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Former Indy 500 winner de Ferran to resume racing career

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When Gil de Ferran walked away from the IndyCar Series four years ago, he wanted to find a new career that brought the same kind of challenges.

For a while that goal was fulfilled while the two-time CART champion and 2003 Indianapolis 500 winner worked first as race director for the BAR team in Formula One and then sporting director for the Honda Formula One team.

Quickly, de Ferran became disenchanted with both jobs and, last July, found himself pondering his next venture.

This week, the French-born Brazilian announced he has formed De Ferran Motorsports, a team that will run Acura LMP2 sports cars in the American Le Mans Series. And de Ferran, at age 40, is getting back into the cockpit to lead the team.

“I haven’t been in a race car in four years, since I walked away,” de Ferran said Wednesday in a telephone interview with the Associated Press. “After that long out of the car, it’s a huge challenge. But I’m hoping to regain the form I once had.”

“Anyone who knows me, knows I won’t be satisfied if I’m not the fastest in every session and every race.”

A smart driver who earned the nickname The Professor for his inquisitive and studious ways, de Ferran isn’t taking this rebirth as a driver lightly.

“I’m training hard, driving go-carts and working 24/7 getting people in place,” he said. “This is a big job.”

One of the first things de Ferran did was hire longtime racing administrator John Anderson as the new team’s general manager. Anderson helped Dario Franchitti win the Indy 500 and the IndyCar Series title last year as an Andretti Green Racing team manager.

“John knows everybody, has everyone’s respect and knows a tremendous amount about all aspects of the sport,” de Ferran said. “I’m lucky to have him.”

In 2003, de Ferran was driving for the elite Penske Racing team in the IRL. He not only won Indy that year, but finished the season with a victory at Texas Motor Speedway. After that, he walked away from the cockpit, he said, for good.