



Is a change of power on the horizon?

While Sarah Bovy, the celebrated representative of the “Iron Dames” on the circuit, will undoubtedly be the crowd favorite at the 20th edition of the Legend Boucles, the battle for victory is expected to reach new heights, pitting cars from different generations against each other.

The Ford Escort has historically claimed the lion's share of Legend Boucles de Spa and Legend Boucles @ Bastogne titles, and there will be plenty of competitive Mk1 and Mk2 cars capable of winning again this year. This includes Cédric Cherain's car, the 2025 winner, now co-driven by Jasper Vermeulen, as well as John Wartique's older model — both drivers returning from the Monte Carlo Rally.

The blue oval will also feature among the top contenders: Olivier Cartelle (Mk2), Bastien Rouard (Mk2), local driver Frédéric François (Mk2), Belgian Historic BRC champion Thomas Carlier (Mk2), returning Caren Burton (Mk1), the eclectic Christophe Van Riet (Mk2), the ever-colorful Julien Elleboudt (Mk2), and the indestructible Dominique Mathy (Mk1), who has revisited his past exploits and even enlisted Louis Louka, Grégoire Munster's regular world-level co-driver, to assist in his assault on the top of the rankings.

Nevertheless, to prevent the Escorts from running riot, there have never been so many outstanding BMWs! Leading the charge is, of course, the superb, brand-new M3 E30 by MATS, driven by Jos Verstappen and Renaud Jamoul — openly declared contenders for victory. Initially entered in a Ford, Emile Breittmayer ultimately decided to opt for a Bavarian car, also an M3 E30. The legendary M3 will also feature in the hands of two major outsiders, Sébastien Incardona and William Reyntiens, flying the Livelive Motorsport flag. Finally, Frenchman Yannick Panagiotis will be aiming for a top-10 finish with his replica of Bernard Béguin's M3 E30. Simply superb.

While the M3 continues to capture the imagination of fans, another BMW has been a fixture in Bastogne for several years: the 325i E30, with its torquey engine, which finished second in the last three editions thanks to the efforts of “Mr G&A Racing,” Guino Kenis. He is clearly aiming for victory this year and has inspired other top drivers to compete in similar cars, including returning local hero Fred Caprasse, former road cycling world champion Tom Boonen, the versatile and loyal Fred Bouvy, Billy Simoné, and local driver Charles Blerot. Add to that Olivier Collard's superb 323i E21 “Snijers look,” and it is clear that the propeller brand will be very much in the spotlight at this year's Legend Boucles 2026!

Make no mistake, however, there won't only be Ford Escorts and BMW 3 Series cars at the start — far from it! For both the spectacle and the soundtrack, Loïc Pirot and Nicolas Blerot's Triumph TR7 V8s, arriving from France, are highly anticipated by fans. The same goes for Marc Duez's impressive Volvo 240 Turbo, one of the former winners at the start. Swedish cars will also be represented by the Glaude family, with Christian and Sébastien's 144s.

Fans of rear-wheel drive will be delighted by the presence of several very well-driven Opels, including track driver Maxime Martin (Ascona B), who will be enjoying his usual winter outing, Olivier Breittmayer (Manta 400), Romuald Thirion (Ascona-look 400), Christophe De Leeuw (Ascona A), Jean-André Collard (Manta 400), and others.

Several Mazda 323 4WDs hope to take advantage of their four-wheel drive on a course that is usually very slippery, led by Ghislain de Mévius, recalling the past exploits of his father Grégoire. Another track driver, Olivier Meurens, has also opted for a Japanese car, as have Hugo and Stéphane Gérard.

In the same vein, several Mitsubishi Lancer Evo3s are announced, including the return to the spotlight of former Belgian Group N vice-champion Nicolas Min, co-driven by Patrick Lambert, son of the late Joseph. Jean-Louis Meynart is also banking on the famous diamonds.

And then there is the Porsche 911, which also holds a place in the Legend Boucles hall of fame. At the time of writing, the identity of the driver taking the wheel of the orange racing car driven by André Lotterer last year had yet to be confirmed. Thibaud Mazuin, a regular competitor in the Belgian championship, will be competing in a 911 SC 3.0 Gr.4 in an attempt to surprise more than one favourite. As for Jean-Michel Martin, four-time winner of the 24 Hours of Spa and father of Maxime, he will be placing his trust in BMA, experts in the 911 Carrera RS.

