



Whose turn is it?

With such high-profile recent winners as Thierry Neuville, François Duval, Mikko Hirvonen, Bryan Bouffier, Kris Meeke, Stéphane Lefebvre and Stefaan Stouf, the Legend Boucles @ Bastogne boasts an incredible list of honours! And on the first weekend of February, the battle for the win will once again be intense. So, who's next?

Every year, the Royal Automobile Club de Spa, organisers of the Legend Boucles @ Bastogne, attracts an international motor sport personality to the heart of the province of Luxembourg. And for the 2024 edition of the winter classic, it's Frenchman Stéphane Sarrazin who'll be taking to the track, inheriting the wheel of the legendary Ford Escort Mk2 'PYB-106' owned by Christophe Jacob and multiple winner of the event!

And Sarrazin, when it comes to his record of achievements, has a lot to live up to! While he has shone brightest on the endurance scene, particularly at the Le Mans 24 Hours, with no fewer than five podium finishes for Peugeot and Toyota, the native of Alès has contested one Formula 1 Grand Prix - in Brazil in 1999 for Minardi - and four seasons of Formula E (3 podiums). On the rally scene, he's been there, seen it and won the French championship in 2004, which earned him a place in the official Subaru WRC team for the following two years. Having led his racing career on several fronts, in 2017 he set up the Sarrazin Motorsport structure, which can be seen more and more regularly in the Belgian Rally Championship.

And in Bastogne, Sarrazin will be co-driven by Nicolas Gilsoul, twice winner of the Legend Boucles with Bruno Thiry (Spa, 2010) and Thierry Neuville (Bastogne, 2017)! What a promise...

To have any hope of winning, the 48-year-old Frenchman will have to overcome some very serious competition, led by Cédric Cherain and Damien Withers (Ford Escort Mk2), the leaders until their unfortunate retirement less than a year ago! At the wheel of a car that has been honed more than ever by the Andes Motorsport team, Cherain, one of the leaders of the Belgian Rally Championship, makes no secret of his intentions: he wants to win!

This will no doubt also be the case for Stefaan Stouf and Joris Erard, the 2011 and 2023 winners! Having damaged his formidable Ford Escort Mk1 during the recent Roger Albert Clark Rally, the coastal driver hastened to build a 'new' Escort Mk2. A real race against the clock to be ready for the first weekend in February...

Hot on their heels is a group of outsiders, all of whom have very good reason to believe in their chances of success. Runner-up to Stouf last year, Guino Kenis, still flanked by Bjorn Vanoverschelde, remains ready to pounce in all circumstances with his formidable BMW 325i E30. As for Ghislain de

Mévius, obviously with Johan Jalet in the right-hand bucket of the Escort Mk2 G Rally Team, he will be keen to set the record straight after a more complicated 2023 edition. Co-driven by André Leyh, Olivier Cartelle (Escort Mk2) is all the more motivated as the Legend Boucles are his annual recreation and his favourite event, as is Christophe Daco, with Steven Spittaels in the right-hand bucket of the Escort Mk2, who will be leading the regional gang... if Frédéric François and Jérémy Penoy (Escort Mk2) have their way! The battle will rage on between the numerous crews from the province of Luxembourg for this prestigious place on the podium...

In this respect, the last-minute entry of a certain Fred Caprasse in a Ford Escort Mk1 could well muddy the waters and change the situation...

In the wake of his first-ever Rallye Monte-Carlo, John Wartique, in partnership with Vincent Duchesne, will be returning to the Ford Escort Mk1 owned by Steven Spittaels and run by the Burton Racing team! And on the strength of his race pace, he has no intention of dragging his feet. First-generation Escorts will also be on the agenda for Bastien Rouard and Dimitri Debuissou, the BRC driver eager to get back behind the wheel after too long a break.

As for Jean-Pierre Van de Wauwer, winner of the Legend Boucles de Spa in 2012 with the well-known Lancia Beta Monte-Carlo, he will be one of the kings of the party, celebrating his 70th birthday in Bastogne, including 55 years of competition! For the occasion, and with a huge helping hand from his supporters and emblematic partners, he has hired a Ford Escort Mk2 and will be taking on the special stages with Valéry Soret at his side!

