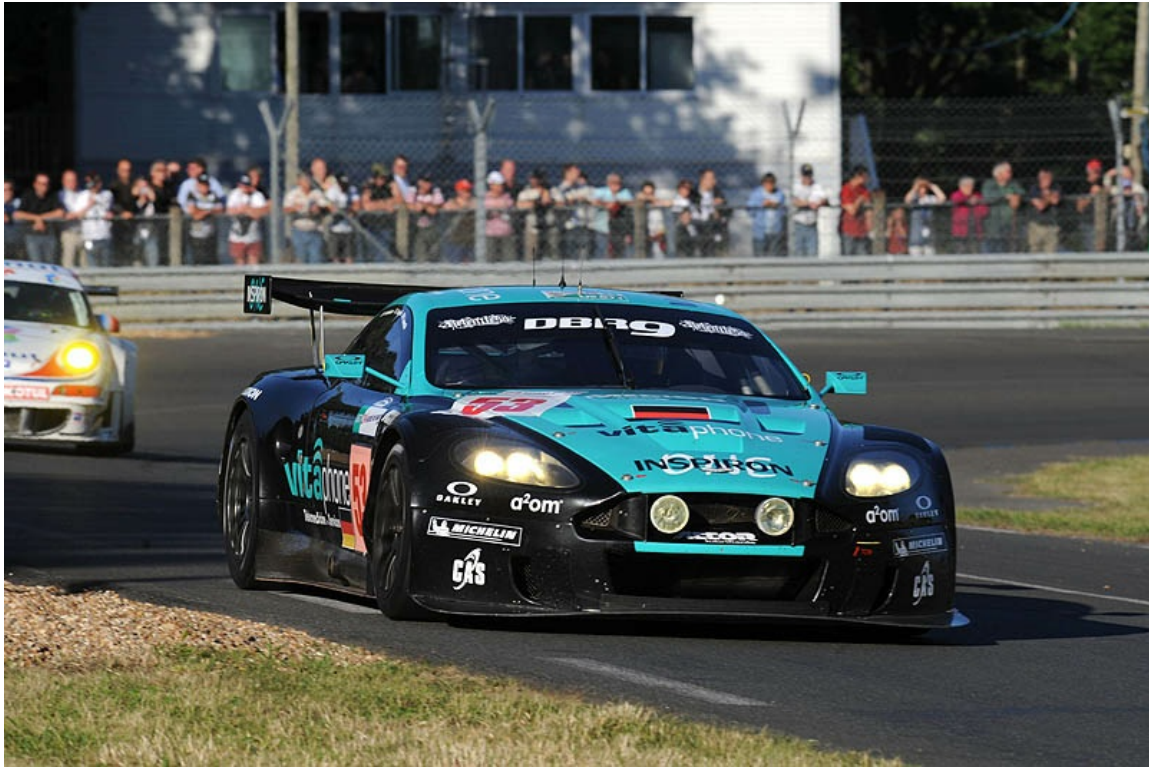


CLASSIC DRIVER



Aston Martin at Le Mans 2008: close-run, but another class victory

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They did it again. This time liveried in iconic Gulf colours, Aston Martin once more beat its arch-rival Corvette over 24 hours of the closest possible racing at Le Mans.

Last year was no cake-walk, characterised as it was by hour upon hour of torrential rain and the pressures of that first, elusive class victory. In 2007 the British company scored a terrific 5th overall and a GT1 class win, with all six cars entered finishing the race. Its yellow nemesis, the **Team Corvette Racing C6.Rs**, was soundly trounced.

Both makes had four cars representing them: two 'works' entries and two strongly supported privateers. If anything, **Corvette** was in a slightly better position as backing-up the yellow cars was

the **Luc Alphand Adventures** pair, a team already leading the LMGTS1 Championship. **Astons** had single cars from **Team Modena** and **Vitaphone Racing Team (Strakka)**, top teams both.



