MotoGP legend Rossi set to make FIA World Endurance Championship debut in Doha


Valentino Rossi. PIC: FIA WEC / DPPI

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

Racing history will be written at Lusail International Circuit this month as Italian motorcycle racing legend Valentino Rossi swaps two wheels for four, making his debut in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) 2024's first race, the 'Qatar Airways Qatar 1812 km'.

Now entering its twelfth year, WEC remains the world's premier international sportscar championship with multiple cars racing simultaneously across two categories (Hypercar and LMGT3).

Paired with the globe's premier racing drivers, it unleashes a high-octane, wheel-to-wheel spectacle for fans across eight exhilarating dates worldwide. The journey commences in Qatar, then ventures through Italy, Belgium, France, Brazil, USA, Japan, and concludes in Bahrain

Iconic Italian driver Rossi, who attended the official WEC rookie test in Bahrain last year will drive the BMW M4 GT3 in the WEC's all-new LMGT3 category for Belgian squad Team WRT, alongside teammates, Maxime Martin of Belgium and Ahmad Al Harthy of Oman.


Italy's Valentino Rossi ahead of a MotoGP event, in this file photo.

Speaking in November about his foray into endurance racing, the 45-year-old said: "I am very excited to compete in the FIA WEC. It is the next step for me to participate in a world championship, not only in Europe but to race globally again.

"I am already familiar with the car after this season, but the format with three drivers from three different performance categories will be new for me. Overall, I believe we will be very well positioned."

Familiar to MotoGP fans as the greatest motorcycle racer the world has ever seen, Rossi's career is the stuff of legends, having won a total of nine Grand Prix championships in his career, with seven coming in MotoGP's 500cc class (four with Yamaha and three with Honda).

Famously nicknamed 'The Doctor' due to the cool and clinical way he sees off his opponents, Rossi is widely considered as one of the most entertaining riders of all time, hailed for his artistic ability to handle high speeds and dexterity on the corners that has earned him the title of GOAT.

He has amassed the highest number of points in MotoGP history, a total of 6,357 over the course of his career with no other racer coming close to this feat. Similarly, he has the highest number of podiums in history, finishing in the top three a whopping 235 times, 76 more times than his fellow countryman and veteran racer, Giacomo Agostini and he holds the record for the most premier class victories, with 89 to his name.

Rossi is also the only road racer to have competed in more than 400 Grand Prix.

It's perhaps unsurprising that he was inducted into the MotoGP Hall of Fame after the conclusion of the 2021 season.

The father-of-one, who proudly wears the number '46' on his back, may have retired from his 25-year long motorcycle racing career in 2021, but his love of racing has never been confined to motorcycles.

Over the course of the past two decades, Rossi has turned his talents to a range of open-wheel, sports, touring, rally and endurance racing championships including testing a Formula One Ferrari in 2006 at Valencia where he lined up alongside racing heavyweights Schumacher, Coulthard and Webber.

In 2022, he competed in the GT World Challenge Europe for Team WRT, driving an Audi R8 LMS in the endurance and sprint categories and last year he took the third podium driving a BMW M4 GT3 car in Dubai as part of the 24H Series.

One thing's for sure: all eyes will be on Team 46 as The Doctor gets behind the wheel of his GT3 BMW. Rossi is a once-in-a-generation talent who creates unforgettable memories on the track for his fans - don't miss out on this spectacular display of driving prowess from one of the world's most iconic names in motorsport!

Al Rayyan defeat Al Shamal as Al Wakrah hold leaders Al Sadd

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA


Roger Guedes celebrates after scoring Al Rayyan's second goal against Al Shamal.

Al Rayyan secured a narrow victory over Al Shamal, while leaders Al Sadd were held in a goalless draw by Al Wakrah as the 14th week of the Expo Stars League concluded yesterday.

In a closely contested match at the Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium, Al Rayyan overcame Al Shamal 2-1. Gabriel Pereira and Roger Guedes had almost secured a clean win for the eight-time former champions, scoring in the 66th and 71st minutes respectively, before Mohsen Al Yazidi netted a 97th-minute consolation goal.