Rounding off this impressive lineup are several original entries, including the highly effective Toyota Starlet “Rovanperä style” driven by Yannick Neuville, Thierry’s brother, who is perfectly capable of causing an upset. ‘Krugger,’ or Fred Bertrand, is betting on his now well-known first-generation Volkswagen Golf GTi “Close look,” with David Dahm as his co-driver. Francis Listrez, co-driven by Eric Marnette (another former winner), presents a superb Skoda 130 RS, a car closely linked to the history of the Boucles de Spa. Dimitri Van Hove is moving up a category this year with his inimitable and melodious Alfa Romeo GTV6, while Samuel Zune will do more than ever to honour the Mercedes 190 2.3 16S. To this list can be added Emmanuel Eggermont’s Toyota Celica 1900 RA20.

There’s no doubt about it: the public will have plenty to feast their eyes and ears on at the Legend Boucles @ Bastogne 2026 RTs! Place your bets...

Challenger – Who’s next?

The Challenger category, characterised by a maximum average speed of 80 km/h on the various Legend Boucles @ Bastogne RTs, has become the domain of regional crews over the years. Surprisingly, no one has yet managed to win twice, making this year’s challenge all the more formidable.

While some former winners, such as Blerot–Dauby (2019), Van Hove–Windeshausen (2020), and Theis–Perrée (2022), have decided to try their luck in the “Legend” category this year, the battle for victory in the Challenger class promises to be fiercer than ever.

Other teams who have already tasted victory are determined to become the first to win a second time. In particular, the last two winners — Maxime Jaumin and Pierre-Yves Godfrin (BMW 325i), and Pierre-Henri Kettels, this time co-driven by Mélissa Poncin (Ford Escort Mk2) — will be aiming for that historic second triumph.

That said, several crews who have never won at Bastogne are ready to leap out of the starting blocks! Among them: Bruno and Florent Nielen (BMW 325i), silver medallists in the last two editions; Jean-Pascal Durré and Julien Ernoux (Ford Escort Mk2); Luc Caprasse and Tony Kairis (Opel Manta 2.4, discovering the joys of rear-wheel drive); Mathieu Boeur and Aurélie Leroy (Opel Ascona B 2.0 S); Jonathan Georges and Elisabeth Fagnant (Peugeot 205 GTi); Pascal and Romane Gérard (BMW 325i); Michael Tirtiaux and Michael Arnould (BMW 325i); Franz Verbeke and Stéphane Higuët (BMW 325i); Philippe “Coluche” Bai and Catherine Magette (Lada VFTS); David Bossicart and Valérie Peret (Volkswagen Golf GTi); and Pascal Lemince and Pierre-Edouard Paris (BMW 325ix).

This is by no means an exhaustive list, to which we can also add Frenchman David Hugla with Loïc Dethier (Mitsubishi Lancer 2000 Turbo), bringing an international flavour to the category.

And then there are the newcomers who could well shake things up! This year, Guillaume Glaude is competing in the Challenger class, accompanied by Bastien Allard in his usual Volvo 142. As for Johnny Delhez from Liège, with Vincent Duchesne, he is returning to his past loves (2018 and 2019), and his beautiful Ford Escort Mk2, reminiscent of Vatanen–Richards, is aiming for a spot on the final podium. The same goes for André and Guillaume Lausberg (Porsche 911), who have decided to follow in Delhez’s footsteps.

A well-known figure on TV Lux sports programmes, Antoine Masson will be swapping the microphone for a helmet and overalls this year! He will be driving a Peugeot 205 GTi, with Dany Monfort as his co-driver. Good luck to them!

What can we say about the new arrival, Jérôme Martiny, who has just returned from the Dakar, the legendary rally raid, which he once again completed brilliantly — even securing a podium place in the “Malle Moto” category! Without missing a beat, he is switching from the handlebars of a Honda to the wheel of a BMW 325ix, with Frédéric Lejeune at his side, aiming to carry forward his Saudi momentum. The Longchamps native will undoubtedly be one of the standout personalities at the start of the Legend Boucles @ Bastogne 2026.

In short, predicting the top three in the Challenger category this year will once again be difficult, especially as the competition will be even fiercer, with not one but three time trials per RT. Competitors will need to be spot-on at the Flying Finish — and that’s not all!

Classic 65 – More open than ever!

While the “Legend” category naturally draws the attention of spectators and observers at the Legend Boucles @ Bastogne, the other field is definitely worth a closer look. The “Classic 65” category brings together the top specialists in high-average-speed regularity, in contrast to the competitors in “Classic 50,” who favour lower speeds.

A glance at the list of “Classic” winners in the event organised by the Royal Automobile Club of Spa shows that the big names — both drivers and co-drivers — in “Régul” have always made a point of converging on Bastogne. Leading the way is Yves Deflandre, widely regarded as the expert among experts. Winner in 2016 with Patrick Lienne and last year with his son Benoit, the driver of the orange Porsche 911 is often considered a giant of the discipline. However, this year he will be conspicuous by his absence, having

opted instead for the Rallye Monte-Carlo Historique — a choice sure to spark lively debate.

