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New era begins for the Holden Racing Team

A new driver, matching new cars, a striking new livery and a major new sponsor mark the Holden Racing Team's fresh approach to the 2008 V8 Supercar season.

HRT moved quickly at the conclusion of the 2007 season to execute a recruiting coup, luring just-crowned series champion Garth Tander to the factory squad to partner five-time series champion Mark Skaife to reunite the pair who drove together in the 2006 enduro races.

In 2008 the formidable duo will pilot matching new cars, with Skaife having debuted his car (#VE006) in the final round of the 2007 season at Phillip Island and Tander set to roll his (#VE007) out for Round 1, Adelaide's Clipsal 500.

An eye-catching new colour scheme penned by Holden designer Peter Hughes means there will be no missing the HRT machines on the grid this year, a predominantly white livery set off with the team's trademark lion's head in day-glo red and finished with silver and black accents.

Completing the package is the addition of well-known transport logistics company Toll as naming rights sponsor, joining Holden and Mobil on the top line of a heavy-hitting list of corporate supporters.

Tander said there was "no greater honour" in V8 Supercars than to be chosen as a driver for the Holden factory team.

"Each of us individually have our own goals and ambitions, both sporting and professional, but I've said all along that I was given that opportunity then I'd like to grab it," he said.

"It's just a fantastic opportunity that's been presented to me. There's obviously a lot of changes compared to what I've had over the past years but it's an exciting opportunity for me to be going to the factory team as reigning champion, it's a real opportunity for me to cement myself as one of Holden's ambassadors in V8 Supercar racing."

Skaife, who joined the Holden Racing Team in 1997 and has since won three championships and three Bathurst 1000 crowns, finished 8th in championship standings in 2007 after missing the Sandown 500 after suffering appendicitis.

Embarking on his 12th season with the team, he is prepared to rule a line under his 2007 season and start the year with a clear head and fresh enthusiasm.

"There's certainly a lot of changes, isn't there?" he said. "Some will take a little while to gel but I'm confident we'll be in there and at 'em from the start. The thing for me is going to be to put the full year together."

"From a personal perspective I feel like I'm driving as well as I've ever driven. When we've gone well, I feel like we're going as well as ever.

"I'm looking forward to the challenge and looking forward to starting the year strongly and being more consistent, that's my plan."

Starting the season with two cars of identical specification, one of which has had its race debut and clocked plenty of testing miles, was a major victory for the team, he said.

"We know that rolling out that new car at the end of last season was a real coup for us, and at least we're getting some proper race miles on that. So to have two of the same specification cars going into the year is really good."

Toll Holdings Managing Director Paul Little said that after his company supported the championship-winning seasons of the HSV Dealer Team in 2006 (won by Rick Kelly) and 2007 (Tander), he was delighted to also place its support behind HRT.

"Of course, this means we're expecting HRT to complete a hat-trick of championship wins this year," he quipped.

Skaife said he welcomed Toll aboard for 2008. "I've known Paul Little for a long time and we're good friends. For them, their commitment to motorsport with the factory team is a real indication that they are genuinely motorsport-oriented and keen to be involved."

GM Holden's Executive Director, Sales and Marketing, Alan Batey said he hoped to see Holden continue its championship-winning run in 2008.

"We're looking forward to another successful year in 2008 and we're particularly pleased to see Toll join the factory 'family'," he said.

"V8 Supercars continues to be an integral part of Holden's sales strategy into the future."

Both drivers praised the team's aggressive new livery. "I think it's the best look we've had for a long, long time in terms of the styling of the car," Skaife said.

Tander agreed. "They have a subtle, classy, angry look about them," he said. "They certainly don't look weak, they look very tough and very smart as well. If the old adage is true that a good-looking race car is a fast race car, then we're looking good already."

Skaife said he was looking forward immensely to the challenge of benchmarking himself against Tander, the reigning series champion and form driver of the past two seasons. "When we drove together in 2006 we got on very well," he said. "We certainly like the cars very similar, and the level of competition between us should be great so I'm really looking forward to that part."

Tander said despite having the champion's #1 on his door in 2008, he would approach the season no differently to previous years.

"I guess the thing that is different is that you are the guy that everyone wants to take the championship off, rather than being the guy who wants to take it from someone else," he said.

“But I see myself as being in the same position as everyone else. Just because of the car number I’m running, it doesn’t mean it gives me any advantage, I still want to win the championship as much as 30 other blokes.

“We all start from scratch in Adelaide and it’s game-on from there.”

Skaife received a confidence boost recently from a retrospective decision to award him victory in the 2000 Clipsal 500, bringing his record-breaking career tally to a staggering 39 round wins.

“You’d always take another victory, but the great thing is that it was a win at Clipsal,” he said. “Other than Bathurst, it’s probably the next hardest race to win. It’s a nice part of my career stats so I’m very pleased to have grabbed another Clipsal.”

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