The victory propelled Al Rayyan to 25 points as they solidified their position in fourth place, while Al Shamal remained in 10th place with 11 points.

The match commenced with high intensity from both sides. An early attempt by Al Shamal's Moroccan midfielder Younes Belhanda was thwarted by Al Rayyan's goalkeeper Fahd Younis. Despite multiple opportunities, Al Rayyan were initially unable to convert their chances into goals. Guedes came close in the 33rd minute, but his attempt narrowly missed the target.

Al Shamal's Mahdi Salem almost scored an opener in the 45th minute when he unleashed a powerful strike that hit the crossbar.

As the second half unfolded, the game maintained its balance until Pereira broke the deadlock for Al Rayyan in the 66th minute, following an assist from Thiago Mendes.

Guedes extended their lead five minutes later, putting Al Rayyan in a commanding position.

Al Shamal appeared to have narrowed the gap in the 80th minute through Mohamed Omar, but the goal was disallowed for offside after consultation with VAR technology.

Despite a late goal from substitute Al Yazidi in stoppage time, Al Shamal were unable to overturn the deficit as Al Rayyan clinched their eighth win of the season.

Meanwhile, at Al Janoub Stadium, Al Wakrah impressively held League leaders Al Sadd in a goalless draw. The match's turning point came in the 70th minute when Al Sadd's Akram Afif, fresh from being named Man of the Tournament at the AFC Asian Cup, missed a crucial penalty kick.

Despite Al Wakrah being down to 10 men after goalkeeper Saoud Al Khater was shown a red card, they managed to hold off Al Sadd's advances, marking the second stalemate between the two teams this season.

After sharing the points, Al Sadd continued to lead the table with 32 points, closely followed by Al Wakrah with 28 points.

Also yesterday, Al Duhail and Al Arabi faced off at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, where the match ended in a dramatic 2-2 draw.

Al Duhail appeared to be cruising to victory with Ibrahima Diallo and Al Moez Ali scoring in the 64th and 69th minutes, respectively. However, Al Arabi made an impressive comeback despite being reduced to 10 men after Muhammad Alaa's red card as they found the back of the net twice in the closing stages of the game.

Ahmed Fathi scored their first goal in the 84th minute while Omar Al Somah scored one off a penalty in the 88th minute, securing a point for Al Arabi and keeping them in fifth place on goal difference, just ahead of Al Duhail.

Van Dijk late header seals League Cup for Liverpool

AP - LONDON

Virgil van Dijk headed Liverpool to a record-extending 10th English League Cup trophy by securing a 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley yesterday.

The center back's header in the 28th minute of extra time settled a tense clash that had ended 0-0 in regulation.

It clinched an eighth piece of major silverware for Jurgen Klopp and ensured the Liverpool manager will not end his final season at the club empty-handed. Klopp will step down at the end of the season, but victory in the League Cup has kept his team on course for an improbable quadruple of trophies.

Liverpool currently lead the Premier League table and is still in contention for the FA Cup and Europa League.

Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino was hoping to win his first major trophy in England after previous spells with Southampton and Tottenham.

He will have to wait, while Klopp can look ahead to more glory before walking away.

Liverpool and Chelsea had met in both domestic finals in 2022 and on both occasions Liverpool came out on top to lift the League Cup and FA Cup on penalties after two goalless draws.

This was another close match that saw both teams have goals ruled out for offside and other chances missed.

Eventually Van Dijk came up with the decisive moment and perhaps the start of a trophy-laden end to Klopp's reign.



English manager Jurgen Klopp (centre) lifts the trophy after Liverpool defeated Chelsea to win the English League Cup final in London, yesterday. AFP

Verstappen eyes fourth title as rivals face 'brutal' reality

AFP - PARIS

Max Verstappen looks set to cruise to a fourth consecutive drivers' title with Red Bull as the dominant team again this year when the curtain rises on Formula One's longest-ever season in Bahrain.

