

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Aston Martin at Le Mans 2009



**Forget any idea of a fairy-tale 50th anniversary win; this was always going to be a tough race for Aston. So, when the 007 car crossed the line in 4th place after 24 hours of the most gruelling racing, the Gulf-sponsored team was delighted with a result that “exceeded all expectations”.**

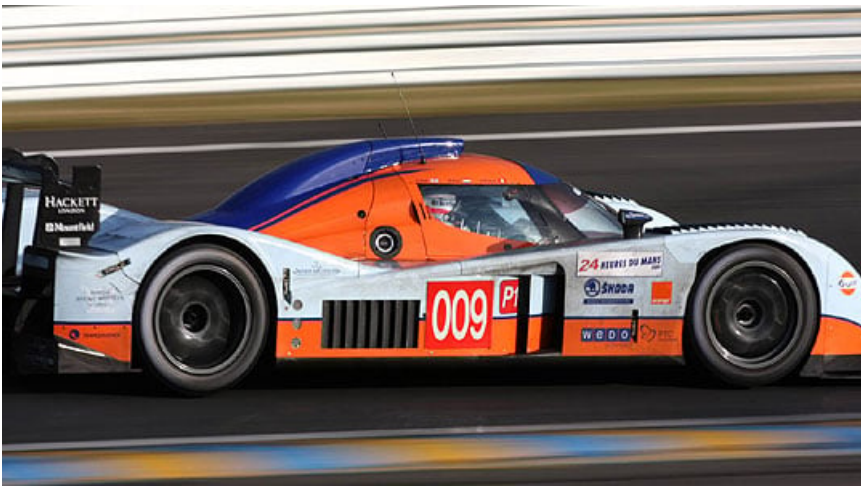
The winners of the production-based GT1 class two years running with its **DBR9**, in 2009 **Aston Martin Racing** turned its sights on **LMP1** (where the overall winner was likely to come from). A win straight out of the box at the opening **Le Mans Series** round at **Catalunya** was a terrific start to the year, but over 24 hours at Le Mans...?



The **Lola** chassis that debuted well in 2008 had been developed by the Gaydon-based team and featured a 6.0-litre 12-cylinder derived from the DB9-series of road cars. Compared with its installation in a **GT1 DBR9**, the prototype's V12 sounded much higher-pitched and smoother. And compared with the diesel Audi and Peugeots... well... it sounded gorgeous.

The diesel factory-entered cars from the French and German manufacturers were always going to be hard to beat. With their better fuel economy, more power, more torque and infinitely better resources, by comparison **Aston Martin** was up against it. Mirroring its 1959 line-up, the team had entered three ‘works’ **Lola-Aston Martins** with last year's chassis running in **Speedy Racing Sebah** team colours.

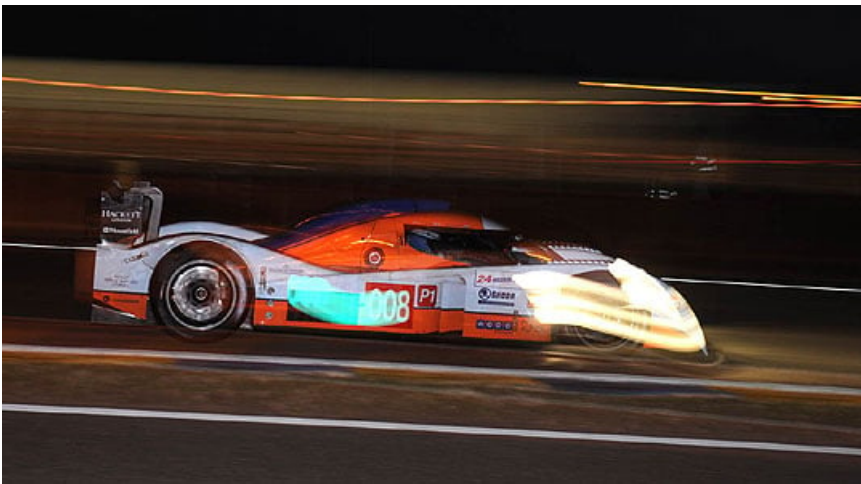
Practice proved that the British cars were in the hunt by comfortably topping the (unofficial) ‘petrol’ class. The 007 car of **Charouz/ Enge/Mücke** was quickest, eighth overall, followed by 008 (**Davidson/Turner/Verstappen**) and the Speedy Racing Sebah entry. The final official car of **Hall/Kox/Primat**, #009, qualified 17th.



