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Karun Chandhok

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Mark Blundell

We speak to Mark Blundell about his sportscar career, the Blancpain Endurance Series and of course that lap.

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The first of a new feature. You know what they say, a picture is worth a 1000 words.

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Until recently, Adam Pigott had never seen Group C. Safe to say, he was impressed...

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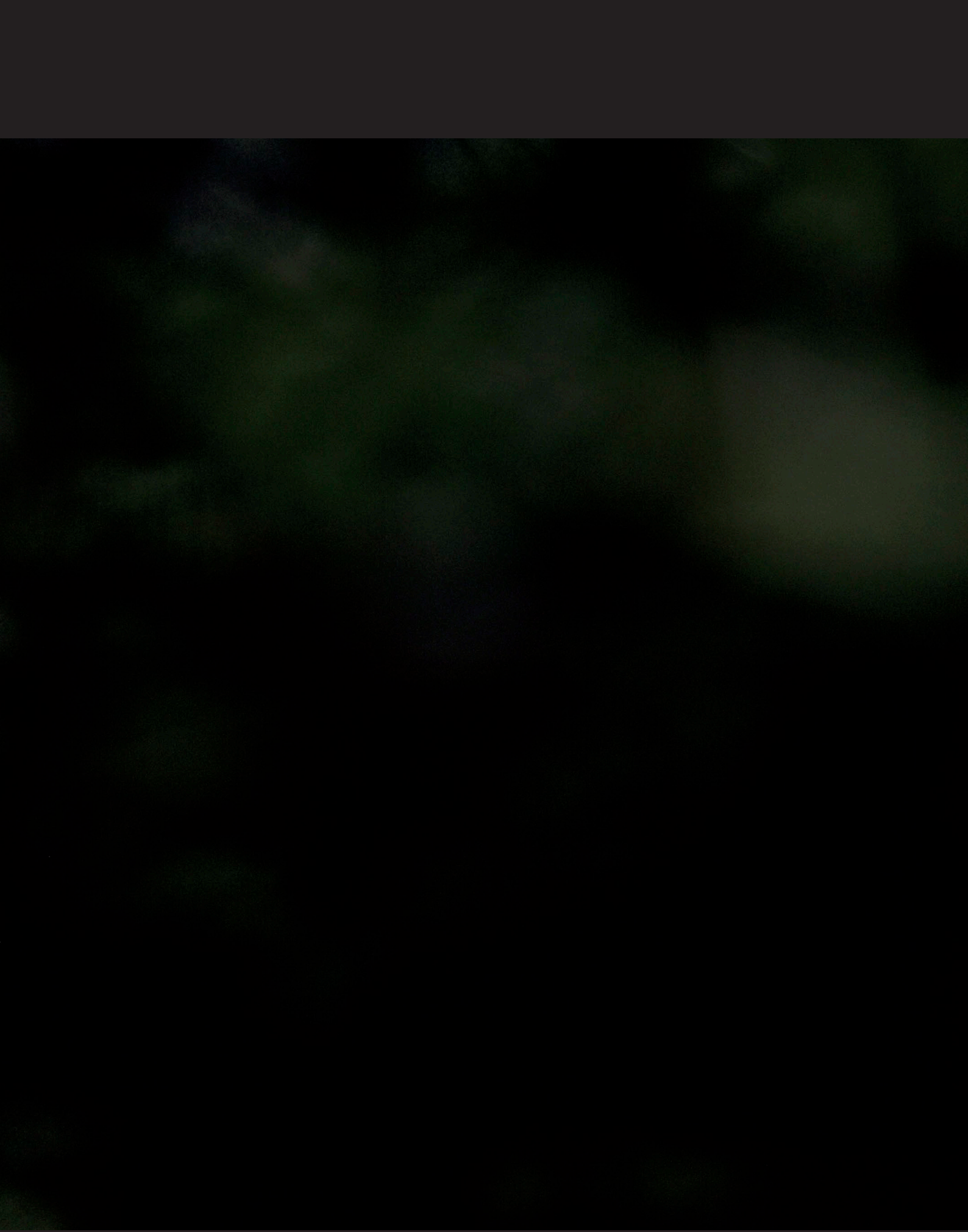




Photo: Jake Yorath

in focus





World Endurance Championship Spa Six Hours
Dan Bathie used a Nikon D300s and 80-200 F2.8
Nikkor. Shutter speed 1/6000th at F6.3, ISO200.



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in focus





ALMS Laguna Seca
Nick Busato used a Nikon D3s and 300mm F2.8 +
1.4x Tele. Shutter speed 1/1600th at F5.6, ISO100.

in focus





World Endurance Championship Spa Six Hours
Jake Yorath used a Nikon D300s and 10-20 F4-5.6
Sigma. Shutter speed 1/80th at F22, ISO250.

in focus







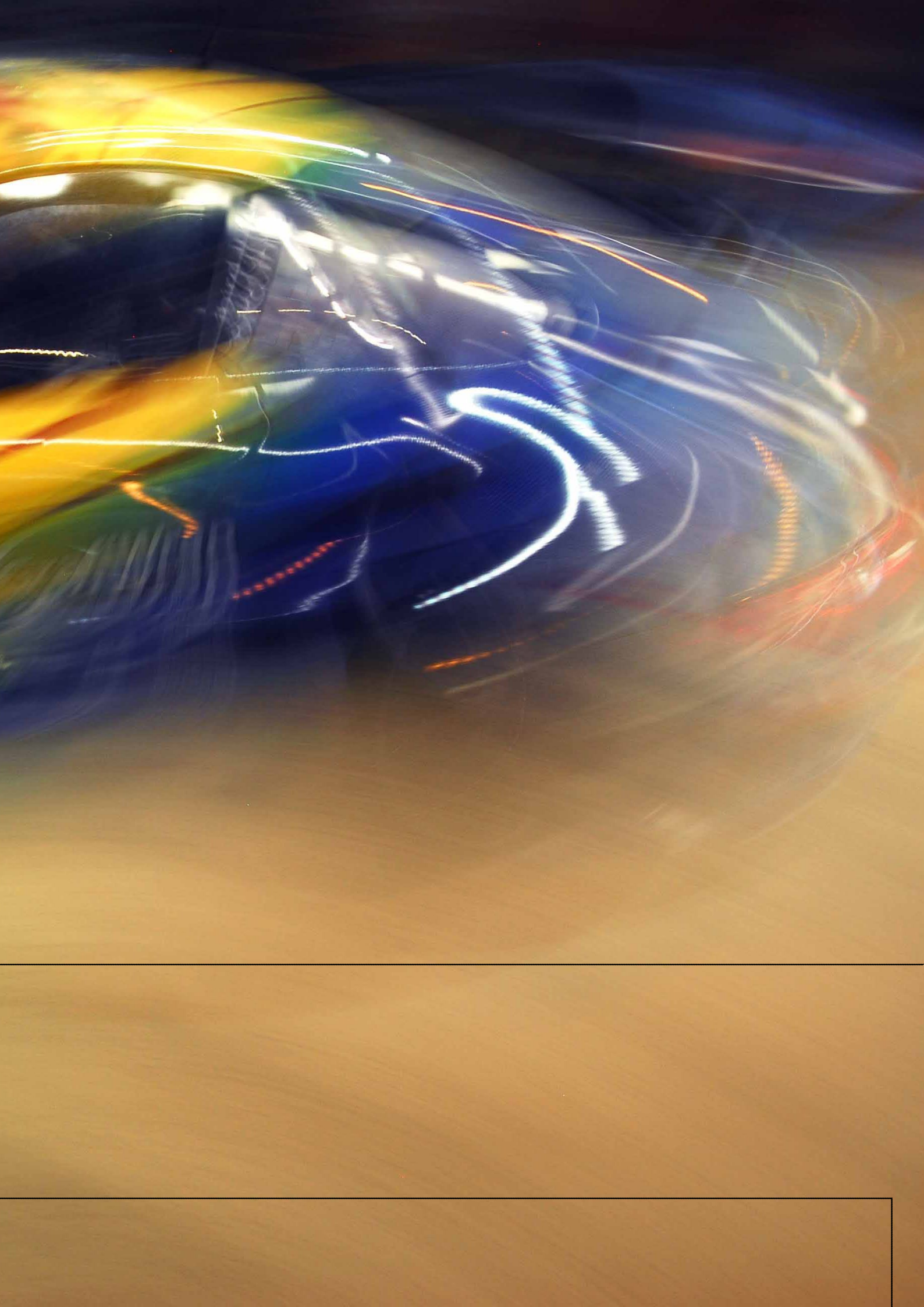
World Endurance Championship Spa Six Hours
Jake Yorath used a Nikon D300s and 10-20 F4-5.6
Sigma. Shutter speed 1/5000th at F4, ISO320.



