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Six Appeal – Aston Martin triumphs at 2007 Le Mans 24 Hours



It was third time lucky for Aston Martin as its multi-car entry finally trounced the Corvettes to win the LM GT1 class of the French classic. Fifth overall was the best result for the marque since 1960, with all of the six cars entered finishing the race, itself most likely the best 100% record at the world-famous endurance race for any manufacturer in the 84-year history of the event.

Taking a leaf out of the 1959 team's pre-Le Mans preparations, **Aston Martin Racing** decided to concentrate all its efforts on the most important race in the calendar. While works-assisted teams from **BMS Scuderia Italia** and **Larbre Competition** had competed elsewhere in 2007, it was the first outing for the Banbury-based DBR9s from **Prodrive** and however much an experienced team like this tests, it was never a given that the car set-up and preparation would work on the day – particularly against the battle-hardened (against limited opposition in the USA) **Pratt & Miller**-run, yellow works **Chevrolet Corvettes**.

As reported [elsewhere on Classic Driver](#), Le Mans in 2007 was characterised by weather alternating between torrential rainstorms and bright sunshine. The track conditions could change from one end of the 8.47-mile circuit to the other, and teams not only had the problem of tyre choice but also agonising decisions brought on by likely safety car periods and when to bring cars in for fuel.



First blood was to the British manufacturer in practice as the #008 **Aston Martin Racing Larbre Competition** DBR9 qualified on LM GT1 pole with a time of 3:50.761, the car driven by Frenchman **Christophe Bouchut**. As this was set in the only dry practice, teams could use the Thursday night session for extensive wet-weather running, with the forecast for the weekend predicting rain – and lots of it.

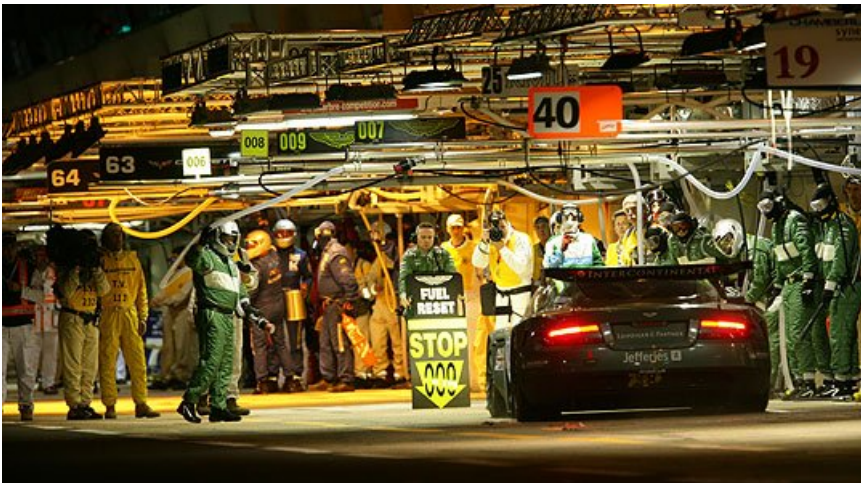
Come 3 o'clock on Saturday, it was Astons to the fore, although the French **Oreca**-run **Saleen S7Rs** caused an early scare. After three hours the #009 **AMR** DBR9 had the class lead, now with only one works Corvette on its tail, the #64 car suffering a terminal mechanical problem while running under safety car conditions in the early hours of the race. The privateer **Team Modena** Aston was repeating its strong 2006 form in third place.



As the dusk settled on the circuit, the #007 car of **Herbert/Enge/Kox** had moved up to lead #009, ahead of the Corvette, and the grey **Team Modena DBR9**. Midnight came and went with the Astons still in the lead but bitter experience from previous races had shown just how strong the American challenge could be, and neither **AMR** car could let up the pace. Rising up the field at this time was the **BMS Scuderia Italia** car of **Babini/Davies/Malucini**.

In the early hours of the morning the pole-sitter, **Christophe Bouchut**, undertook a quadruple stint to bring the #008 **Larbre** car into the running, while at the front, **Darren Turner** was pleased with the way the race was panning out.

"Everything's going really well," he said, "We've had no real problems, and I'm very pleased with my stints."



At half distance the order in GT1 was -

1. 007 Peter Kox Aston Martin Racing DBR9 171 laps
2. 009 Rickard Rydell Aston Martin Racing DBR9 171 laps
- 3 63 Ron Fellows Corvette Racing Corvette 170 laps
- 4 008 Christophe Bouchut AMR Larbre DBR9 169 laps
- 5 100 Jamie Davies AMR BMS DBR9 168 laps
- 6 54 Laurent Groppi Oreca Saleen S7R 167 laps



The first problem with the **AMR** cars occurred at 6.30 on Sunday morning, with 8 ½ hours to go. **Johnny Herbert** made a minor mistake and visited a gravel trap, the off-track excursion damaging both the car's front splitter and its mounting points. A few hours later **Tomas Enge**, driving the same car, went off road and pitted repeatedly for minor repairs caused by gravel ingress and a failed alternator.

Was this the start of the Sunday morning problems that had stymied the green British cars in the past?

As it turned out; no. With a strength in depth never seen before at Le Mans, and the denuded works Corvette team running its sole remaining car at maximum speed (but always behind the #009 DBR9), the final hours of the race - many in torrential rain under the safety car - were really just a matter of circulating the track safely until at 3.00 pm.

David Brabham, a stalwart of the AMR team since its debut year in 2005, took the chequered flag.

He said: "I think that last lap this year was the longest of my entire life. The quantity of standing water made judging the amount of grip available a complete gamble. I just took a lot of care to bring the car home safely, and I think this result is a fantastic culmination of all the hard work not just from myself, **Darren** and **Rickard**, but also from the entire team."

David Richards, Aston Martin's Chairman, said: "To see Aston Martin winning at Le Mans again, nearly 50 years after our last famous victory, is a truly magnificent achievement for everybody associated with Aston Martin across the world."

Dr Ulrich Bez, Aston Martin's Chief Executive, commented: "Since our last victory here in 1959, Le Mans has been dominated by several other great marques. But this year we had more cars than any other manufacturer and they all finished: six out of six, including the GT1 winner. It's been as truly historic day for Aston Martin and I am absolutely delighted."

After two years' of late Sunday morning agony for Astons at Le Mans there's only one thing you could say at the end of the 2007 race - "It's been emotional".



Final positions in LM GT1 -

- 1 009 Brabham/Rydell/Turner Aston Martin Racing DBR9 342 laps
- 2 63 Fellows/Magnussen/O'Connell Corvette Racing 342 laps

3 008 Bouchut/Elgaard/Gollin AMR Larbre DBR9 340 laps
4 007 Enge/Herbert/Kox Aston Martin Racing DBR9 337 laps
5 54 Belloc/Groppi/Prost Oreca Saleen 336 laps
6 100 Babini/Davies/Malucelli/ AMR BMS DBR9 336 laps
10 59 Fittipaldi/Garcia/Menten Team Modena DBR9 318 laps
13 006 Berville/Bornhauser/Fisken AMR Larbre DBR9 271 laps



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