Whatever the outcome of an independent investigation into allegations of controlling behaviour by team boss Christian Horner, Red Bull have built a crushing level of momentum and a stunning car that oozed potential in pre-season testing.

After sweeping to a record 21 wins in 22 races last year, with Verstappen claiming a record 19, plus 12 poles and nine fastest laps as he accumulated a staggering total of 575 points, Red Bull have every reason to believe they can stay on top.

In such a demanding calendar, much will depend on the form of Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez, who won twice last year before fading, if the team hope for a clean sweep this time.

Ferrari, entering a second season under the guidance of Frederic Vasseur as team principal, who has recruited seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton to replace Carlos Sainz in 2025, will be aiming to improve on their one triumph last year.

Hamilton's Mercedes team have also improved their car and both he and team-mate George Russell declared it as more "driveable" and comfortable.

FORMULA ONE: 2024 SEASON CALENDAR

- March 2: Bahrain Grand Prix, Sakhir
- March 9: Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, Jeddah
- March 24: Australian Grand Prix, Melbourne
- April 7: Japanese Grand Prix, Suzuka
- April 21: Chinese Grand Prix, Shanghai
- May 5: Miami Grand Prix
- May 19: Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, Imola
- May 26: Monaco Grand Prix
- June 9: Canadian Grand Prix, Montreal
- June 23: Spanish Grand Prix, Barcelona
- June 30: Austrian Grand Prix, Spielberg
- July 7: British Grand Prix, Silverstone
- July 21: Hungarian Grand Prix, Budapest
- July 28: Belgian Grand Prix, Spa-Francorchamps
- August 25: Dutch Grand Prix, Zandvoort
- September 1: Italian Grand Prix, Monza
- September 15: Azerbaijan Grand Prix, Baku
- September 22: Singapore Grand Prix
- October 20: United States Grand Prix, Austin
- October 27: Mexico Grand Prix, Mexico City
- November 3: Brazilian Grand Prix, Sao Paulo
- November 23: Las Vegas Grand Prix
- **December 1: Qatar Grand Prix, Lusail**
- December 8: Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, Yas Marina

Arabian Drag Racing League season concludes amidst record participation

THE PENINSULA – DOHA


Qatar Racing Club Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khaled Al Thani poses with the champions of the respective event categories at the conclusion of the 2024 Arabian Drag Racing League season.

After six rounds of excitement, enthusiasm, and engine rivalry amidst a distinctive crowd presence and strong competition among the champions of drag racing in Qatar and the Gulf region, the final round of the 2024 Arabian Drag Racing League came to a thrilling conclusion.

Sponsored by Qatar Racing Club (QRC) Chairman H E Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Thani, the League's competitions were marked by high excitement and breath-holding moments. The competition revolved around two fronts: the first concerning the podium of the sixth round, while the second, which drew the most attention, focused on the season championship. This resulted in the highest number of participants in this round, surpassing all previous six rounds, with more than 140 racers participating across the nine categories.

The most prominent competition was seen in the Super Street Outlaw class, with a fierce competition for the season title continuing until the final race, where both Hussein Akbar and Jaber Al Maghribi competed. Akbar secured his fourth championship win, crowning him the champion of the round and the current season. Al Maghribi settled for second place for the second consecutive round.

The 4.50 Index category witnessed a heavy surprise with the early elimination of the leaderboard topper Hassan Ashkanani and the runner-up Basel Abbas in the first round. This opened the door for third-placed Fawaz Ibrahim Ahmed Ali to claim the championship title if he reached the semi-finals. Indeed, he achieved third place in this round, while the final race was contested between Ibrahim Abbas Abdullah and Rashid Al Balushi. Eventually, the title went to the former, who secured his first podium of the current season.

Qatari driver Ahmed Al Abdullah needed to qualify for the head-to-head match-ups to clinch the current season title in the 4.80 category. He succeeded in doing so, regardless of the round's results, ultimately securing the title.