Mirroring the battle for overall honours, the **Aston Martin Racing Gulf** cars were playing **Audi** to **Corvette's Peugeot** in qualifying, although only a touch slower; **Antonio Garcia** set the quickest lap of 3m48.994s in **009 Aston Martin**, against **Jan Magnussen's** 3m47.668s. It was clearly going to be close.

Come the three o'clock start it was the **009** car that made the running, with the two yellow cars shadowing it for the first few hours and **007** not far behind – all four works cars on the same lap. The weather was fine, there were no pace car incidents, and the pale blue and orange **Aston Martin DBR9s** running like trains. What could go wrong?



As it turned out, very little, but the frenetic pace and the constant pressure of the seemingly indestructible **Corvettes** meant every gearchange, back-marker pass and pit-stop was decisive. At half-distance the order in GT1 was:

1. 009 Aston Martin Racing Brabham/Garcia/Turner 180 laps
2. 63 Corvette Racing Fellows/O'Connell/Magnussen 180 laps
3. 007 Frenzen/Piccini/Wendlinger 179 laps
4. 64 Corvette Racing Gavin/Beretta/Papis 178 laps

Of the private **DBR9s**, the **Team Modena** car was running sixth and the **Vitaphone Racing Team** entry was stuck out on the circuit with suspected propshaft failure.



Regular Le Mans-goers will know that it's in the early hours of Sunday morning that teams can win the race. The cars start to falter, the weather can play up and although they are all supremely fit, the drivers can drop their guard – and the car into the gravel. There was none of the latter, but for both **Corvette** and **Aston Martin** their number two cars developed – amazingly identical – alternator faults. This put the **#64 Corvette** out of the running and slowed the **007 Aston** to a point where it was always going to play catch-up to **009**.

With just three hours to go, spectators had the scintillating prospect of a down-to-the-wire finish in class, as well as for overall honours. Rain had swept over the circuit from the early hours and, although thankfully less severe than last year, it was of a squally, irritating nature that meant tyre choice (slicks, intermediates or full wets) became paramount.



Darren Turner of **Aston Martin** said, “You drive to a completely different set of rules in this situation. You don't try to be competitive; you just try to be safe and consistent. Even if you drop a few seconds a lap to your rivals, it doesn't matter.”

Both teams played the pitstops and tyre-choice calls to perfection – as you would expect from **Aston Martin Racing/Prodrive** and **Pratt & Miller Corvette** – but it was the **009 Aston Martin DBR9** of **David Brabham**, **Antonio Garcia** and **Darren Turner** that held their nerve and won.

Factory **Corvettes** were second and third in class with the second **Gulf DBR9** fourth, a couple of laps behind the slower American car. **Team Modena's DBR9** finished eighth in GT1, despite a couple of setbacks including a puncture.



David Richards, Chairman of Aston Martin, commented: “For me, Le Mans is the greatest motor race in the world and to win it for the second consecutive year is a brilliant endorsement of a fantastic team effort – particularly in the iconic colours of Gulf.”

Dr Ulrich Bez, the **Chief Executive of Aston Martin**, added: “I am very proud that in the space of just three weeks we have taken two major class wins in two of the most important 24-hour races: the Nürburgring 24 Hours and now the Le Mans 24 Hours for the second time. It’s been an incredible day for everybody, and one that we will remember for a very long time.”

Final Results GT1:

1. 009 Aston Martin Racing Brabham/Garcia/Turner 344 laps 13th overall
2. 63 Corvette Racing Fellows/O’Connell/Magnussen 344 laps 14th overall
3. 007 Aston Martin Racing Frenzen/Piccini/Wendlinger 341 laps 15th overall
4. 64 Corvette Racing Gavin/Beretta/Papis 339 laps 16th overall
5. 72 Luc Alphand Adventures Alphand/Moreau/Policand 335 laps 17th overall
6. 73 Luc Alphand Adventures Blanchemain/Goueslard/Pasquali 325 laps 21st overall

Text - Steve Wakefield

Photos - Aston Martin Racing

*With grateful thanks to **P&O Ferries**.*

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