

BELOW New world order: the Tesla Model S, seen here at the championship's Ibiza launch

FROM ZERO TO HERO? ELECTRIC GT IS BORN!

Gimmick or game-changer? **Chris Pickering** quizzes one of the founders of the world's first zero emissions all-electric GT series

SINCE the advent of Formula E – now entering its third season – it almost seems strange to think that electric racing was once regarded as an alien concept. And yet one question remains: With electric road cars now knocking on the door of a range of 300 miles and supercar-scaring performance from the likes of the Tesla Model S, why can't we just race those?

That's exactly what the founders of the Electric GT series asked themselves. Tesla-owning IT entrepreneur Mark Gemmell and professional racing driver Agustín Payá aren't perhaps the typical championship promoters. But in a world where Google is developing cars and Apple is reportedly in talks to buy McLaren, they may very well represent the future.

"It's always good to look at business with

fresh eyes," comments Gemmell. "If the automotive industry wanted to create another electric racing series it would already be doing it. You find people like us coming in because that's not happening."

The two co-founders got to know each other a few years ago and began seriously discussing the possibility of an electric GT championship in the spring of 2015. Payá already has considerable form in the world of electric motorsport, having used battery-powered vehicles in everything from stage rallying to ice racing. He's even taken on the Dakar Rally in the only all-electric vehicle ever to do so, the aptly-named Acciona 100% Ecopowered.

Clearly, Formula E is something of a benchmark for the new series, but its creators have set out to do things a

little differently. The series will kick off next summer, with 20 identical track-prepared Tesla saloons. These will be run by 10 international teams and driven by professional drivers with a diverse range of backgrounds. British IndyCar driver Stefan Wilson has been confirmed, alongside GP3 racer Vicky Piria, former F1 test driver Dani Clos, plus NASCAR racer and environmental activist Leilani Münter.

Not only will they be using production-based cars with a relatively mild degree of modification, but they plan to race on conventional circuits. The championship will call at seven European venues, including the Nürburgring, Paul Ricard and Barcelona. There are also plans to hold three non-championship events in the Americas.

Each race weekend will consist of a 20-minute practice session, a 30-minute qualifying session, a day race (60 km) and a dusk race (60 km) with recharging periods in between. The events are billed as 'a weekend-long festival of technology and innovation for sustainability'. ▶