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in focus





World Endurance Championship Spa Six Hours
Dan Bathie used a Nikon D300s and 300 F2.8
Nikkor. Shutter speed 1/200th at F2.8, ISO200.

in focus

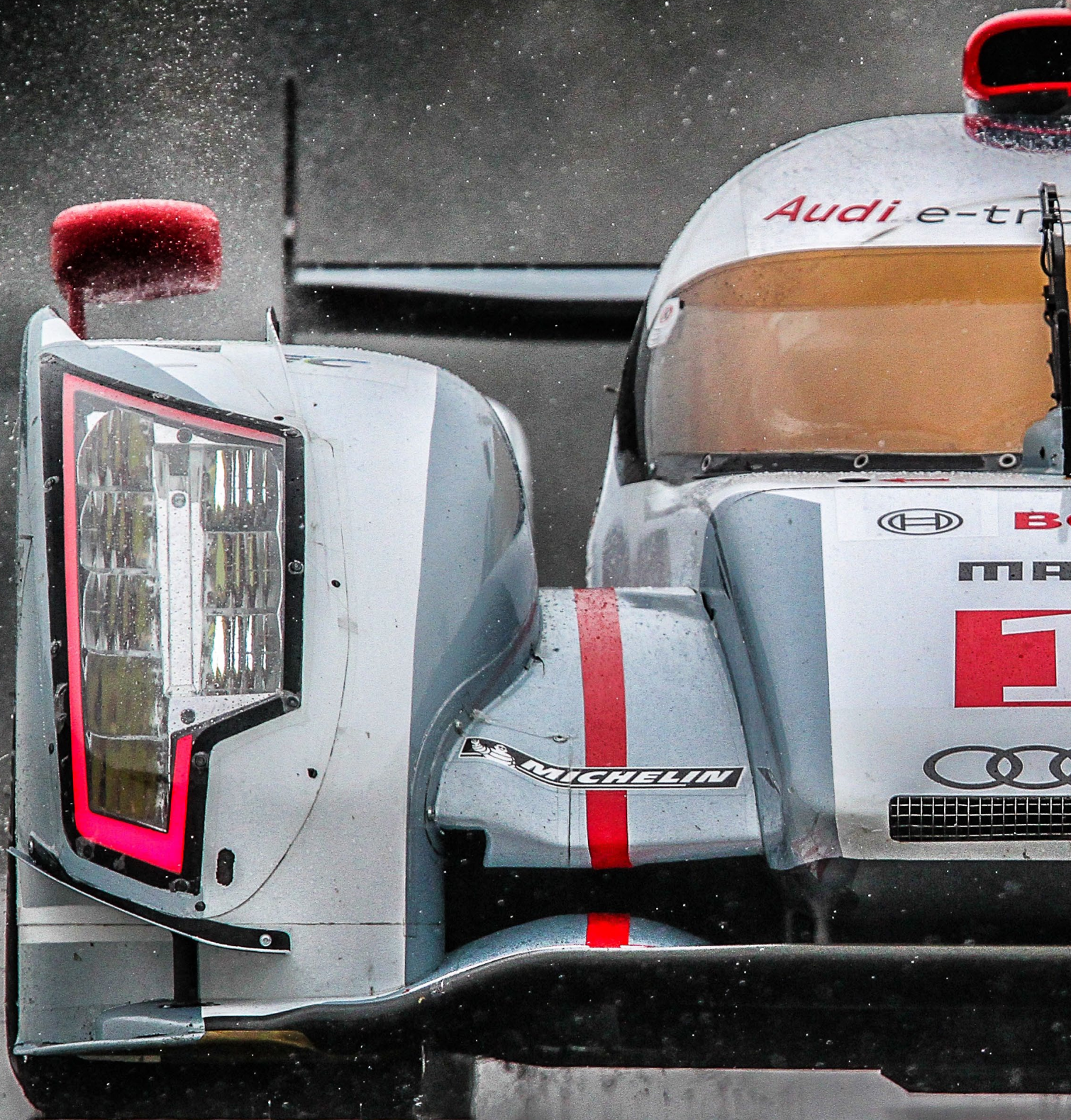


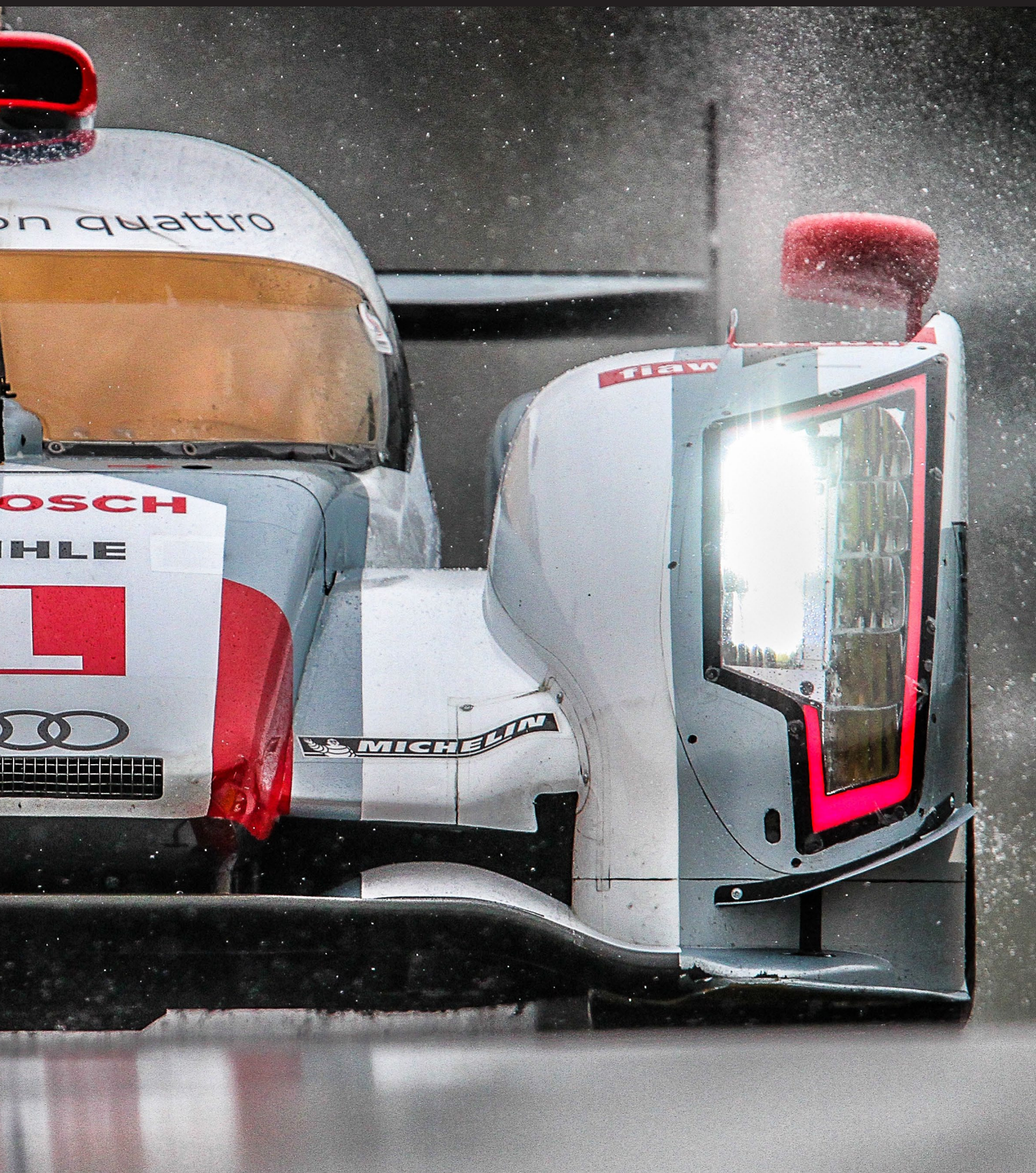


Sebring 12 Hours

Nick Busato used a Nikon D7000 and 300mm F2.8 + 1.4x tele. Shutter speed 1/400th at F2.8, ISO100.

in focus





World Endurance Championship, Spa Six Hours
Gerlach Delissen used a Canon 7D and 300mm F4 + 1.4x
converter Canon. Shutter speed 1/8000th at F2.8, ISO800.

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in focus





Avon Tyres British GT Championship, Oulton Park
Jake Yorath used a Nikon D300S and 300mm F4
Nikkor. Shutter speed 1/500th at F4, ISO200.

in focus





Blancpain Endurance Series, Monza
Dan Bathie used a Nikon D300S and 300mm F4
Nikkor. Shutter speed 1/400th at F5.6, ISO200.

in focus





World Endurance Championship Spa Six Hours
Jake Yorath used a Nikon D300s and 80-200mm F2.8
Nikkor. Shutter speed 1/80th at F2.8, ISO400.





Patriot Games

This British GT Championship season we're going in depth, with live text updates, photo galleries, interviews and blogs all weekend adding up to the most comprehensive coverage around. It's all part of the service.