With Emile Breittmayer and Alexis Thomas (Escort Mk2), Olivier Breittmayer and Stéphane Prévot (Escort Mk1), Eric Mauffrey and Anne Brahy (Escort Mk2), Geoffrey Leyon and Jean-François Elst (Escort Mk1), Johnny Delhez and Jonathan Lemaire, Sébastien Incardona and Christophe Poës (Escort Mk2), Fred Bouvy and Jean-Louis Hottelet (Escort Mk2), Julien Elleboudt and Dominique Dricot (Escort Mk2), Miguel Henry de Frahan and Jean Dilley, Thomas Kleinwachter and Sina Carabin, Axel Schütt and Klaus Finke, Henning Schütt and Jan Bemman - the list of other tame drivers of cars emblazoned with the blue oval is certainly not lacking in prestige! It would be hard to predict the final top 10!

While some fans feel that the Ford Escorts, as formidable as ever, are too numerous at Bastogne as they are at other large-scale historic rallies, there will be plenty of variety provided by a number of cars that are eagerly awaited! The Mazda RX-7 Gr. B Mazda RX-7 of Samuël Lay and Cédric Pirotte, the BMW M3 E30 LifeLive of Billy Simoné and Olivier Beck, the BMW 325i E30 of Grégoire Destexhe and Jehan-Félix Brasseur, the BMW 2002 Ti of Aly Kridel Jr and Daniel Perron, the BMW 323i E21 of Eric Wilmus and Sébastien Smoes, the Peugeot 504 Coupé V6 of Alexandre Viron and Michael Renkin, the Porsche 911s of André and Guillaume Lausberg, Pierre-Cédric Henry and Laurent Gauthier, Laurent Richard and Loïc Dumont, the ex-factory Opel Manta 400s of Jean-André Collard and Thibaut de Raikem on the one hand, and Jacques and Robin Sestach on the other, the ex-Colsoul Opel Ascona 400 of Richard and Florence Thiéry, the Opel Ascona B of Maxime Hebrant and Wivine Wiard, the Opel Ascona A of Christophe De Leeuw and Pieter Van Hoef, the Toyota Corolla of Benoit Verlinde and Marc Vandemoortele and Manu Eggermont and Edouard De Braekeleer, the Toyota Starlet of Yannick Neuville and Romi Schröder, the Volkswagen Golf GTi of Aaron Duville and Stijn De Vleeschauwer, the Volvo 240 of Bernard Lamy and Bertrand Ninane, the Subaru Legacy 4WD Turbo of Kristof Lombaerts and Jonas De Lombaert, and so on, and all just as good! All these crews made it a point of honour to prevent the Escorts from dominating the final top 20!

A category in which a certain... Maxime Martin, the official BMW M Motorsport driver, quickly confirmed his annual break, having just returned from the Rolex 24 Daytona! As far as the weather is concerned, the clash is likely to be significant, unlike the co-driver, who remains his good friend Kenny Dewolf.

And then there are the other regional contenders, who are approaching 'their' Legend Boucles @ Bastogne with varying ambitions, but with enormous heart and ambition! Those who have made the jump from 'Challenger' to 'Legend', such as Charles Blérot and Antoine Dauby (BMW 325i E30), Jencome Theis and Laurent Perrée (Ford Escort Mk1), Dimitri Van Hove and Lionel Windeshausen (Alfa Romeo GTV6), Samuel Zune and Grégory Fraselle (Mercedes 190 2. 3 16S), Pascal and Romane Gérard (Mazda 323 Turbo), Stéphane Gérard and Fabrice Laroche (Mazda RX-7 Gr. B), Mathieu Boeur and Aurélie Leroy (Opel Ascona B), Nicolas Blérot and Mélissa Poncin (Peugeot 205 GTi), Samuel Burnon and Marc Sevrin (Ford Escort Mk2), Didier Joris and Pierre-Yves Erneux (Ford Escort Mk2)... not forgetting the Volvo 142 and 144 gang from the Glaude family, with Christian and Anne Glaude, Sébastien Glaude and Aurélie Van Houdenhove, as well as Guillaume Glaude and Raphaël Cop! So we're in for a new episode in this saga set in the charming little village of Longchamps, where the presentation of the regional competitors traditionally takes place a week before the event.

With nearly 240 crews taking part, all categories combined, one thing is certain: the popularity of the Legend Boucles @ Bastogne is undiminished!