

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Close finishes for 2006 Le Mans Legend races



Long established as an important part of the countdown to the 'main event', this year saw not one but two races for historic cars organised by Motor Racing Legends. Both proved to incredibly exciting, with battles for the lead conducted over their entire duration.

### Post-War Cars at Le Mans: a Fight to the Line

A grid of post-War Le Mans-type racers built up to 1955 (plus an invitation class for slightly later cars) provided a gripping spectacle for the vast Le Mans crowds, shortly before the start of the modern 24 Hours. On pole was Gary Pearson in his **Jaguar C-type**. Second on the grid was Joe Colasacco, in the **Alfa Romeo 3000CM** owned by Lawrence Auriana – a car driven by Fangio at Le Mans in 1953, and later gifted to Peron, President of Argentina. As the race began, it became clear that Colasacco was not going to let Pearson's C-type get away from him. The Jaguar and Alfa diced for lap after lap, first one and then the other in the lead, as their lap times progressively dropped.

On the final lap of the race Pearson was ahead when Colasacco spun at Arnage and, although he recovered without damage – and without losing a place – this ensured the Jaguar scooped a comfortable first place. Fastest lap, however, went to Colasacco's Alfa.



Stuart Graham (above) put in a characteristically superb drive in Robert Waterhouse's **Austin-Healey 100S** to come in third, with the **HWM Sports** of 'Spike' Milligan in fourth and Rick Hall's **Ferrari Monza** in fifth. Meanwhile, the under-2000cc class was won stylishly by Chris Conoley in his **HRG Singer**, followed by David Alborough's **AC Ace Bristol** and Diethelm Horbach's **Porsche 356**. The invitation class for later cars was won convincingly by David Cottingham in his **1956 Ferrari 500 TRC**, who also took ninth place overall.

Sir Stirling Moss expertly piloted the ex-Briggs Cunningham **OSCA MT4** now owned by Roger Earl, after Sir Stirling's own Jaguar C-type, which he had originally entered for the race, was unable to run. "The fact that Roger Earl gave up his drive to ensure Sir Stirling took part in the race exemplifies the spirit of the ACO Centenary Races," said organiser Duncan Wiltshire of Motor Racing Legends. "It's that sportsmanlike attitude from our competitors, plus the tremendous atmosphere of the Le Mans 24 Hours weekend, that makes these

historic support races so special.”



### Pre-War Cars at Le Mans: Nail-Bitingly Close Finish

The ACO Centenary Race for pre-War cars, run on the Saturday morning of this year's Le Mans 24 Hours, was one of the most closely-fought battles ever held on the full 13.65km circuit. On pole position was the **Alta Sports** of Luke Stevens and, in second place on the grid – just a few hundredths of a second behind – was the **Talbot 105 Alpine** of Gareth Burnett. From the outset, the two cars (both owned by John Ruston) ran neck and neck, the lead repeatedly switching between them for the entirety of the 40-minute race.

As the leading cars exited the final corner and headed for the chequered flag, the Talbot was marginally ahead but the 2-litre supercharged Alta was closing rapidly. There was a tremendous cheer from the crowd and from the pit-lane as they crossed the line with scarcely a hair's breadth between the two, but the Talbot managed to hold on to first place by a mere 0.06 seconds. Although relegated to a nail-bitingly close second place, the Alta, skilfully driven by current European Caterham Champion Luke Stevens, took the fastest lap of the race, at 6min 3.27sec.

It wasn't just a tight finish at the front of the field, however. The **Bentley 4¼-litre** of Bob Gilbert came in third, with Mark Butterworth's **Lagonda V12 Le Mans** only just pipping Holly Mason's **Aston Martin Ulster**, LM21, to fourth place – by an even smaller margin than the leading two cars. Albert Otten's **BMW 328** took sixth place, and third in class. Elsewhere in the field, class winners included Mike Preston in his **Bugatti T50**, and Jock Mackinnon, in the **Bentley 3-litre** he had driven to Le Mans all the way from Edinburgh.

“The reaction of the crowd said it all,” commented organiser Duncan Wiltshire of Motor Racing Legends. “If any of the younger spectators had initially thought historic events might be slow or uninteresting compared with the modern 24 Hours, they soon changed their minds. The grandstand spectators stood and cheered at the excitement of the close racing. The spectacle was enough to ensure that the ACO Centenary Races generated 2½ hours of live coverage across Europe on Motors TV.”

**Story:** *Classic Driver*

**Photos:** Paul Jarmyn of Fotografia Corse. Prints available from Paul on +44 (0)1923 268685 or [paul@fotografia-corse.co.uk](mailto:paul@fotografia-corse.co.uk)

*Motor Racing Legends will be back at the 24 Hours next year, running the **Le Mans Legend 2007** - for which a new era of Le Mans race cars will be chosen. For further details on this, as well as their **Pre-War Sports Car Series** and the **Royal Automobile Club Woodcote Trophy** (for genuine sports-racers of the post-War era, up to and including December 1955), please contact them at the address below. Both race series will be holding rounds at the **Silverstone Classic** on July 28/30.*

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