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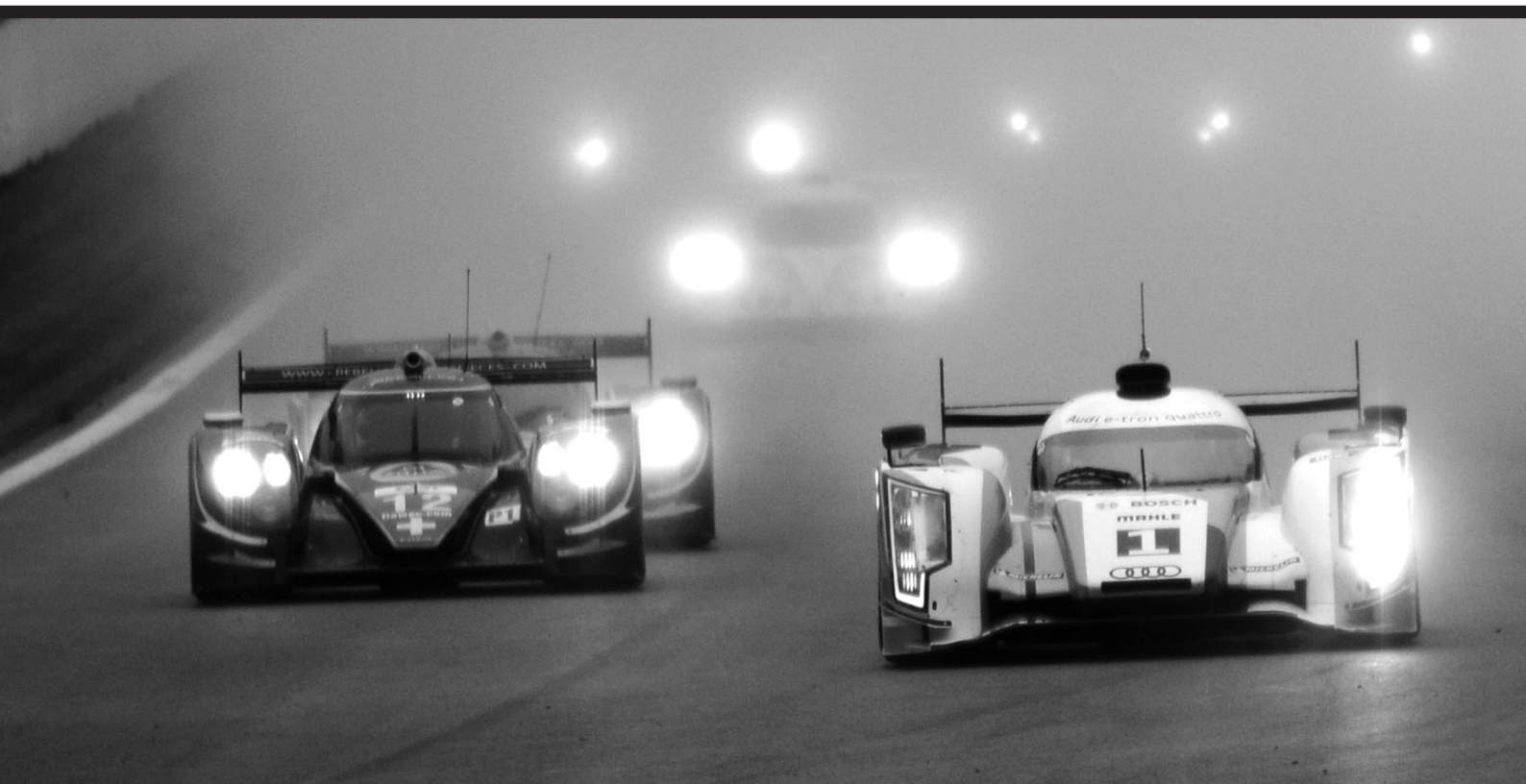


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WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?



The 2012 season is well under way now, and it's given us a good chance to inspect the lay of the land. What can we take from the first few races of the year?
Stephen Errity and Jake Yorath investigate.



1: WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP SERIOUSLY IN NEED OF MANUFACTURERS

No pressure, Toyota. Having missed their planned debut at the second round of the championship in Spa, the Japanese team will now debut the TS030 in the harsh spotlight of the Le Mans 24 Hours itself next month.

There could hardly be greater weight resting on their shoulders. As entertaining as the class battles at Sebring and Spa were, there was no getting away from the fact that the intense rivalry at the front of the field between Peugeot and Audi was sorely missed. It took three years for Peugeot to get their 908 properly on terms with Audi - but every fan wants Toyota to be pushing the Germans hard right from the first Wednesday practice session at La Sarthe.

It's a lot to ask, but perhaps their more recent previous experience of Le Mans with the TS020, coupled with F1 expertise as well as probably the most advanced knowledge of hybrid drivetrains of any manufacturer, will help Toyota get up to speed quicker. As interesting as the Audi intra-team rivalries are, it would be a shame if that's all we have to look forward to at the head of the field between now and Porsche's arrival in 2014. Hybrids have started to take over from pure diesels as the manufacturers' weapon of choice. But their cost and complexity means that the gap between the big teams and the privateers, which at times in the past few years had been just small enough to pique some interest, will once again become a yawning chasm the smaller outfits have no hope of bridging. SE

2: GT1 WORLD ALL IS NOT LOST



Photo: Jake Yorath

The GT1 cars running in the Dunlop Supercar Challenge series at Zolder back in April were a clear reminder of what's been lost with the GT1 World Championship's move to GT3 machinery only for the 2012 season.

A bit louder, a bit wider and a bit more aggressive than the ubiquitous GT3s, the old-school GT1s will always have a special appeal for sportscar fans that's going to be hard to match. But if you focus on the here and now for a moment, you'll find a GT1 World Championship that's still delivering entertaining racing and providing a showcase for some very talented drivers to strut their stuff. Oh, and the Team Vita4One BMWs sound incredible.

The series' opening round at Nogaro was an Audi whitewash, raising fears of a one-dimensional season, but the second event at Zolder was a more open affair, with wins for the aforementioned BMW as well as the Muhlner Motorsport-run Porsche 911s. Costs have forced the championship to visit less high-profile circuits than before, but if one of them happens to be near you, GT1 is still a show worth going to see. It's hard to say the same about the GT3 European Series, however. Two years ago, it was providing some of the best production-based racing in Europe, but now, with an exodus of teams to the Blancpain Endurance Series and other options, it's looking distinctly underwhelming, with only 12 cars entered so far this year. The organisers say more are in the wings, but with GT3s now being allowed in the European Le Mans Series and gentleman drivers showing a strong preference for long-distance races, recapturing this championship's past glories is going to be a tall order indeed.

SE



Photo: Markus Berns/ SRO



Photo: Dan Bathie



3: BLANCPAIN ENDURANCE SERIES TIME WELL SPENT

We've been banging this drum for a while now, but the Blancpain Endurance Series really is a superb championship: 50-plus cars in three-hour races at Monza, Silverstone, Spa, Navarra and the Nurburgring is a very good start.

Add to that some absolutely top-drawer drivers competing in the Pro class, good variety of cars right down through the field and interesting episodes such as Valentino Rossi's guest drive at Monza, and you're really on to a winner.

The Italian round also brought further news of the series' blue-riband event, the Spa 24 Hours at the end of July. Reports indicate that over 90 entries have been lodged for the race's 62 grid slots - all you need to know about the health of pro-am GT racing in Europe right now. The wet conditions in Monza made it tricky to pick out an early-season favourite, but one thing is for certain - McLaren has a lot of work to do if the MP4-12C is to live up to its promised potential this season. Balance of Performance adjustments may be partly responsible for its lack of outright pace, but there are some pretty serious reliability issues to be worked out, too.

For now, BMW, Porsche and Mercedes rule the roost, with the Ferrari teams likely to mount a stronger challenge in warmer, drier conditions. **SE**

4: BELGIUM UBER ALLES

'It should be called the Belgian Endurance Series'. So went the joke in the press room at Monza after Marc VDS Racing, Belgian Audi Club Team WRT and KRK Racing swept the podium at the first round of the 2012 Blancpain Series, all with at least one Belgian driver aboard.

BMW, Audi and Mercedes were the cars of choice, but the teams were all home-grown Belgian outfits. Marc VDS and in particular Prospeed are well established names, but KRK put in an especially impressive performance in light of their relative newcomer status.

And the trend isn't limited to the Blancpain Endurance Series. The WRT Audis scored a double one-two at the opening FIA GT1 round in Nogaro, while the round-two feature race at Zolder was won by Muhlner Motorsport, running a Porsche 911 under the Exim Bank Team China banner. The latter victory was particularly significant, as Muhlner have been endurance specialists until now, with little experience of the fast and furious sprint-race pitstops that characterise GT1 World.

Belgians are making their mark in prototypes, too: TDS Racing by Thirion triumphed at the opening round of the European Le Mans Series at Paul Ricard, while Bas Leinders and Maxime Martin are set to reprise last year's Le Mans 24 Hours appearance. After 2011's LMP1 Aston Martin, they've moved down to the hotly contested LMP2 class, driving a Morgan-badged OAK-Judd with Danish software entrepreneur David Heinemeier Hansson. Maxime Martin in particular is one to watch out for: already in 2012 he's put in a storming final stint to clinch the aforementioned Marc VDS Monza victory in the Blancpain series, not to mention his heroics in the wet at Zolder, where he led the field in the ageing Valmon Racing Aston Martin DBRS9. The best sportscar driver in the world without a works deal right now? He's definitely one of them, anyway. SE





5: MCLAREN HAVE A MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB



The hype that surrounded the launch (to customers, at least) of the MP4-12C was tremendous, and all the 'Formula One technology' talk got the teams rolling in to buy the car. But it has been nothing short of a disaster so far.

Unreliability has been a huge problem, with team sources saying they must constantly be on top of the car, guessing its next problem. On top of that, the cars have a nasty habit of catching fire, with both Gulf Racing and Apex Motorsport suffering burnouts with their cars - the Apex fire coming having done just a handful of rolling demo laps.

However, it isn't just not going that's the problem. When the car is going, it isn't particularly fast, and a number of drivers have complained that it is terribly unpredictable to drive. It's not been the most solid of starts for the guys from Woking in their plan for GT world domination - there's a lot of work left to be done.



It's not like the teams are all low grade - Hexis are reigning World GT1 champions, United Autosports are hugely professional and ASM Team have championship winning pedigree. The drivers are far from shoddy, too, with Rob Bell, Duncan Tappy and Alvaro Parente all doing their best. The car, right now, just needs a hell of a lot of work.

That said, very few others can be counted in the 'building their own road car from scratch' list, so plaudits have to go to them, despite the issues.

JY

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Making His Mark

Group C Nissan, Group C Peugeot, GT1 McLaren, LMP MG, GTP Bentley. Mark Blundell has tamed them all around the Circuit de la Sarthe and elsewhere, and now he's back in sportscars with United Autosports for the full Blancpain Endurance Series in a McLaren MP4-12C. *Stephen Errity* sat down with the British veteran at Monza to discuss the highs and lows of an impressive career.

