

THE TIMES, THEY ARE A CHANGIN' FOR PRUETT

By JOHN JEPPESEN

Scott Pruett's name will not appear over the door of a Chip Ganassi race car anymore. Obviously, it begs the question: Why? Pruett spent 12 years with the team amassing a record 60 wins, five Grand-Am Daytona Prototype driver championships and seven team titles. Putting a period on his record, Pruett has a display case with five Rolex 24 At Daytona winner's watches in his trophy room.

That makes the news of Pruett's departure a surprise in light of Ganassi's deal to develop and campaign the new Ford GT in IMSA as well as the fabled 24 Hours of Le Mans.

So we asked Pruett that question point blank. He declined to comment on his departure from CGR, saying only: "All good. Just business."

Not missing the next apex, the always-ebullient Californian is looking forward instead.

"2016 has brought a lot of change," Pruett said. "It's exciting. There's a lot of great stuff going on." On the matter of the split with Ganassi he said: "It was a difficult decision to make and not one I took lightly. My relationship with Lexus went back to the latter days of my Indy car career, 2004 to 2008 in sports cars and I really just liked the people at Lexus. ... They said they were going racing and exciting as the Ford GT program would have been, I just made a decision to go with Lexus."

Pruett's new ride is based on the Lexus RCF GT3 race car campaigned in Japan and Europe. It will be prepared and developed by Paul Gentilozzi's new F Performance operation in Michigan, but the car won't be ready for IMSA until mid-season.

Pruett is no stranger to the Lexus brand. Lexus engines powered Pruett's DP wins from 2004 through 2007, so his move is like putting on a pair of comfortable running shoes.

"When Lexus left motorsports, I pledged to them that I would be there to help them return when that time came," said Pruett. "That time is now and I could not be more ecstatic to be representing Lexus as a performance brand ambassador and on the track in the F Performance RC F GT3."

Long story short, the Lexus RC F will be one bad-ass ride on the street and the race track.

"A core mission of F Performance Racing is to strengthen the Lexus F brand by applying lessons gleaned from racing, while nurturing an engineering culture that transfers that knowledge to dynamic, high-performance passenger car development," said Lexus Group Vice President Jeff Bracken.

Pruett and Gentilozzi also have history, some 30 years worth.

"We started racing against each other in the mid '80s," Gentilozzi recalled. "He was at Roush and I had



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my own team."

Gentilozzi remembers their first clash because it was his first Trans-Am victory at Long Beach in 1988.

"He was in the Stroh's car. I was in the Budweiser car," Gentilozzi recalled. "Throughout the '90s Scott drove for me several times on both our Trans-Am team and our IMSA team."

They won twice at Daytona, once overall accounting for one of Pruett's Rolexes. Scott also picked off a Trans-Am Championship in 2003 while driving a Gentilozzi-owned Jaguar.

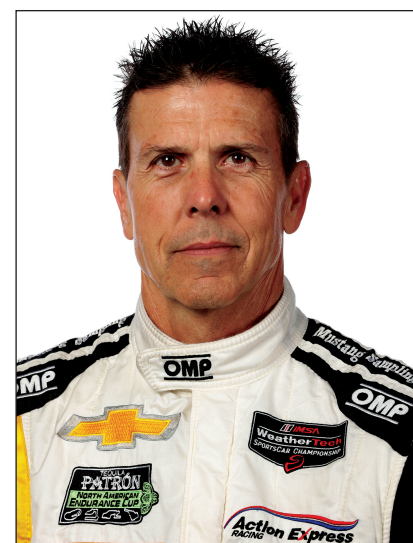
Gentilozzi is pleased with the reunion, but otherwise nonplussed. "Scotty always makes big news as long as I've known him, 30 years or so," he said. "But neither of us view it that way (a big deal), it's just another deal."

The Lexus RC F GT3 has been around.

"It was built by Toyota Technocraft in Japan and this project has been going on for a pretty long time," Gentilozzi said. "It was raced last year in Japan in the Super GT series and by the Farnbacher team in the Nurburgring series (in Europe). We're going to adapt the car. In North America, we have a different tire and different requirements for the car so we're working to get the car structured to what we do here."

The new F Performance team will test before the competition debut in May or June.

Pruett will have some time on his hands before then and figured a guy can't have enough Rolexes, so he signed up with Gary Nelson's Action Express squad to run the 36 hours of Florida — the Rolex 24 At Daytona



Nelson said. "The years of knowledge that are in his head have already shown up in the way he has compared notes with our drivers. We've already seen the value in the first day."

Pruett, 55, has no intention of retiring anytime soon. He is one of a growing number of people in his demographic who are not playing it safe. That was the focus of the PBS series "Life Part2," hosted by former New York Times sportswriter and columnist Robert Lipsyte. Lipsyte weighed in on the next chapter of Pruett's life.

"Scott's move is exactly part of a trend going on now throughout the boomer generation of people starting second (even third) acts in their lives," Lipsyte said. "Maybe it's better health, entitlement or not staying forever at one job (thanks, boss), but boomers move on and reinvent themselves. It's harder in sports, of course, where the expiration date comes earlier. Scott isn't letting anybody decide his fate, he's grabbing his own future and that's a real inspiration for all of us. Especially, if you're doing it at speed."

Clearly, Pruett has taken America's troubadour Bob Dylan's words to heart: "You better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone, for the times they are a changin'." ■

and the Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring.

Nelson's Mustang Sampling Corvette Daytona Prototype was the 2015 IMSA champion. Pruett was looking to break a tie with Hurley Haywood with five Rolex victories, but an early mechanical problem relegated the team to a fourth-place finish.

"I'm excited about joining that organization. They won the championship the last two years and it's a great group of guys. I'm really looking forward to driving with these guys instead of against them," Pruett said. "We've been racing wheel to wheel against Barbosa (Joao) and Fittipaldi (Christian). In fact, Christian and I go back to the Indy car days."

Nelson didn't even blink when he heard Pruett was available.

"When you get an opportunity to get a guy with that kind of experience in endurance racing, you jump on it,"



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