In the 4.0 category, reaching the final race solidified Muslim Al Qallaf's place as the current season's champion, irrespective of the race's outcome against Badr Khurshid, who managed to claim victory again.

The competition heated up for the championship title in the 8.5 Index category, eventually won by Abdulaziz Al Swaylim, who emerged victorious in the final face-off against Hussein Ashkanani.

Mohammed Jawad clinched the title in the 9.0 Index category, despite not reaching the semi-finals in this round. The podium was completed by Qatari racer Majed Al Sharshani in first place and Ali Al Zankawi in second.

Super Street Bike category saw the conclusive race between Mashari Adel Al Marri and Fahad Al Hamoud. The race resulted in favour of Al Marri, marking his first victory in the championship and leaving Al Hamoud in second place.

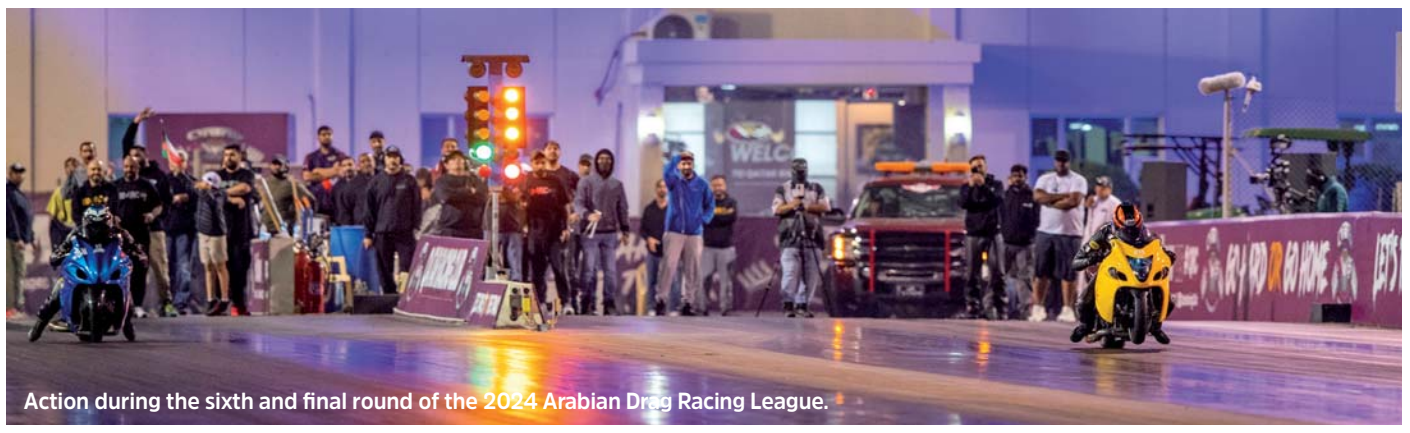
Based on these results, Ahmed bin Bilal was crowned the champion of the current season in this category.

Moving to the Super Street Bike category, winner of the first, fourth, and fifth rounds, Mohammed Bu Rashid, secured the third-place podium in this round, which was enough for him to clinch the champion's title. Meanwhile, the final race of this round, contested between Musfir Al Musfir and Mohammed Abdullah Al Salem, ended in favour of Al Musfir, marking his first title in the current season.

In the 8.5 Index category dedicated to motorcycles, Mohammed Al Mahrous secured both the season's championship and the first place in this round, while Fadi Abu Jamous claimed second place.

At the end of the competitions, QRC Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khaled Al Thani honoured the media who covered the championship rounds in appreciation of their efforts.

This was followed by the presentation of commemorative shields from QRC to Basal Salem Al Subah Motorsport Racing Club and its director Saif Awadh Al Mutairi, as well as to the head of the Drag Racing Committee at the club, Khalid Al Ajil. Then, the ceremony concluded with the crowning of the top three winners in each category, culminating in the crowning of the champions of the current season.