Photography: Dan Bathie



T

he car rounds the Ford chicane and powers down the pit straight into a world of the unknown. It's a struggle to slow down for the Dunlop chicane, and immediately the big Lola-Nissan bares its teeth. A flurry of jinking movements on the steering wheel as the back end wrestles to break free through the tight left-right sequence. Back on the power, attack the sweeping curves of the Esses. Another heartstopping moment as it tries to break loose mid-corner. Hanging on for dear life now up the hill to Tertre Rouge. A little twitch on the exit, get the power down, don't lose the momentum onto the Mulsanne straight. Up through the gears and Christ, it's still spinning the wheels in fourth. Scenery becoming an intangible blur now. Hard on the brakes, hack it down through the box and monster the kerbs on the first chicane. Still going. Still fighting. A moment to take breath, then the second chicane comes up. Made it through. Mulsanne corner next. Just stopped in time. Ease it around and flat out once more. Flash through the kink before Indianapolis. Left, squirt of power, right through Arnage, lairy slide on the way out. Approaching Porsche Curves now, this is where it could all go wrong. Car on the left! He's on a slow lap. Keep it planted, don't miss the turn-in point. Guide it through the rollercoaster, easy on the throttle. Open it up at the exit, just the last chicane to go now. Wrestle it through, back end makes one last attempt at freedom, but falls into line. Hammer down across the line - it's pole!





"I'D NEVER DRIVEN THE CAR IN ANGER,
AS IT HAD NEVER RUN PROPERLY."



With that lap, Mark Blundell snap-oversteered his way into sportscar racing's history books. It was 1990, his second year at Le Mans with the works Nissan team, and after a frustrating few days of practice and qualifying, during which the R90CK had never run right, he simply took the chance and went for it. "It was a toss-up between myself and Julian Bailey as to who was going to do qualifying," he remembers. "We actually tossed a coin - that's how we decided. The last session was the first time the car had run properly all week, and it was still overboosting. We weren't on qualifying tyres - we had to use the hardest race tyre we had, because we had no data. I'd never driven the car in anger, as it had never run properly."

Blundell completed a cautious outlap, trying to get a feel for the mysterious and uncooperative machine underneath him. "I never even hit full throttle before the start of the lap," he says. "Then the team came over the radio and said it was overboosting. I was actually supposed to abort the lap, but for some bizarre reason my radio didn't work - probably because I'd unplugged it! And that's how I started

the lap - I unplugged the radio and said 'you know what - I'm going for it'. Fortunately for me, it worked out!" he grins. "Every time I went into a corner, it was completely new. To this day, I maintain that if I'd had more knowledge and understanding of the car and some qualifying tyres, I'd probably have been about four seconds quicker."

Pole in 1990 was a welcome uplift from the misery of the previous year, when, after months of build-up, Blundell didn't even get to turn a wheel in the race, as the car retired when Julian Bailey had a coming-together with a Jaguar after only 35 minutes. What's it like going through all the preparation and then not getting a chance to compete? "People don't realise how tough the week before is," explains Blundell. "The race is actually the easy bit. Beforehand, you've got early mornings and late qualifying, then you don't get to bed till 2 or 3am because you're debriefing. Then you get your day off, which isn't a day off, it's promotional work. So, come the weekend you feel like 'now we can get down to work,' which makes a retirement very hard to take. I remember that weekend well,

though, but for different reasons - we spent all night in the funfair!"

Blundell was racing the Nissan at a time when Group C was an accepted path to Formula 1 for up-and-coming drivers. Names such as Schumacher, Brundle, Frentzen and Wendlinger plied their trade in sportscars as young hotshoes, before becoming even better known on the F1 stage. Blundell himself dovetailed his Nissan campaigns with a testing programme for Williams F1. "Group C and F1 were chalk and cheese in many ways," he notes. "The Nissan had big downforce, a big venturi tunnel and big horsepower - it was making 1100bhp at Le Mans - but it was heavy, too. The nuances of driving a racing car are the same, though: four wheels, throttle, brake and steering wheel. There's just a different character to every car."

Fast-forward to 1992, and Blundell was behind the wheel of what was perhaps the ultimate Group C creation: the Peugeot 905. By now, the line between sportscars and F1 was becoming well and truly blurred, and the 905 has often been described as Grand Prix car with wheelarches. "That wouldn't be far off," agrees Blundell. "I think

"THE TEAM CAME OVER THE RADIO AND SAID IT WAS OVERBOOSTING. I WAS ACTUALLY SUPPOSED TO ABORT THE LAP, BUT FOR SOME BIZARRE REASON MY RADIO DIDN'T WORK - PROBABLY BECAUSE I'D UNPLUGGED IT!"

when Nissan came along with the Lola carbon chassis, it was the start of a new era for sportscars, then Peugeot took it to another level. The 905 was a very refined racing car, a magnificent machine.” 1992 was the year of Blundell’s first, and so far only, Le Mans win, co-driving with Derek Warwick and Yannick Dalmas. “After the race, we all went back to the car, and it started up first time,” he remembers. “We were pretty sure it could have done another 12 hours no problem. Winning Le Mans with a French manufacturer was wonderful, but it was a bit strange, as we didn’t really celebrate in a big way. I went to my hotel to get my hire car, drove back to Paris, caught a plane and I was home on Sunday night, so it was a bit bizarre.”

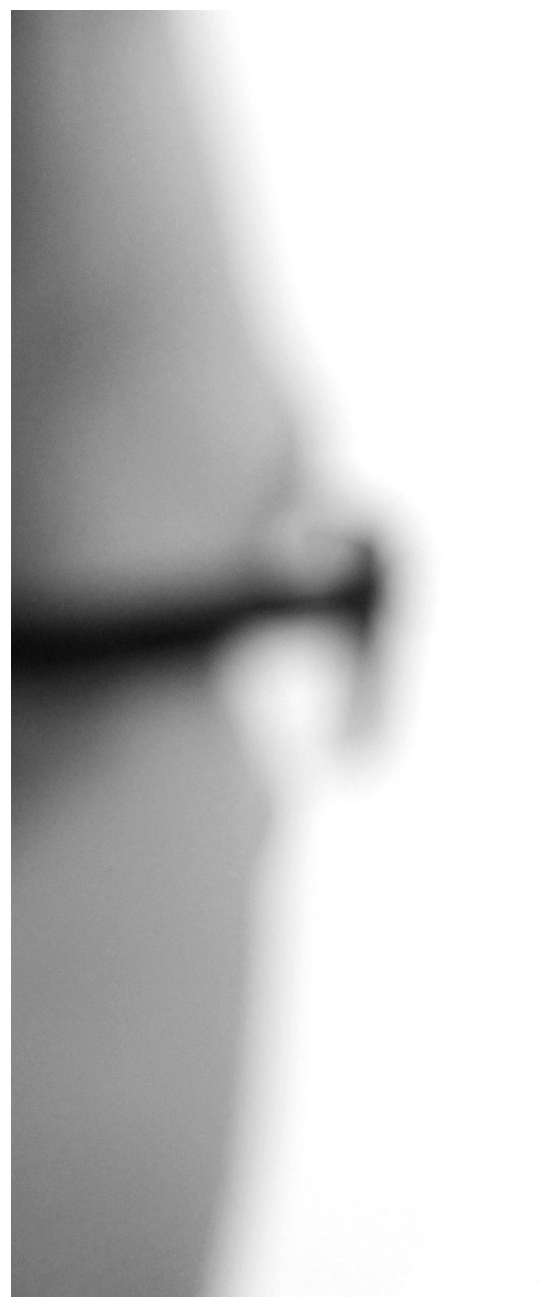
Blundell had come a long way to reach the glamorous heights of standing on the podium at Le Mans. Whereas many racers get started in karting, this North London boy cut his teeth in the dog-eat-dog world of junior motocross. As a career path, it’s a world away from the carefully planned pampering of today’s young driver academies, but Blundell reckons it was more of a help than a hindrance. “I came from doing races where you’d have 40 guys on the start line, elbows out and already tangled going into the first turn. It meant I was never concerned about going into a corner side-by-side, wheel-to-wheel with someone, so I think it made me that bit more robust. My career path was slightly different to the norm. I went from the bikes to Formula Ford, took big step to F3000, missed out on F3 and also went sideways into sportscars while I was still on my way into F1. Group C was a stepping-stone to F1 and you don’t really see that with sportscars these days.”

As a driver who moved from sportscars to single-seater,

back again, Blundell is well placed to judge the difference between the two disciplines. “A lot of single-seater guys who come into sportscars end up really enjoying it, as it gives them a little bit of time to relax. Whereas in F1 it’s so focused, everything sits on your shoulders. In sportscars, you can take in a bit more of what you’re achieving and share some of the weight with the other guys. There’s a lot more camaraderie here, with better relationships between drivers who are sharing the highs and lows.”

Following victory in 1992, Blundell’s next outing at La Sarthe came after the Group C era had drawn to a close. Driving a McLaren F1 GTR for GTC Gulf Racing in 1995, he came fourth in a race that’s best remembered for the torrential rainfall that persisted for much of its duration. “To be fair, we probably should have won that year, as we led for quite a while,” he remembers. “Unfortunately, Ray Bell, the car’s owner, went off the road two or three times, so we had to come back through the field from last place during the night. By the end we were up to fourth. Maurizio Sandro Sala, my other team-mate, was a great little driver. It was bittersweet, we probably could have taken the laurels that year if things had been different. It was a character-building race, no question, but at least we had the machinery to let us fight our way through the field. Le Mans is a soul-destroying race if you don’t have a car under you that gives you the ability to move forward.”

