

CLASSIC DRIVER



Timewalkers, 1990: Blundell hits warp speed at Le Mans

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It's June 1990, and during qualifying for the 24 Hours of Le Mans, drivers are setting out their plans on how to attack the new chicanes added to the legendary, albeit dangerous, Mulsanne Straight. For one lucky driver, Mark Blundell, a fortuitous malfunction will see him become a Le Mans legend...

Back in the late 1980s, when rumours began to circulate that plans were in place to chop the Mulsanne Straight into three different segments, many manufacturers and privateers prepped their cars for one last go at breaking the speed record on the longest stretch of straightaway on the famous circuit. In 1988, Parisian garage owner Roger Dorchy, driving for Welter Racing, took his WM P88-Peugeot to the limit and hit an incredible 251mph — the highest recorded speed on the track.

Houston, we have a problem



While speed records are always at the back of race car drivers' minds, with the new layout of the 'Straight', today, most are just trying to figure out how to survive them, not master them. Or at least that was the intent...

As Mark Blundell gets behind the wheel of the factory-backed Nissan R90CK prototype, with limited running time and a wealth of fierce competitors, he's expecting to learn more about the car and make a respectable run for the top 10. Everything appears to be going as planned, until he sees the 'Straight' in front of him and gears up, but something seems to be going wrong with the 3.5-litre, twin-turbo V8. The turbo wastegates are stuck and they begin to rocket the R90CK past 1,100bhp.

Lemons into lemonade





As Blundell frantically weaves in and out of the chicanes, the odometer starts to reach 238mph. Miraculously, Blundell made it through the now-curved 'Straight' unscathed. In a car he had never driven before, on a track that was essentially new, Blundell's driving can only be described as purely reactive and instinctive. As he recalled: "Every input was pure reflex — things were coming at me everywhere I looked. For about 50 per cent of the lap, I felt like I was on the verge of a massive accident." While he would beat the 2nd place Brun Motorsport Porsche 962 by a full six seconds to take pole, Blundell and his R90CK would go on to retire before the end of the 24-hour race — but that pole lap will forever remain in the annals of history.

Photos: Darrel Ingham / Pascal Rondaueu via Getty Images

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