy of one special American built supercar – Viper.

And with a world stage of racing before them eager to see the return of a North American racing icon, the two identically prepared SRT Viper GTS-Rs from SRT Motorsports begin a new journey that encompasses its gloried past with unmistakable character that makes it undeniably Viper.

"For me, it's the competition you're racing against – there are some fantastic global performance brands racing in the sport and mixing it up with those brands sets the scene for what happens in the showroom," said Ralph Gilles, President and CEO, SRT Brand and Motorsports, Chrysler Group LLC. "The correlation is perfect for SRT. This is validation for our performance brand because it's in our namesake and it's who we are."

Unveiled to the public as a concept car at the 1989 North American International Auto Show in Detroit under the Dodge banner, the public's love affair with Viper was instantaneous as car enthusiasts and race fans oozed at the idea that a hand-built North American, 8.0-liter V-10 supercar would challenge for international road racing superiority.

Debuting in 1996 under a partnership with the French race and engineering firm Oreca, the original Viper GTS-R struck early in sports car competition winning five international GT championships and the 1997 to 1999 FIA GT championships in addition to three consecutive one-two finishes at the 24 Hours of Le Mans (1998-2000) in the GTS class.

The 2000 race at Le Mans would mark the end the factory-backed Vipers racing history, most notably it would also prove to be Viper's last race contested at Le Mans as Chrysler's official factory-backed Viper racing program would end in 2001.

For the next decade privateer racers would carry the Viper banner in various FIA GT races around the world while race ready-made Dodge Viper Competition Coupes would be sold specifically to customers for FIA GT3 for competition internationally and SCCA Speed World Challenge racing competition in the United States.

A New Era Begins

With the formal introduction of the fifth generation SRT Viper at the 2012 New York International Auto Show, the all-new 2013 SRT Viper GTS was greeted with much speculation that a race version would soon follow. No one knew how soon, as minutes after the Stryker Red road version made its way on stage, the new SRT Viper GTS-R roared to life as part of the surprise announcement to the world that the factory-backed venom of Viper was back for competition in the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) with, at the time, sights set on the possible future return to Le Mans.

"We sell SRT vehicles all over the world and racing in the 24 Hours of Le Mans reminds car enthusiasts who we are and how we appreciate world class motorsports," Gilles added.

With the all-new SRT Viper GTS announced to the world, SRT Motorsports engineers and Riley Technologies were

collaborating behind the scenes developing and designing the SRT Viper GTS-R race car that would make its much anticipated return to competitive motorsports four months later at Round Six of the ALMS in Lexington, Ohio. Following a planned four-race partial schedule to finish out the 2012 season, the foundation was set for a full 2013 ALMS campaign.

In February, before the new ALMS season began, the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO) extended an invitation to SRT Motorsports to compete in this year's 24 Hours of Le Mans marking the return of Viper to one of the most hallowed grounds of all racing – Circuit de la Sarthe.

"I still remember the excitement and euphoria and spill-off effect of having been successful at Le Mans in the past," Gilles said. "We had a fantastic platform for the car and while our number one goal was to get back into ALMS racing, a return to compete at Le Mans again was also certainly on our radar too."

Showing the World the SRT Brand

Its racing heritage has been branded Dodge in North American and Chrysler in international competition, but there will be no denying that when two racing Viper GTS-Rs are unloaded next week in the heart of France that their livery is clear; SRT Motorsports.

Although the behind the scenes planning has gone on for over two years while it's on-track competition is just seven races old, Beth Paretta, Director of Marketing and Operations, SRT Brand and Motorsports has kept herself and the team laser focused on one date – Saturday, June 22, 2013.

"We know the people who attend the 24 Hours of Le Mans are not only motorsports enthusiasts, they're also car people to the core," said Paretta. "They love performance automobiles and know what they like. To be competing on this historic racetrack against the numerous premier automotive brands from around the world is amazing."

As she pours over detailed plans surrounding Viper's return to Le Mans for the first time as a factory-supported SRT effort (first for Chrysler Group LLC since 2001) the multi-year planning process will culminate when the green flag drops for the 90th anniversary of the world's greatest automotive endurance race.

Turning the SRT brand into an international nameplate is no easy task as SRT cross-pollinates into individual Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge and Viper product lines. Nearly two years as a separate company brand at Chrysler Group, the SRT team maintains its successful formula to design, engineer and build benchmark American high-performance vehicles led by its 'flagship' car – the 2013 Viper.

Balancing the rich history of Viper while introducing the new SRT brand requires a targeted approach that combines reflection on past racing successes.

Competing at Le Mans provides the new SRT Viper GTS-R and the SRT Motorsports team the opportunity to compete against the absolute best sports car teams from around the world.

From the strength of its various Viper owners clubs that currently encompass 35 regions across the United States and four international clubs around the world, passion and brand loyalty for the Viper was established in its DNA when the first car rolled off the assembly line in 1992 in Detroit. The world now awaits the newly badged SRT Viper GTS-Rs return to historic Le Mans.

"SRT is still working to be recognized by the public as a separate brand within Chrysler Group – and although we've been around for a while, we're still educating people what the three letters SRT (Street and Racing Technology) mean to the company and the performance vehicle world," she added. "So it's a great opportunity to be in front of people who will help us tell our story."

With the global sports car stage watching later this month in Le Mans, just southwest of Paris, the SRT Motorsports team will be in full force leveraging their participation in the 24 hour race by activating onsite which includes the extremely popular 2014 Jeep® Grand Cherokee SRT which is sold in Europe.

"This is the first international motor sports event that we've competed in as SRT Motorsports and it's quite the honor to show the world what the new Street and Racing Technology brand is all about," Paretta said. "Our

involvement over the last year in the American Le Mans Series has given us an incredible amount of visibility and we're just thrilled to have the opportunity to show the international community the SRT brand on every lap and every race that we compete in around the world."

About SRT and SRT Motorsports

The Chrysler Group's SRT (Street and Racing Technology) brand uses a successful product development formula featuring five proven hallmarks: awe-inspiring powertrains; outstanding ride, handling and capability; benchmark braking; aggressive and functional exteriors and race-inspired and high-performance interiors to remain true to its performance roots.

The SRT lineup in the 2013 model year features five vehicles that are world-class performance contenders and bring the latest in safety technologies and creature comforts. The Chrysler 300 SRT8, Dodge Challenger SRT8 392, Dodge Charger SRT8 and Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT8 are joined by the SRT flagship Viper and Viper GTS models, which are making their highly anticipated return to the high-performance sports car market.

The engineering expertise within SRT extends well beyond its high-performance street vehicles. Technical support for the Chrysler Group's various racing programs is provided by the astute engineers at SRT Motorsports, where lessons learned on the race track directly translate to improved vehicles for the company's customers.

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