Blundell then stayed away from Le Mans for six years as he focused on his F1 career. But in 2001 and 2002, he was back, driving an LMP675 MG-Lola that he describes as ‘one of the most fun cars I’ve driven’ - especially around Le Mans. “It had a huge amount of grip under power,” he enthuses. “We ran in third overall for a long time during the 2002 race.”



“LE MANS IS A
HAVE A CAR
TO MOVE FOR



A SOUL-DESTROYING RACE IF YOU DON'T
UNDER YOU THAT GIVES YOU THE ABILITY
FORWARD."

"THAT BENTLEY WAS THE BEST SPORTSCAR I'VE EVER DRIVEN. AN UNBELIEVABLE CAR"

I think I was in the car for three hours and 45 minutes in the wet. By the end of it, I was shouting to them over the radio, 'I can't do any more, I'm knackered!' It was great to be associated with the heritage of MG, too, but unfortunately the depth of resources just wasn't there, and the engine and reliability were big weak points. But I think the effort had the desired impact and put them on the map."

2003 brought a move to an even higher-profile British works team: Bentley. With the factory Audi squad staying away that year, and two promising development seasons under its belt, this was Bentley's big chance, and Blundell was right at the sharp end. The campaign kicked off at the Sebring 12 Hours in March, a race frequently cited as more demanding than the 'big one' at La Sarthe in June. "It's a more physical race and the circuit is more demanding, yes," says Blundell. "For me, I'd recently had a shoulder operation after a Supermoto bike accident, so I had a couple of bolts in my shoulder. That was a little bit of a hindrance, but we finished third, which definitely showed our potential. I was reminded of the Peugeot era: that Bentley was the best sportscar I've ever driven. An unbelievable car - not only pretty, but with performance to match. I think we should have won Le Mans that year as well. We led for a long time, we were the fastest car on the track, but we had two problems with £1 battery terminals. That was a big letdown, no matter what you do you can't compensate for those little

things. But it was great to be a part of such a historic effort."

After 2003, Blundell stepped out of the driving seat to focus on his business interests in property and sports management. But only a few years later, the track came calling again in the form of an offer to race newly-formed team United Autosports' Audi R8 GT3 car at the Spa 24 Hours. At the time, Blundell said: "I left at a good level with factory cars on a professional basis, and coming back here definitely has the word 'enjoyment' written underneath it, but at the the same time it's about understanding whether I've got enough to do something professionally again."

Evidently the answer was yes, as after some Grand-Am outings and a return to the Spa 24 Hours last year, he's now signed up for a full season in the Blancpain Endurance Series, driving United's brand-new McLaren MP4-12C GT3. Sharing the car in the Pro-Am class with team owner and one-time American F1 hopeful Zak Brown, plus gentleman racer Mark Patterson, Blundell is looking at things differently this time around. "On-track performance is one thing, but I'm also looking at what I can bring to the team, what can I do to get the guys I'm driving with up to speed, seeing where we need to improve. And it's quite enjoyable to be in that position. Don't get me wrong: when it comes to Sunday afternoon, I'm still racing as hard as anyone, but it's a different focus. It's not where I earn my living any more, so my way of looking at it is different

to what it would have been 10 years ago."

This more considered outlook is part of the reason why there's one race Blundell is not keen to return to: the Nurburgring 24 Hours. He drove for Volkswagen at last year's event, sharing a very quick, specially developed Golf 24 with Johnny Herbert, Eduardo Mortara and Franck Mailleux. "It's a circuit that I don't really have a lot of experience on and it's one of the circuits where anyone who does have experience reaps rewards," remarks Blundell. "My biggest concern is the fact that I'm at a stage in my life where racing isn't my core business any more. I've got other businesses looking after young drivers, property investments and the family, too. So to go to the ring and have 300-odd cars starting, with speed differentials and a variation in driving ability way beyond what I'd ever seen just didn't feel very responsible of me. Don't get me wrong: it's a super race, one of the toughest and most challenging you can do, but it wouldn't be high up on my list to go back."

What is on Mark's list for the rest of this season is Blancpain Endurance Series rounds at Silverstone, Paul Ricard, Spa-Francorchamps (24 Hours), Nurburgring and Navarra - plus the challenge of developing a McLaren that has so far proven to be less than totally reliable and somewhat off the front-running place. Make no mistake - the Mark Blundell story isn't over yet.



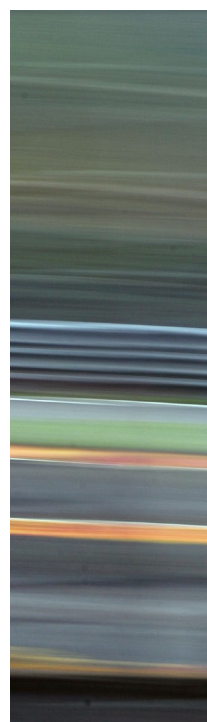


Spa Six Hours: In Pictures

The first of a new feature, we take a look back at the Spa Six Hours through the eyes of our photographers Jake Yorath and Dan Bathie.



Photo: Dan Bathie





1/ The Audis led away in unison, the e-trons would soon pull away in the damp conditions.

(Photo: Tim Yorath)

2/ The Am class winning IMSA Performance Porsche 997 heads towards one of the most famous corners in motorsport.

(Photo: Dan Bathie)

3/ One of the Audi e-trons climbs Raidillon and begins the long dash along Kemmel

(Photo: Dan Bathie)

4/ Through the crowd at Eau Rouge. The Gulf Lolas struggled all weekend though.

(Photo: Dan Bathie)



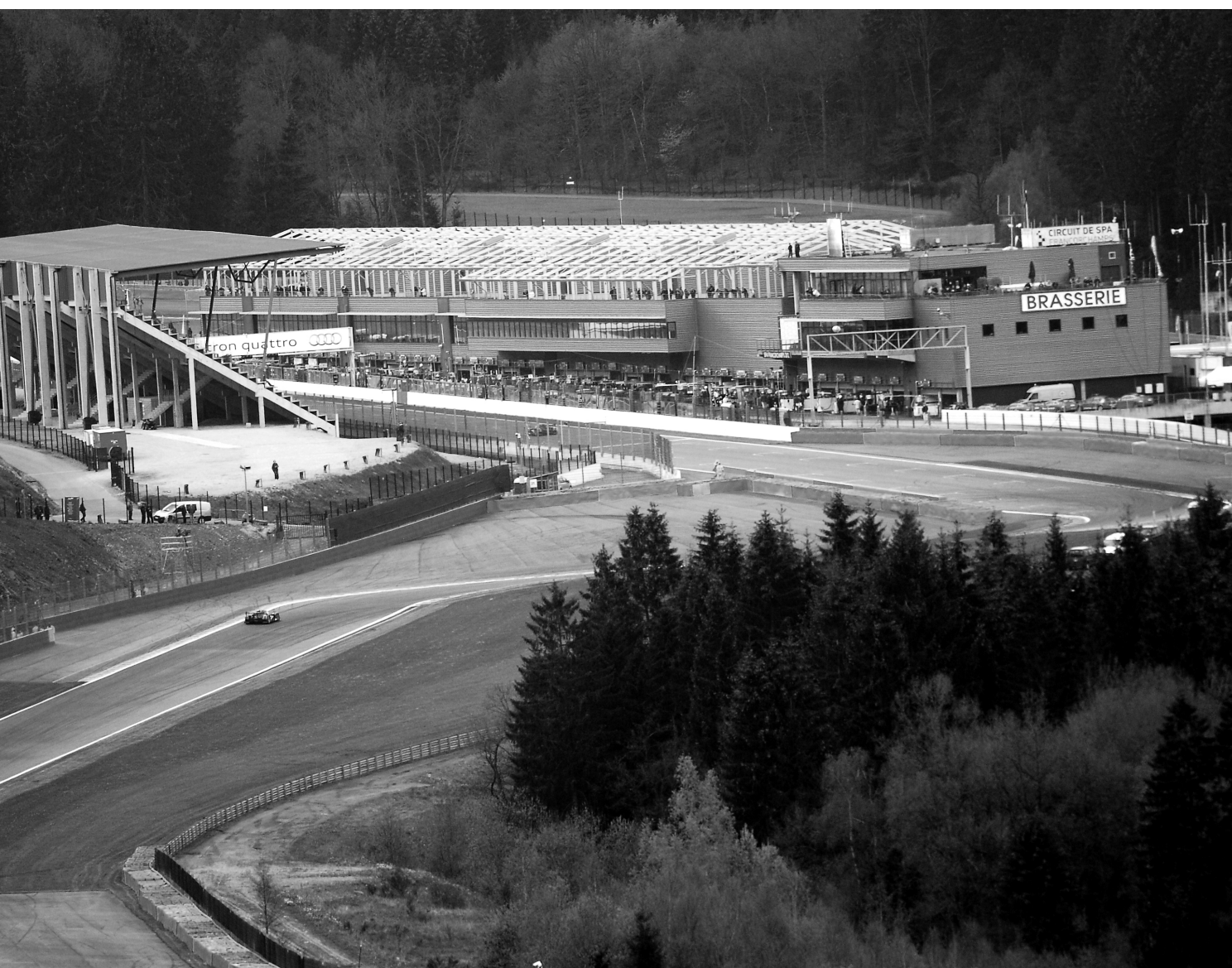




1/ The tyres and brakes smoke as a one of the Lotus Lolas comes in for a stop.
(Photo: Dan Bathie)

2/ The Rebellions couldn't match the pace of the Audis, but took the unofficial petrol class win.
(Photo: Dan Bathie)

3/ The View from the top of Rivage. It's fair to say that Spa has a few elevation stages.
(Photo: Dan Bathie)







