

CLASSIC DRIVER



2009 Le Mans Legend

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For many spectators, the historic support race at the Le Mans 24 Hours is every bit as exciting as the main event (albeit a whole lot shorter). The Le Mans Legend showcases a huge and colourful grid of 61 Le Mans-type race cars from a given period of history - this year, from 1949 to 1965 - competing in full-on combat just a few hours before the start of the modern race. And one of the fiercest battles is to get a place on the grid in the first place: Motor Racing Legends, which runs the historic race, attracts many times more entries than the grid could possibly accommodate. Hence places are given, first and foremost, to cars with genuine Le Mans pedigree.



Back in 1965, the 24-hour race was a glittering triumph for Ferrari, with the marque placed 1st, 2nd and 3rd overall, so it was good to see **Carlos Monteverde's** eye-catching yellow **Ferrari 250LM** – thought with some justification to be the actual car which finished second in 1965 – qualify second on the grid for the **2009 Le Mans Legend**. In pole position was **Neil Cunningham's Jaguar E-type**, while the second row of the grid was occupied by **Justin Law's Lister Jaguar GT** and **Tony Dron's Ferrari 246S**.

The big disappointment in Thursday's qualifying was the withdrawal (with engine trouble) of the **1959 Le Mans-winning Aston Martin DBR1**, which many had hoped to see competing on the 50th anniversary of its great victory. Despite its immobile state, the famous Aston nevertheless played an important part in proceedings, taking centre stage (along with **Sir Stirling Moss**) at Friday's **Aston Martin Owners Club** lunch in **La Chartre-sur-le-Loir**.



The lunch was held at the **Hotel de France**, the very place where the **Aston Martin Le Mans** team based itself in 1959, and indeed the **DBR1** was put in exactly the same spot where it sat 50 years ago, before being driven off by road to win the race. Interviewed by **Club Chairman Richard Jackson**, **Sir Stirling** entertained the gathering in his customary acerbic style, with stories of Le Mans – a race he has always professed to dislike: “Twenty-four hours is far too long for a motor race... I think the **Nürburgring 1000Km** is a much better test of the car but that's probably because I won it, and I never won Le Mans”.

Back to the circuit, and Saturday saw the **Le Mans Legend** delight the crowds with its down-to-the-wire action. Initially a three-way fight between the pole-sitting **E-type**, the **250LM** and the **Lister Jaguar**, it became a two-horse race when the E-type retired. Lap after lap, the yellow **Ferrari** and almost-black **Lister** swapped places, the smaller, more nimble Ferrari eventually overcoming the more powerful Lister when the latter's brakes started to fade. In the final laps, **Justin Law** drove his **Lister** with tremendous skill and increasingly lurid slides, but **Monteverde's** cool determination took him first past the chequered flag – by 7.8 seconds.



Some way behind the front two but pulling out a substantial lead on the rest of the grid – and hence scooping not only third overall but an emphatic class victory – was Tony Dron’s front-engined **246S Dino**. **Dron** took full advantage of the Ferrari’s ‘slippery’ aerodynamic shape to make up for its small engine and relative lack of outright power. Fourth place was taken by **Julian Bronson’s Lister Costin**, with a fifth overall – and class win – for **Ewan McIntyre** in his **Lotus 15**.



A delighted **Harry Leventis** took a further class win for **Ferrari**, with his mid-engined **206 Dino**, while **Class 4** saw **Jaguar D-types** sweep first, second and third in class – led by **Gavin Pickering**. Other class winners were the **Lotus 11** of **Andrew** and **Michael Hibberd**, the **Jaguar C-type** of **Nigel Webb**, and the **Frazer Nash Le Mans MkII** of **Richard Lake** and **Jane Varley**.



Sir Stirling Moss, meanwhile, sharing his beautifully restored **Osca FS 372** with **Roger Earl**, also took home a trophy – a remarkable achievement, since a gearbox problem in qualifying saw the pair relegated to a disappointing 57th on the grid. Thanks to the team’s hard work, the gearbox was repaired in time for the race and the little **Osca** climbed 23 places to carry off a well-deserved third in class.



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