

CLASSIC DRIVER



Ferrari Hat-Trick - Tony Dron describes his win in the Ferrari 246S Dino at Goodwood 2003

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Lord March's fabulous 1950s fancy dress party is one thing, but driving this glorious Ferrari is a serious business. Back in 1960, Phil Hill and Wolfgang von Trips took this same car to second place in the Targa Florio and it is worth, well, what? At least a million and a half, maybe £2m.



The following is an extract from Tony Dron's feature in Auto Italia magazine, December 2003.

I push the ignition key in, then press the separate starter button. There is a moment of noisy churning before the V6 in front of me catches, and the familiar crackle blasts from the unsilenced exhaust. The whole taut frame of the old car vibrates with pent-up power. Oil pressure is good. The gearstick clicks smoothly into its dog-leg first on the gate, and we roll purposefully out onto the track, behind the course car.

We've won this race for two successive years and we're hoping for a hat-trick, but it won't be easy. We're on pole but the cars round me have bigger engines and will be quicker off the line. On the green flag lap I keep the pace slow, bunching the field fairly tightly behind. I change down to first and edge towards the start line...



Form up and, about 30 seconds later, we're off. Stepping off the clutch at my carefully chosen, steadily-held high revs, there's the familiar shudder and tremendous noise. Not bad, but we're losing ground to a green car and a blue car, visible through the subsiding tyre smoke. Approaching 70mph I go for second gear and fluff the dog-leg change. Damn. A split second is lost and Tiff Needell, right up behind me, momentarily backs off.

Meanwhile Peter Hardman is away into Madgwick Corner in the Aston DBR1, the actual 1959 Le Mans winner, hotly pursued by Julian Bronson's Costin-bodied Lister-Chevy. I'm behind, alongside Barrie Williams in the Tojeiro-Jaguar. Leaving Madgwick, Gary Pearson's D-type flashes past, going like a rocket in a stunning display of raw power. So now I'm fourth, with Tiff (Lister-Jaguar Knobbly) and Barrie right on my tail.

Gary is weaving around a bit in the D-type but it's a tricky beast and he knows what he's doing. We both know that 'my' Ferrari can take Fordwater corner very nearly flat in fifth at 138mph and the D-type can't. Inevitably, the Ferrari moves up on him coming out of Fordwater and slips past on the inside. It's the same with Julian Bronson in the Costin-bodied Lister-Chevrolet. He drives the fearsome, flame-belching monster perfectly but has no defence against the nimble Ferrari. What a delight to drive this agile machine.

Now I'm second, but some way behind Hardman, and the real work begins. We have to hound him down, lap by lap. Peter is driving very hard, with consistent precision, and both these great front-engined sports-racers - the 1960 Ferrari 2.4-litre V6 and the 1957 Aston Martin 3-litre - are averaging close to 100mph. The thing is to focus on being ultra-smooth, gliding serenely round the track with all four wheels sliding on the limit, perfectly on line and leaving every corner absolutely as fast as possible.

Only a few feet behind the Aston I work as hard as I can, the engine screaming to 8,000rpm in every gear. I hardly need the rev counter because I can hear it and feel it. Here comes Fordwater again: screw yourself up and stay super-smooth. Through we go. Same old speed thrill every time, both doing about 138.000mph. Identical.

Sweeping into St Mary's, on a touch of opposite lock at high speed, the Ferrari gains a bit in the righthander as I ease the power back on briefly before straightening up and braking gently for the left. When you get it sliding like that, it feels incredibly reassuring; for a 43-year-old car, the grip is unbelievable - and it tells you exactly what it's doing.

At last I spot the Aston's weak point. Coming out of the double apex righthander of Lavant, the green car has been sliding very sideways every time. The red car closes, leaves the corner faster and gets alongside, running tightly on the Aston's left down the next straight. Peter has clearly realised the problem, too. That's why he's on the right and has kept me on the left. As I creep alongside until my nose is almost up level with his front wheel, I wonder what he's thinking. Surely he's feeling the pressure? If so, he shows no sign of it as we blast along, side by side.

Howling down towards Woodcote at 140mph, the better aerodynamics of the Ferrari come into play and the red car edges alongside before the braking area - but the cars are a match under braking, he has the inside line and he hasn't made one bad move all race. I have no chance this time.

Never mind; plenty of laps left - but we now know each other's plans precisely. My one hope is to get a couple of feet closer as we leave Lavant next time, almost touching.



The Aston is well sideways when we get there, wriggling around as usual, but this time the Ferrari's better grip at that point puts me inside him on the exit. As we hare side by side down to Woodcote, I have the inside line and it's Peter who has no chance. We're through. Peter never gives up but the Ferrari is the quicker car, and we're 2.8 seconds ahead at the chequered flag.

It's hot, noisy and strenuous to drive these cars, but what a privilege.



Words courtesy of Tony Dron and Auto Italia magazine. **[CLICK HERE FOR FURTHER DETAILS](#)** or call +44 (0)1858 438817 for back issues and subscriptions.

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