1/ Andre Lotterer focuses before the start of the race.
(Photo: Dan Bathie)

2/ Just in case you forget where you are.
(Photo: Jake Yorath)

3/ The Signatech Nissan had a difficult race, finishing in 13th place.
(Photo: Dan Bathie)

4/ Pecarolo brought the Dome to Spa, and with it their dedicated fans.
(Photo: Jake Yorath)

5/ Larbre took 4th place in GTE Am with the Corvette.
(Photo: Jake Yorath)





1/ It could only be Spa.
(Photo: Jake Yorath)



1/ Duval, Dumas and Gene
post for the press.
(Photo: Jake Yorath)

2/ An easy victory? Maybe
but it was still celebrated
like any other.
(Photo: Jake Yorath)

3/ Romain Dumas celebrates
as he steps from the winning
car.
(Photo: Dan Bathie)



One season racing and one season testing, both for back-of-the-grid teams, does not sound like the best way to make a big impression in Formula 1. But against all the odds, that's what Karun Chandhok managed to do in 2010 and 2011. Thanks to his affable, laid-back manner, charismatic personality and deep appreciation for the history of the sport, he quickly became a popular figure in the often-ruthless F1 paddock and is well known to fans through his media work for the BBC and others. Now, though Formula 1's loss is sportscar racing's gain, as the 28-year-

IT'S KARU

Formula one turned its back on Karun Chandhok, but he found a home in sportscar racing. He's doing just fine... (well, mostly)

old Indian has signed with JRM Racing to drive their HPD LMP1 car in the World Endurance Championship. And judging by his form at the recent Spa-Francorchamps round of the series, Chandhok is not in the least bit bitter about having to leave the world of Grand Prix racing behind. In fact, he's enjoying sportscars immensely.

"It's very different, it's fun, it's a lot more relaxed and the people are nicer. There's a lot less politics and bulls**t involved," he says without hesitation. "Of course, nothing will ever compare to the experience of driving a Formula 1 car, but I'm really enjoying the racing. The wheel-to-wheel stuff they do here is great!" A ringing endorsement of the WEC, then. But was it daunting being thrown in at the (very) deep end that is the Sebring 12 Hours?

WORDS: STEPHEN ERRITY
PHOTOS: JAKE YORATH

W!



"AT LE MANS I'D I DON'T KNOW WHEN TO SLEEP KNOW WHEN



like this. Straight away from day one I was as quick as David," he says confidently. "It was my first time driving at night properly, and again I was as quick as anybody, so I was personally very encouraged by what I was able to achieve. We had a great race for the first nine hours and 27 minutes!" he laughs. "But for a car that didn't test at all beforehand and then missed the Sebring Monday and Tuesday tests, having only had one suspension problem for the entire race with nothing else going wrong is pretty impressive, I think."

Rewinding to the end of last year, Chandhok knew he had to be racing somewhere in 2012 to keep up the momentum of his career. A year testing and commentating was all well and good, but few industries

forget about you quicker than motorsport. "Unfortunately, the reality in F1 today is if you haven't got £10 million, you're not doing anything," he explains. "Neither my family nor my sponsors could afford that. So I started looking at other options like the WEC. To me, it's the next-best option outside of F1: they're quick cars, there are some great circuits on the calendar and the quality of drivers is very high, especially in LMP1. It seemed like the logical next thing to do."

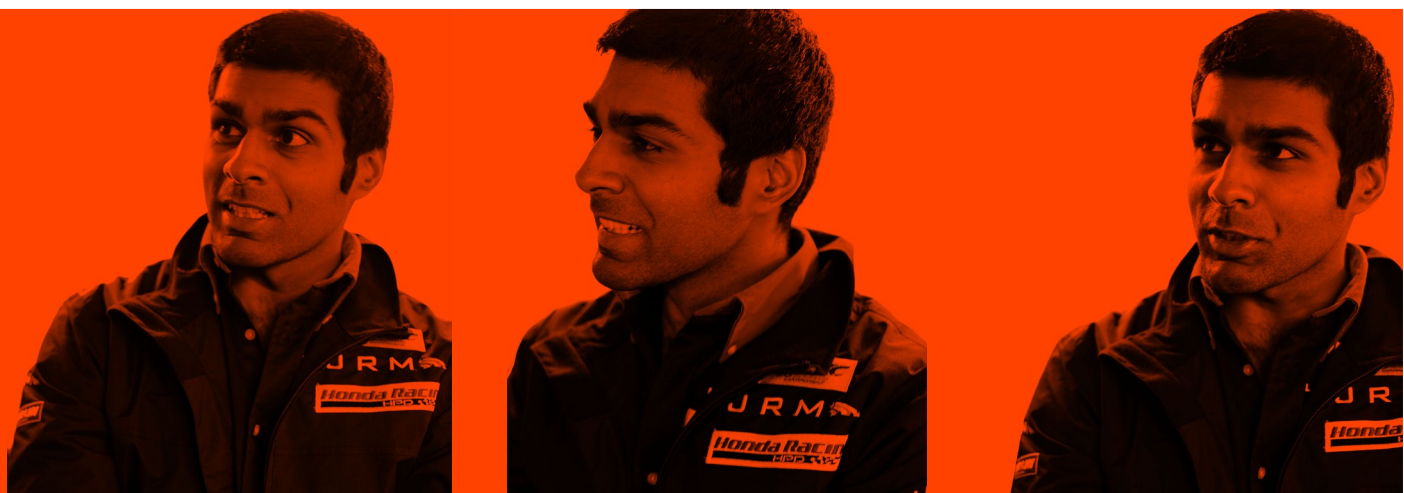
The decision was made easier by the enthusiastic encouragement of Radio Five Live colleague and then-Peugeot works driver Anthony Davidson. "He's the bloke who really got me into sportscars," Chandhok recalls. "I've known him for many years, and when

I was doing the BBC commentary with him, he said 'you've got to come and do this, it's such a good laugh and you'll have such a great time.' He was really loving it and he got me thinking that it could be fun."

So Chandhok was looking for an opportunity - and very soon one presented itself. "[JRM boss] James Rumsey e-mailed me through my website and asked would I be interested in doing something with them. So I jumped on a plane to meet him and we had a good chat. Obviously, every driver wants to sign for a factory team, but I like James' vision of what he's trying to achieve. As soon as he told me David [Brabham] and Peter [Dumbreck] were on board, I was interested."

Coming from the 'Pirhana Club' of

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F1, Chandhok found that deals come about much easier in sportscars. "I went home and told my dad that it went very well, but that I was a bit confused because James had agreed to everything I asked for," he remembers. "When my contract arrived, I read it and sent it to my lawyer. We spoke later I said to him 'there's something wrong here - it's the first time there isn't a single clause I want to negotiate.' I'm almost missing the battle of arguing over stuff you have to go through in F1!"

Whatever about off-track legal battles, it would be hard not to miss the thrill of piloting an F1 car - any F1 car - and Chandhok doesn't pretend otherwise. But the HPD LMP1 prototype, especially around a track like Spa, is certainly not

without its charms for a driver. "The big difference in any context, on any circuit, is weight," he explains. "It weighs 400kg more and makes 200bhp less than an F1 car. So everything happens a little slower. But they're still very enjoyable cars to drive: they produce a lot of downforce from the underbody and Spa is obviously a great circuit to drive whatever car you're in. Physically, it's not as demanding as single-seaters. GP2 cars are very tough as they have no power steering, but these cars do. It's no problem for me: At Sebring I drove a triple stint in the dark and did my best time two laps from the end."

As it turns out, driving the car is the easy part. What's more challenging is getting used to the radically different mentality of endurance

racing compared to F1. "It's quite different to F1," explains Chandhok. "David and Peter have been there and done that and they're a bit older, so they don't have the insecurity you see in F1, which I think in all honesty I still have. I still need to understand the mentality that in this discipline of racing, the more you help your team-mate, the better it is for everyone." In F1, you always hold a little back from your team-mate, because you want to beat them. I'm getting better at it, but it's quite nice having team-mates that are a good bit more relaxed than I'm used to."

And is it more satisfying to be fighting at the sharp end in sportscars than tooling around at the back in F1? Chandhok's answer is typically thoughtful. "It's different isn't it,"



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he says. "I've always believed that in motorsport, you want to win, but ultimately you're racing against your circumstances. In F1, if you're in a Red Bull, Ferrari or McLaren, you have to win. If you're in a Force India, getting a podium is a victory. If you're in a Caterham or a HRT, then progressing to Q2 or scoring a point is a victory. It's the same for us: in a straight fight, we're never going to beat the Audis, and probably Toyota, too, so we're racing for best of the rest outside the manufacturers."

Chandhok showed promising pace at Spa, but unfortunately blotted his copybook with a crash at Eau Rouge on his way from the pitlane to the grid, putting the car on the back foot for the remainder of the race. But the team stuck around after the event to test and is now in much better shape for the big one - Le Mans.

Even drivers who are unenthusiastic about sportscars in general can't fail to be swayed by the possibility of adding a win here to their CV, so for someone with Chandhok's enthusiasm, it's definitely a big deal. There are some logistical issues to be worked out between now and then, however. "The whole thing is going to be new to me," he exclaims. "Even at Sebring, I was a bit confused, but at Le Mans I'm gonna be f**ked! I don't know what times to sleep, what times to eat - I don't even know when to arrive in France! But once I deliver in the car, everything else will fall into place."

