

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The 2012 Le Mans Classic](#)

Lead

Yes, it was unseasonably wet and windy, but did that spoil this year's Le Mans Classic? Not a bit of it – who could complain about an event with three Porsche 917s, many GT40s and the arrival of 18 Ferrari 250 GTOs?

Every two years, just a few weeks after the modern 24 Hours, the good citizens of Le Mans welcome historic racing enthusiasts to arguably the most famous circuit in the world. The necessary road closures are made, the signs are put up and the ACO sets its superb organisation into gear once again; this time for the 'Le Mans Classic'.

While organisers might try and set 'themes' for an event, in most cases (aye, Goodwood and Pebble Beach excepted) it's more a matter of who turns up and what they have entered. In [the sweltering 2010 Le Mans Classic](#) there was a big presence by Ferrari Classiche and, by accident or design, the entry list then featured many significant Ferraris: 330 P4, the 'Breadvan', 330 TRI, 250 P and their ilk.





In 2012, from this spectator's viewpoint at any rate, the emphasis had shifted to that other great multiple-Le Mans-winning marque, Porsche. From a host of scuttling 356s to an ex-works Martini 936 in the final *plateau*, Porsche-philes were in for a treat.

The Stuttgart manufacturer's entry was topped by three 917s (sadly reduced to two after the Gulf-liveried Vern Schuppan/Richard Attwood car fell foul of someone else's accident in qualifying). The Gulf car had been scintillating in practice with the two vastly experienced, ex-Porsche factory, Le Mans-winning drivers hitting speeds of well over 215mph on many parts of the track in the immaculately prepared car.

John Wyer would have been proud.





As we always say, you can't beat seeing cars on a circuit on which they did well in period. So, joining the 917s were a host of 935s, 906s, 908s and 904s; all Porsche racing cars with an honourable history at Le Mans and a fabulous sight *en masse*.

Down at Maranello, Shaun Lynn's 1970 Ferrari 512S sounded magnificent, and other fantastic Ferraris included any of the 512 BBLMs, or that staple of class wins in the late fifties/early sixties, the 250 GT Berlinetta. David Franklin's 312P coupé did not, sadly, make it beyond practice.





Every one of the six separate grids provided entertainment. From the pre-War category, spectators were treated to 'Mr Le Mans', Derek Bell, behind the wheel of a vintage Bentley, while the immediately post-War race was a constant battle between Alex Buncombe, in [JD Classics'](#) ex-Fangio Jaguar C-type, going head-to-head with Gavin Pickering aboard a 'D'. The battle finished two to one in Buncombe's favour, with everyone saying just how fast the bronze car had gone. A fine driver...

...as was Andy Meyrick (a member of Aston Martin Racing's 2011 AMR-One LMP1 squad), who drove the Tate & Lyle-sponsored green de Cadenet-Lola like the wind in *plateau 6*. Speaking of 'de Cad', the great man was at the event — which included several cars he'd driven at Le Mans — behind the wheel of the green/yellow Ferrari 250 GTO that had just finished the [2012 250 GTO Tour](#).



He was joined by many other famous racers, with the likes of Yvan Muller, Fabien Giroix, Gerard Larrousse and Prince Leopold of Bavaria *really* showing the skilled amateurs how it should be done.

Racing apart, there was the now regular Artcurial auction, several track parades and the ‘Little Big Mans’ children’s race. The spectators enjoyed seeing the rather special line-up of cars dedicated to the memory of Carroll Shelby, and goggled at the Martini-sponsored Porsche 917 LH and 935/77 taking a rare holiday from the Porsche Museum.

And personal highlights? I do have a soft spot for Porsche 935s, so the GELO-sponsored red/yellow cars were a favourite, and watching the ‘boiling kettle’ Howmet TX gas-turbine car is always a treat. These, and the rumbling American NASCAR and IMSA guests from the late 70s really made this year’s Le Mans Classic.





You can view a gallery of more 2012 Le Mans Classic photos [elsewhere on Classic Driver](#).

Photos: Classic Driver

Gallery

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