With most of free practice and qualifying carried out either at night, or on a wet track, the blazing Saturday sunshine was inevitably going to mean a hard race for car and driver alike. 007 and 008 proceeded to lap high up in the field although 009 suffered the team's first problem: an alternator change around 7 o'clock on Saturday evening.

A couple of hours later, 008 was now fourth overall, 007 seventh and 009 dropping back with more technical problems. Over the next few hours, the two leading Astons continued their good progress, swapping positions as 008 hit a **GT1** car with **Darren Turner** at the wheel. 009 was making steady progress up the field until **Stuart Hall** was involved in an accident with an **LMP2** car and was subsequently excluded from the meeting. **Peter Kox** and **Harold Primat** would have to share driving duties for the rest of the race.

Gearbox problems were affecting 008 with just six hours to go, so a top six finish for two cars was looking unlikely. The 007 Aston was running strongly in fourth, but 009 was eliminated at 09:46 in a heavy crash at the **Porsche Curves** when driven by **Harold Primat**. With a hint of rain in the air, and **Audi** still suffering from overheating, was a podium position possible?



Sadly for **Aston Martin Racing**, the answer to that was "no", with the three laps between 007 and the third-placed #1 **Audi R15 TDI** an unassailable gap with so little time left.

That said, it was a strong performance and gave many marque enthusiasts much to cheer about. 008 finished 13th, having suffered minor accident damage and on-off gearbox problems dropping it back on Sunday. It was on the same (342nd) lap as the **Speedy Racing Team Sebah** car.

After the race, **David Richards, Chairman of Aston Martin**, said: "I'm absolutely delighted. We came to **Le Mans** with modest expectations and we've exceeded all of them. Once again, **Aston Martin** has punched well above its weight and it's a fantastic achievement from everyone involved. Now we have to ask ourselves some serious questions about where we go from here."





Dr Ulrich Bez, Chief Executive Officer of Aston Martin, added: "In the same month that we launch the new **V12 Vantage** and **DBS Volante**, it is fitting that the same 6.0-litre V12 heart powers our LMP1 cars to such an outstanding Le Mans debut. I am thrilled for the whole team."



#### GT1: Single-entry DR9 finishes 31st

Just one **DBR9** was on the grid: the **Muller Jetalliance Racing** entry of **Lichtner/Hoyer/Gruber**. At **Le Mans**, it really needs a factory effort to beat the **Pratt & Miller**-run works **Corvettes** and the blue car was plagued by mechanical troubles and minor accidents. It finished, though, in 31st place.



#### GT2: Drayson Racing Aston Martin Vantage GT2, a popular interloper in a crowded class

Outnumbered by some margin, the singleton **Aston Martin Vantage GT2** entered by **Lord Drayson, Minister for Science and Innovation** in the British Government, looked and sounded magnificent.

Having qualified on the 23rd row of the grid, the green car with its blaring eight-cylinder exhaust note performed well until a failed alternator required a 1 hour 20 minute stop at 03:30. The car's 2009 Le Mans adventures were then curtailed for good when another electrical problem led to the car expiring at the

second chicane on the Mulsanne Straight. It was 33rd overall and 10th in GT2.

*Text - Steve Wakefield*

*Photos - Aston Martin Racing*

*With grateful thanks to [P&O Ferries](#).*

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