Spend any length of time in his company and it becomes clear that Chandhok is one of a new breed of sportscar drivers helping to drive enthusiasm for this once-neglected branch of the sport. Undoubtedly fast, comparatively young and eager to build a long and successful career in the new World Endurance Championship, he fits right in with the relaxed yet highly professional environment of 21st century endurance racing. With team-mates of the calibre of Dumbreck and Brabham, along with the engineering nous of JRM's Nigel Stepney backing him up, all the elements are in place to make it happen. Over to you, Karun...



Heidfeld: Back For More

Karun Chandhok was not the only recent F1 alumnus racing at Spa: Nick Heidfeld has signed a deal for the full WEC and has started strongly, driving for Rebellion Racing alongside Nico Prost and Neel Jani. We caught up with him after free practice in Belgium.

How has the Spa weekend gone for you?

“Free practice was good: we were the quickest petrol car, which is always our target, because there’s no way to beat the diesels. This is our first race with the new 2012 Lola LMP1 coupé, having tested it in Valencia after Sebring. It’s reasonable - we’re not yet as much on the limit as we were with the old car. We sorted some things out in Valencia, but there’s definitely a lot left to try in terms of setup to make it better. Overall, though, it’s not bad at all.”

How did the deal with Rebellion happen?

“I got in contact with James Robinson, an engineer I knew from my time with Jordan in F1 who is now the engineer here - simple as that!”

Were you happy with how the Sebring 12 Hours went?

“It was very important, as it was my first race with the team and I had to get used to the traffic - something I’m not used to from F1. It’s not so bad here in Spa - there are fewer cars on the grid and the circuit is longer. Everything was new for me

in Sebring, including the traffic, the driver changes and the night driving. I have done Le Mans once, back in 1999, but that was a long time ago!”

That year, how did you feel when you saw the Mercedes driven by your team-mate Dumbreck flipping through the air on the Mulsanne straight?

“It was one of the worst moments of my career - I was very relieved to find out that Peter was okay. It definitely came as a surprise, as I felt no hint that the car would do that during the stint I drove before Peter got in. After the problems with Mark Webber’s car in practice, we took some measures which we thought were enough to fix the problem, but obviously they weren’t. Yet I’ve no issue coming back to sportscars now, as the rules have made the cars much safer by reducing the chance of them taking flight. I think they should keep working on safety, and something I think needs looking at is the very poor visibility out of the LMP1 cars. With big tyres and bodywork, you can’t see anything out the front-right window. I had an accident in Sebring free practice, going through the hairpin quite slowly, just because I couldn’t see another car right next to me - I turned in and there he was, bang!”

Is there a big difference in how you approach Spa in a prototype compared to an F1 car?

“It definitely helps that I know the circuit: Sebring obviously took a bit longer to get to grips with. It’s a different speed, but you know for each corner that you shouldn’t do that or you should try this, then you set about fine-tuning your approach, working out your exact braking points and how much kerb you can take.”

Finally, are you looking forward to returning to Le Mans for the first time since 1999?

“Yes, definitely - that’s basically why I’ve done this. I enjoyed Sebring and I’m enjoying Spa, but the main thing for me was to do Le Mans again. Back in ‘99, when Mercedes asked me to do it, I wasn’t so keen, to be honest, but of course I was their works driver, so I said yes. It was only when I got there that I realised how good it was and what a fantastic atmosphere the place has. I thought ‘I’ll have to do this again some day.’ Obviously I knew it was a big, famous race, but until you go there and experience it, you don’t really understand what it’s about.”

Nick was speaking to Stephen Errity.

A B C

Adam Pigott experiences Group C for the first time, and seems to like it.

Photography: Adam Pigott.



// IN THE DAYS LEADING UP TO THE DONINGTON HISTORIC THERE WAS ONE RACE THAT I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE – GROUP C. //



I was definitely born in the wrong decade. I've known this for many years now, but the Donington Historic has emphasised this point more than ever. I can't recall ever attending a race weekend which has delivered so much - beautiful cars, brilliant racing and even some good weather (at least on the Sunday anyway). I could go on and write about how I enjoyed the friendliness of the paddock, how the Matra sounded fantastic, the incredibly

close racing or perhaps the top class drivers that were competing; Frank Stippler, Andy Meyrick, Alex Buncombe, Lord Drayson to name a few. Instead I thought I'd write about something that I was very excited to see.

In the days leading up to the Donington Historic there was one race that I was looking forward to more than anything else - Group C. I'd never seen a Group C race before; I'd only previously seen them on display at various motoring shows

and museums across the country. So I was eager to see twenty of them racing on a classic circuit such as Donington Park.

I decided that for the Group C qualifying I'd start in the pits, most of the Group C cars had a pit garage and after having a look around earlier on in the day it looked like it would probably be complete chaos with Group C cars appearing out of nowhere, providing some interesting photo opportunities. As the qualifying session was approaching I



was surprised at the lack of activity - most of the cars were still in their garages and the drivers were nowhere to be seen.

A few minutes later however, the pit lane exploded into a flurry of activity, the first Group C car to break the cover of the pit garages was an immaculate Spice SE89. Shortly afterwards most of the other Group C cars emerged and were pushed into position at the end of the pit lane for the start of the session. It was when the engines began to be fired up

that I realised how spectacular these cars really are. Whilst I wouldn't say that any of the Group C cars are ear-deafeningly loud (unlike the Historic F2 which had raced earlier) but each car had a beautiful, unique sound to it. My immediate favourites were definitely the Sauber Mercedes C9 and the Aston Martin AMR-1 - both having very unique qualities that seemed to shout above the rest.

I headed out towards the track to capture some of the on-track action in the qualifying session

The Donington Historic Festival also had sportscar racing in the form of the '1000km' for Pre 1972 sportscars race (Top) Which also included the fabulously sounding Matra 650 (Middle)

Photos: Matthew Barrington









- I couldn't get over the speed of the cars, and even the lower power Group C2 cars were lapping the Donington Park circuit in some seriously impressive times. Unfortunately a small rain shower meant that a lot of the cars returned to the pits after the dry running at the beginning of the session, this was only qualifying after all. But this short qualifying session had given me a glimpse of what was to come on Sunday; I literally couldn't wait to see the cars out on track again.

Sunday felt like a day of waiting as Group C was set to be the second to last race of the day, I had a lot of time to kill before the main event. I took this opportunity to have a look around the paddock and capture some of the other racing at the festival. Rather surprisingly I was very impressed with the entertaining racing which was going on; even though some of the cars were worth hundreds of thousands of pounds the owners were still driving them properly, putting on a good show for the crowd. The E-Type Challenge was particularly enthralling with an entertaining battle between Alex Buncombe and Jon Minshaw. Another race that I can't ignore was the '1000km' for Pre-'72 Sports-Racing Cars which took place on the Saturday evening - the combination of numerous Lola's, Chevron's, Fords and Porsche's with an added bonus of a beautiful Matra 650 & Ferrari 512M was certainly a race not to miss.

During the other races I'd found

time to explore the Donington Park circuit. Having only visited the track once before I was keen to get a better look around - by the time Group C came along I was already in position and was waiting to hear the aural assault from the twenty Group C cars roaring across the Donington Park circuit. Seeing these cars race was a fantastic experience. I can't describe how the cars made me feel - awestruck would do. There were a few heart in mouth moments as the cars twitched around, or in the case of Steve Tandy's Nissan R90CK, hit the wall...

One thing that struck me during the race was how people of all ages seemed to be in awe of these fantastic pieces of machinery. I spoke to a few people across the day about the Group C cars, the general consensus seemed to be that those who weren't born when they raced in the World Sportscar Championship wish they had been, and those who did see them race back then had very fond memories of attending Brands Hatch, Donington, Silverstone and even Le Mans to see them race. It makes events such as the Donington Historic such important staples on the motorsport calendar - experiencing these cars whilst we still can.

It does, however, make me wonder if in 20 years' time we'll look back on the current generation of world endurance prototypes and yearn for them in the same manner as most people do now for the Group C era. I'm not so sure, only time will tell.





Alan Mann

1936 - 2012

*Successful and respected team owner Alan Mann passed away in March of this year at the age of 75. Although he is best known for the iconic red and gold Ford Escorts his eponymous team ran in the British Saloon Car Championship, he also left a legacy to the world of sportscar racing in the shape of the beautiful but troubled Ford F3L. **Stephen Errity** looks back at the project and the man*

Like many of the great team bosses, West Sussex-born Alan Mann began his love affair with motor racing behind the wheel, where he showed ample if not prodigious talent in non-championship F1 races and hillclimbs, driving a random selection of machinery, including a Jaguar C-Type and HWM-Alta F2 car. But Mann's true skill and genius lay in car preparation, team organisation and race tactics, and he deployed that in full to great effect, initially under the banner of Andrews Racing, the motorsport arm of Andrews of Southwick Ford garage, where he was dealer principal.

By 1964, his reputation was such that the newly formed Alan Mann Racing - based next door to the Brooklands banking in Byfleet, Surrey - became an official Ford factory team. This was the era of Henry Ford II's 'Total Performance' project, which had the aim of dominating all disciplines of motorsport around the world. Having initially run the humble Cortina GT, then prepared unwieldy Ford Falcons for the Monte Carlo rally, Mann's team was entrusted with the full-flat Lotus Cortina for the 1965 season. The results spoke for themselves: driver Sir John Whitmore romped home to win the sub-1600cc class of that year's European Touring Car Championship.

The same year, the team made its first successful foray into sportscar racing, winning the 1965 World Championship of Makes with the Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupé and getting involved in the development of the lightweight MkII version of the Ford GT40.

Alan Mann Racing entered Le Mans in 1966 with two MkIIs, one driven by Graham Hill and Australian Brian Muir, the other by Whitmore and another Australian, Frank Gardner...