It would take a truly clever person to predict the winners of the 2026 race! In fact, only one team at the start can boast of already having made its mark on the winners' list. Winners in 2024, Michael Bartholemy and Patrick Lienne — three-time winner among co-drivers — will start with slightly higher odds than their direct competitors. A double victory in sight?

There are sure to be many who disagree, starting with those who have already stood on the Bastogne podium without ever taking gold. This includes Claude Ninane (3rd in 2023), now partnered with Freddy Cara (Opel Kadett C); Eric Gengou and Didier Gathy (Volvo 142 S, 2nd in 2023 and 3rd in 2019); and Daniel Reuter and Robert Vandevorst (Porsche 911 S, 3rd in 2017, 2nd in 2016, 3rd in 2014).

This group of favourites also includes other crews who specialise in regularity racing: Julie Kenis (Guino's daughter) and Bjorn Clauw (BMW 325i E30); René Georges and Romain Lahaye (Volkswagen Golf GTi); François Destrée and Frédéric Van Rijckevorsel (Volvo 122); Pascal Van de Moortel and Michael Demortier (Mini Cooper 1300); Michel and François-Xavier Cartiaux (Ford Escort Mk1); Pieter Van Loocke and Tom Vanbecelaere (Citroën Visa GTi); and the Germans Rolf Droste and Fabian Mohr, sharing the cockpit of a gleaming BMW M3 E30.

There is no shortage of originality in the "Classic 65" category, especially as the Legend Boucles 2026 sees the return of Italians Giorgio Schön and Francesco Giammaria, who are sure to turn heads with their gleaming Ferrari Dino 308 GT4. This will not be their first attempt in the heart of the province of Luxembourg.

Keep an eye on the top regional drivers, who are always formidable on their home turf, including Joël and Pol Keller (Volkswagen Golf GTi), Michael and Théo Weiller (BMW 2002), Gilles and Noah Gérard (Peugeot 205 GTi), Jonathan Feller and Pascal Demarche (BMW 1602), and many others.

As for the famous priest in the race, Jean Dewandre, he returns with his brother Philippe and the well-known Talbot Sunbeam Ti — a true blessing for the "Classic 65" category, which is always exciting to follow.

Classic 50 – Three in a row for Dufrasne and Dogné?

Traditionally, this is the category for purists of consistency, experts at achieving a "zero" score. For two days, the battle will rage in the Classic 50 category, especially as this

2026 edition marks the return of a crew that has already won twice in Bastogne: Dominique Dufrasne and Isabelle Dogné! In 2022, they triumphed in a DAF Marathon before repeating the feat the following year in a BMW 323i E30. This year, they will be back in the Bavarian car, aiming for a hat-trick.

The competition promises to be fierce. The most recent winners, Patrice Simon and Christian Bernard, will be aiming for a double victory in their Porsche 924 — unless Mario Varrewaere and Pablo Cracco, in their original Nissan Pulsar and silver medallists last year, move up the rankings.

The group of favourites also includes other well-known crews in the regularity category, notably Jean-Christophe and Mathieu Henderickx (Alfa Romeo Giulia GT Junior 1300), Clemens and Harold Noe (Lancia Delta HF), Alain Collee and Didrik Mortier (Alfa Romeo Giulia GT Junior 1.6), Peter Wouters and Charly Laroye (Alfa Romeo 1750 Berlina), Felix Quirijnen and Philip Copmans (Citraën Dyane 6), Pieter Van Loocke and Tom Vanbecelaere (Citraën Visa GTi), and Rik Dumortier and Bert Werniers (Austin Mini 1000).

Also worth noting is the international contingent, once again led by Italians Eugenio Rossi and Michele Perlino in their superb Lancia Flavia Coupé 1800. Alex and Peter Beavan are coming from the British Isles in a Volvo 122, which is also the choice of Dutchmen Olaf Pothoven and Pieter Van Leusden. Their compatriots Bart Thielen and Michiel Sanders have opted for an Opel Ascona B 2.0 S, while Frenchmen Philippe Tarbouriech and Xavier Rousset will be racing in a Peugeot 505 SR.

In terms of originality, the field also includes a Fiat 131 Racing (Mores–Schrobiltgen), a 1973 BMW 520 (Evrard–Laurent), and the unmissable Trabant P601 driven by Jean-Pierre Thonard and Benoit Pennartz.

In short, there will be something for everyone!