Action during the sixth and final round of the 2024 Arabian Drag Racing League.

Qatar to face Kazakhstan in FIBA Asia Cup Qualifier

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Qatar's national team will be up against Kazakhstan in the Group E match of the FIBA Asia Cup 2025 Qualifiers at the Al Gharafa Club hall today. The match starts at 7:00pm.

The FIBA Asia Cup 2025 Qualifiers is being played across three windows: February 2024, November 2024, and February 2025. A total of 24 teams will be aiming to qualify for the region's flagship men's national team competition

The draw for the qualifiers placed Qatar in Group E alongside Iran, Kazakhstan, and India.

Al Annabi are seeking to snatch victory in today's match after they narrowly lost 74-76 away to Iran in their opening match. Despite Iran's lead in the first quarter, the Qatar national team were a strong match for the hosts in the second and third, where they succeeded in finishing the third with a lead of 48-47.

While the Qatari team was close to achieving victory, as the result indicated progress, the Iranian team succeeded in coming back from behind for a thrilling victory.

The Qatar national team went through light training yesterday evening, after returning from Iran. After participating in the friendly international tournament, which was held in Tehran over four days and with the participation of six teams, during which they played three matches, they won two matches and lost one.

The technical staff of our national team, led by the Greek coach Thanasis Skortopoulos, announced the national team's list for the qualifiers, which includes 23 players.

Australia win rain-hit third T20 against New Zealand

AFP – AUCKLAND

A "clinical" Australia beat New Zealand by 27 runs in the rain-shortened third Twenty20 in Auckland yesterday to complete a clean sweep of the series.

Responding to Australia's 118-4 from 10.4 overs, New Zealand scored 98-3, falling short of a target adjusted to 126 off 10 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method.

The required run rate grew quickly after the home side lost two quick wickets before Glenn Phillips posted their top score for the second straight game, finishing on 40 not out off 24 balls.

Australian pace bowler Spencer Johnson impressed in his first appearance of the series taking 1-10 off his two overs.

Three rain stoppages curtailed Australia's innings after they were asked to bat first at Eden Park. Opener Travis Head top scored with 33 off 30 balls but the most punishing batting was player of the match Matthew Short's 27 off 11 balls and Glenn Maxwell's 20 off nine.

Australia dominated the series, winning the opener by six wickets in Wellington on Wednesday, followed by a 72-run victory in game two in Auckland on Friday.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 118 for 4 (Head 33, Short 27) **beat New Zealand** 98 for 3 (Phillips 40*, Johnson 1-10, Zampa 1-20) **by 27 runs** (by DLS method)

LEGENDS TOUR BY VISIT QATAR

PSG legends continue to write club's history in Doha

THE PENINSULA – DOHA


Former Paris Saint-Germain stars pose with the winner's trophy ahead of the Legends Tour by Visit Qatar, in Doha.

Eight legends of Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) recently travelled to Doha for the organization of the Legends Tour.

Organized in partnership with Visit Qatar, the legends' journey combined football with the discovery of the country's wonders.

For this very first Legends Tour in Doha, PSF honoured some of its greatest legends with the presence of Ronaldinho, Pedro Miguel Pauleta, Claude Makélélé, Didier Domi, Javier Pastore, Jay-Jay Okocha, Nenê, and Ludovic Giuly. Beyond its unique scope, this event also served to continue strengthening the solid ties that unite the Club with its partners.

During the trip, the illustrious former PSG players participated in the "Legends Tour by Visit Qatar" tournament. After a few hours of decisive plays and spectacular goals, it was the Visit Qatar team led by Claude Makélélé that won the first edition of the tournament.

On the evening of February 14, the PSG legends intensely experienced the victory of their successors by a score of 2-0 against Real Sociedad, in the first leg of the Champions League round of 16.

This significant moment was shared with 150 supporters of the Rouge & Bleu, as part of an exceptional screening, creating unforgettable memories that will remain forever etched in their memory.