*The team made its first
1965 World Championsh*



*Successful foray into sportscar racing, winning the
Tip of Makes with the Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupé*

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The F3L

For the 1976 season, the sportscar rulebook was rewritten, and the top Group 6 class limited to an engine capacity of three litres. This spelled the end of Ford works support for the GT40 so, rather ambitiously, Alan Mann Racing decided to build its own new prototype, based around the Cosworth DFV three-litre F1 engine. The unmistakeable shape was the work of Ford aerodynamicist Len Bailey, who was involved in the design of the GT40. They say if a car looks fast, it usually is, and although the extremely low and long F3L was indeed quick (it could slice through the air at speeds of up to 350km/h (convert) and had a drag coefficient of only 0.27), it was also unstable at high speeds and very unreliable.

The F3L qualified second on the grid for its first-ever race, the 1968 BOAC 500 at Brands Hatch. It matched the pace of the works

Porsche 908s, but the pattern of unreliability was established with retirement due to gearbox trouble. A further blow came during free practice for the F3L's next race, at the Nurburgring. British driver Chris Irwin crashed heavily at the Flugplatz jump, sustaining head injuries from which he was fortunate to survive.

That was pretty much the final straw for the programme, although there was one final highlight when Gardner put the car on pole for the 1968 Spa 1,000km. For the 1969 season, the F3L was set aside in favour of the P69 - an open-top version of the car that had an even poorer reliability record. Mann's efforts with the F3L were in stark contrast with those of that other great Ford privateer, John Wyer, who persevered with the GT40 in the new GT class and took two Le Mans victories in 19xx and xx.

The Later Years

The failure of the F3L programme was followed by a contraction of Ford's racing activities in Europe and the termination of Mann's works contract. Alan sold the outfit to Frank Gardner, who had won the British Saloon Car Championship driving his Escorts in 1968 and 1969. He started several aviation businesses, which he ran until 2006, but Alan Mann Racing would make a welcome return at

historic events such as the Goodwood Revival in the early 2000s. Alan is survived by his wife, Sharon, and sons, Thomas and Henry. According to the family, he completed writing his autobiography shortly before he passed away. It's scheduled to be published before the end of the year.

Photography: Jake Yorath





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Rather ambitiously, Alan Mann Racing decided to build its own new prototype, based around the Cosworth DFV three-litre F1 engine.

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Carroll Shelby

1923-2012

Carroll Shelby, who won Le Mans as a driver (with Aston Martin), a manufacturer (class victory with the Cobra Daytona coupé) and team owner (with the Ford GT), passed away on May 10, shortly before this issue of *l'endurance* went to print.

He drove in Formula 1 and sportscars, won Le Mans in 1959, was a successful team owner, founded the road-car tuning company that still bears his name and gave the world the iconic Shelby Cobra muscle car and Cobra Daytona racer. The following is adapted from the official obituary released by Shelby American.

Born in rural East Texas, Shelby attended high school in Dallas and served as a pilot in WWII. Returning home after the war, he started several businesses, including a car dealership he co-owned with fellow Texans Jim and Dick Hall. The partnership gave Shelby first taste of car manufacturing: the 'Scaglietti' Corvette.

Around this time, he started drag racing in a 1932 Ford, then moved on to road courses. He won three national sports car championships in the US and entered a clutch of Formula 1 races before getting the attention of David Brown at Aston Martin. Co-driving a DBR1 with Roy Salvadori, he was victorious at Le Mans in 1959. Always versatile, Shelby also set land speed records at Bonneville Salt Flats.

A heart condition brought a premature end to Shelby's driving career in 1960, so he turned his attention and talents to race car design and automotive manufacturing. He believed in combining big horsepower with inspired engineering and approached GM with a proposal to fit a Chevy V8 into the British AC Ace chassis. But GM turned down what would have been a competitor to the Corvette. That led Shelby to approach Lee Iacocca at Ford with the idea of building a two-seat sports car using the company's new small-block engine. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship between the two.

When Ford agreed to supply motors and cash to start the venture, Shelby wasted no time. He formed Shelby American around a group of Southern California hot rodders. They shoehorned Ford's engine into the lightweight Ace roadster, creating

the legendary Cobra, which made its debut at the 1962 New York Auto Show.

After developing a competition version of the Cobra, Shelby fielded a team in Europe, setting the stage for his legendary rivalry with Ferrari. In addition to racing the Cobras, both in coupé and roadster form, he eventually added Ford GTs to the team at the behest of Iacocca. In 1965, they won the FIA sportscar world championship and the next year captured the overall win at Le Mans with the Ford GT and a class win with the Cobra Daytona Coupé.

“Carroll Shelby was an automotive visionary and leader,” said Dan Gurney, who was part of the Shelby American racing team. “We managed to win some tremendous races together, like the GT classes at the Targa Florio, Le Mans and Goodwood with the Daytona Cobra Coupé in 1964. Then we won the crown jewel: Le Mans 1967 in the Ford GT40. Carroll’s leadership was unconventional and more powerful than either his friends or competitors ever imagined. His charm will be missed and his reputation as a motorsports icon is secure.”

Despite all this, Shelby considered his greatest achievement to be the establishment of the Carroll Shelby Foundation. Created in 1992 while he was waiting for a heart transplant, the charity is dedicated to providing medical assistance for those in need, including children. It also supports educational opportunities for young people through automotive and other training programs and benefits the Carroll Shelby Automotive Foundation.

Shelby remained active in the management of each of his companies and the Foundation until his death, even though he endured both heart and kidney transplants in the last two decades of his life. An innovator and pioneer, he traveled the world, socialized with movie stars and beauty queens, made and lost numerous fortunes, won races, built cars and lived large.

Shelby is survived by his three children Patrick, Michael and Sharon, his sister, Anne Shelby Ellison of Fort Worth, six grandchildren, four great grandchildren and his wife Cleo. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in his name to the Carroll Shelby Foundation.

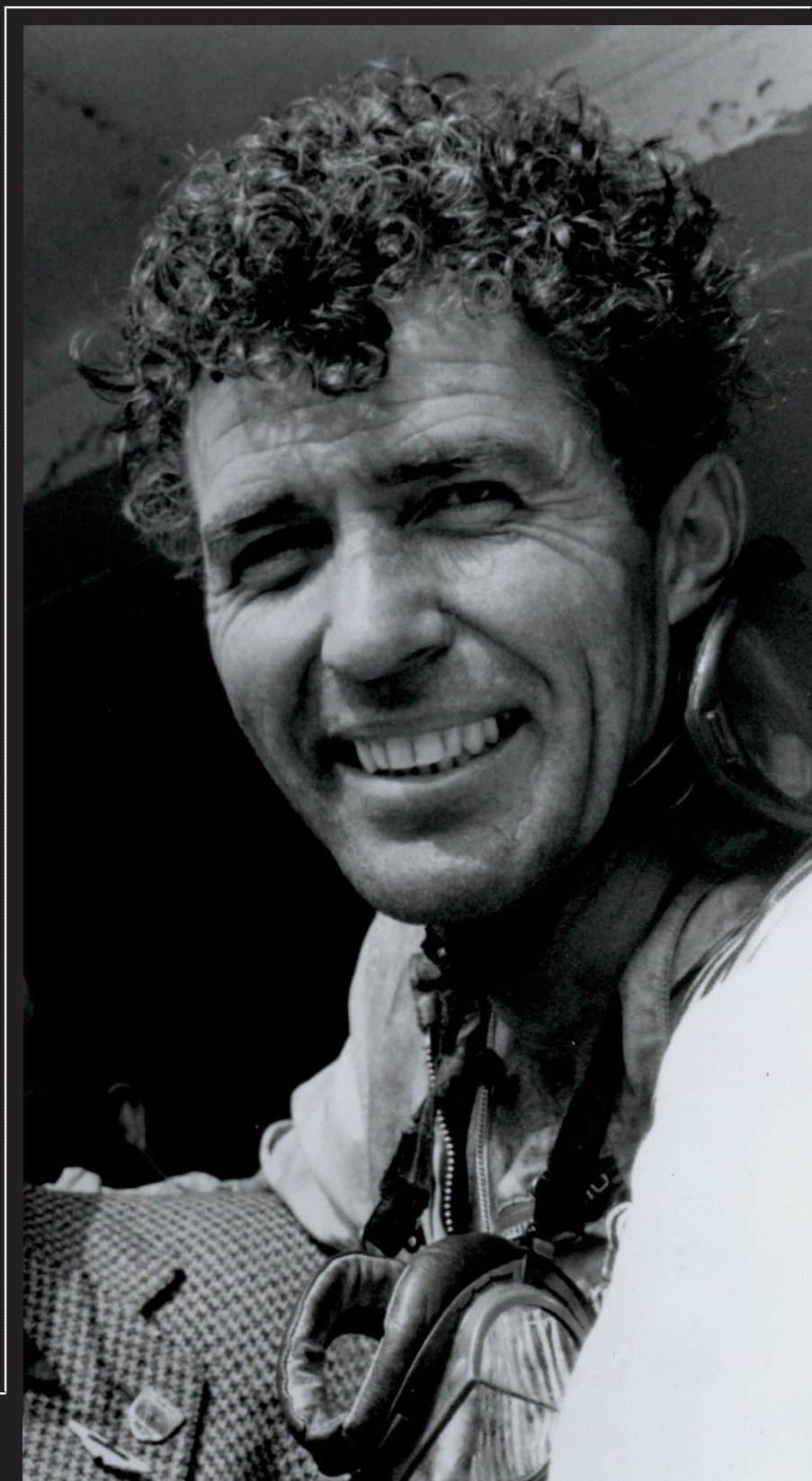


Photo: Newspress

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