

Tests have reportedly shown that Electric GT's Tesla Model S development car is capable of running at racing speeds for more than 30 minutes. Gemmell concedes that this may depend on driving style to a certain extent, but he expects most drivers would be able to complete the race with around 20 per cent charge remaining.

There are no plans to include car swaps or mandatory pit stops, although the pit lane will be open to change from slicks to wets if the heavens open.

Gemmell says he's not against the idea of a strategic element and in fact he's considering some pretty radical options: "Pit stops can add to the spectacle and they bring the whole team into the equation. If we could get approval from the FIA and the teams to artificially wet the tracks – possibly under fan request – that's something we'd look at."

He has no intention of following Formula E's FanBoost system, he says: "I'm in two minds about that. I think it was a good thing to try in Formula E, but it's not one of the features we'd seek to emulate. There are some similar ideas that we're exploring, but it's early days yet."

Fans will be able to stream races via Periscope, Twitch and YouTube, as well as interacting directly with the teams using social media platforms, Gemmell explains: "It's important to engage younger fans. Streaming will be one aspect of that, alongside social engagement and perhaps tie-ins with gaming platforms. I think that's something that a lot of sporting events will be embracing over the next few years."



ABOVE Payá is the only man to have taken on the challenge of the Dakar Rally in an all-electric vehicle

Uniquely, however, this will be a two-way link. The cars will be connected to the web and they will retain the giant central touchscreen system found in Tesla's road cars.

"We want to give the driver some sensation that the audience is cheering them on," says Gemmell. "It's a new opportunity to have a big screen in front of them and we're open to ways we could exploit that."

LUDICROUS MODE

Testing has so far centred on the now-discontinued P85+ variant of the Tesla Model S. This uses a single 350 kW (470 hp) electric motor driving the rear wheels with a 310 kW (416 hp) battery pack. It can store up to 85 kWh on a full charge, hence the P85 tag (the 'plus', in case anyone's wondering, is essentially a sports pack applied to the production car, which doesn't alter the power output).

In standard form, the P85+ is good for 0 to 60 mph in 4.2 seconds with an electronically-limited top speed of 130 mph (210 kph). Electric GT's tweaks have raised the limiter slightly to 220 kph (138 mph) and the 0 to 60 mph sprint is now estimated at around three seconds.

Gemmell and his colleagues chose the P85+ because it was the fastest Model S available in rear-wheel drive. The thinking was that this would make the racing more spectacular for drivers and spectators alike, but Tesla now appears to be moving towards four-wheel drive for its higher powered models, which presents something of a dilemma.

"Our conversations with Tesla are ongoing about this," Gemmell admits. "If we could continue to get hold of the P85+ we would use them, but Tesla is moving more towards the four-wheel drive versions and it's vital that we showcase the best technology out there." ►



ABOVE The success of Formula E, which kicked off its third season in Hong Kong, has proved an inspiration for the GT series

FIA/Formula E