The players also participated in the Qatar International Food Festival for a special live cooking show, during which renowned chef Alexandre Guillo hosted a workshop alongside Ronaldinho, Javier Pastore, and Claude Makélélé.

Then, invited by the PSG President Nasser Al Khelaïfi, they attended the WTA Qatar TotalEnergies Open, and later enjoyed a dinner on Al Maha Island, a symbol of Qatari hospitality excellence.

This unprecedented gathering of legends was also an opportunity to discover the Club's facilities and its partners, such as the Aspetar clinic and the PSG Academy where the legends met with their supporters, offering training to young talents.

The Legends Tour also marked a stop at the Ooredoo Doha Marathon, which celebrated a record participation of 13,000 people. Furthermore, the Parisian legends met children from the Qatari Foundation Education Above All.

Commenting on the memorable tour, Brazilian legeng Ronaldinho said: "Participating in the first organization of the Paris Saint-Germain Legends Tour was a huge joy, as this Club holds a very important place in my career. The holding of this first legends tour is a beautiful acknowledgment from the Club!"

The association of players who have made the Club's history reflects the ambitions and values of PSG, particularly the transmission and sharing of its extraordinary history with younger generations. The Club expressed its profound gratitude towards its legends and continues to rely on their experiences to grow and face challenges.

Ashwin bags five-for as India chase 192 in England Test

AFP – RANCHI

Spinner Ravichandran Ashwin took five wickets as India bowled England out for 145 on day three of the fourth Test yesterday to set up a chase of 192 to clinch the series.

India reached 40-0 at stumps, needing another 152 to win their third straight match and the five-Test series. Skipper Rohit Sharma was unbeaten on 24, with Yashasvi Jaiswal on 16.

Opener Zak Crawley earlier top-scored with 60 but the rest of the England batting faltered against India's spin, with Ashwin returning figures of 5-51 and Kuldeep Yadav 4-22.

England lost regular wickets to end their innings in the final session, leaving it up to the bowlers to level the series and send it to a fifth-Test decider in Dharamsala.

India's bowlers did their job after wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel hit 90 in the morning session to reduce the hosts' deficit after they began the day on 219-7. Ashwin took the new ball on a pitch with cracks and variable bounce and struck in consecutive balls to remove Ben Duckett, caught at short leg for 15, and Ollie Pope, lbw without scoring, as England were reduced 19-2.

Root, who scored an unbeaten 122 in the first innings, put on 46 with Crawley before Ashwin and India reviewed an lbw appeal, with tracking software indicating the ball pitched just in line and would have hit Root's leg stump.

Crawley raised his fifty but was bowled by Yadav. Yadav then removed Ben Stokes just before tea when the England captain was undone for the second time in the match by a ball that barely bounced ankle high and was bowled off his pad. Jonny Bairstow fell on the first ball after tea and the innings folded soon after. Ben Foakes fell for a 76-ball 17 off Ashwin. England spinner Shoaib Bashir took his first Test five-wicket haul to help bowl India out for 307, giving the tourists a lead of 46 going into their second innings. India were rescued in the morning session by Jurel, who put on a 76-run eighth-wicket stand with overnight partner Yadav. Veteran fast bowler James Anderson broke the stand when Yadav, on 28, played on to give the veteran seamer his 698th Test wicket.

Jurel hit six fours and four sixes in his 149-ball stay and picked up his maiden Test half-century.

Bashir trapped debutant Akash Deep lbw for his fifth wicket and kissed the ground in celebration.

BRIEF SCORES: India 307 (Jurel 90, Bashir 5-119) and 40 for 0 (Rohit 24*, Jaiswal 16*) **need 152 runs to beat England** 353 and 145 (Crawley 60, Ashwin 5-51)


India's Ravichandran Ashwin (right) celebrates the dismissal of England's Joe Root. AFP

THE HIGHER ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF QATAR EXXONMOBIL OPEN 2024



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We look forward to your participation in our upcoming events

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