

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Racing drivers reflect on their most memorable moments at Le Mans

### Lead

During this year's 24 Hours of Le Mans, we scoured the paddock for racing drivers young and old and asked them for their standout moments from driving in the world's toughest motor race. From unforgettable victories to heart-aching retirements, here's what they had to say...

Le Mans means many things to different people and for the guys who have donned their helmets and actually taken part in the endurance classic, the memories from what are arguably the very best seats in the house are especially vivid.



That's why we went on a hunt for racing drivers to ask them for their fondest memories from their time at the Circuit de la Sarthe. This year's 24 Hours of Le Mans was entertaining, if not a thriller. For us, to see both teams entered by Classic Driver dealers finish – the Ferrari 488 GTEs entered by [Kessel](#) for the all-female Iron Dames outfit and [GTC Guikas](#), respectively – was particularly special. Congratulations to Toyota on their second consecutive victory and a special thanks to Porsche for taking such good care of us throughout the weekend. To say it was one to remember would be an understatement.

### Sea of humanity



Hurley Haywood's three Le Mans victories barely scratch the surface of his outstanding career. The American racer's résumé also includes five wins at the Daytona 24 Hours, two in the 12 Hours of Sebring, and two IMSA GT championships. In honour of the veritable motorsport legend's achievements, Haywood was invited to be Grand Marshall at Le Mans this year.

"I've been lucky to win this race three times," he told us. "I was here when they changed the configuration of the pit lane and I remember seeing that sea of humanity out there put goosebumps all over me. Survival is key here and when you finally finish, it's such a relief. And if you're lucky enough to win, it's a rollercoaster of emotions beyond belief. My 1994 win is the one that stood out – the Dauer 962 wasn't the quickest car, but we got lucky and ran a perfect race." We highly recommend watching the documentary *Hurley*, which was produced by Patrick Dempsey and tells Haywood's extraordinary story.

### Pedal to the metal



The American driver Cooper MacNeil was rather pleased to have two fellow teammates in this year’s race, his sixth time at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Back in 2015, he and Jeroen Bleekemolen were forced to run the race as a pair and move up to the GTE Pro category with their Porsche 911 as a result. “I think I drove for around 11-and-a-half hours that year,” he remembers. “This racetrack isn’t too technical, but the high speeds mean you really need to be on top of your game at all times, particularly in traffic. Mentally, it was really draining but we ended up finishing fifth, which was an incredible result.” The Ford GT that won the GTE AM class last weekend was disqualified for a fuel infringement, promoting MacNeil and his Weathertech Racing teammates into third place. Congratulations Cooper!

### Lady Luck and Le Mans



Having competed in the 24 Hours of Le Mans seven times, [Sam Hancock](#) knows only too well how quickly fortunes can change in the French endurance classic. We caught up with Sam during a short break from his television commentating duties, during which time he recalled the heartache of his retirement back in 2011 from fourth overall and with just 40 minutes left to run in the gorgeous Gulf-liveried Aston Martin LMP1 car.

“It’s the one that got away for me,” he told us. “There were six diesel cars in the category and for one reason or another, the Peugeots fell away which left us right where we wanted to be, leading the petrol-powered cars. With 45 minutes to go, I had just completed my final stint and Darren Turner was due to take over the car when the engine let go coming out of the second chicane. It was probably a combination not wanting to accept reality and being deliriously tired, but I managed to limp the car all the way to Arnage. The moment I remember most is climbing out of the car to a supportive ripple of applause from the spectators on the back. That’s the Le Mans spirit!”

### And clench!



Before he went out and won the fiercely contested GTE Pro category in his Ferrari 488 GTE, we grabbed Briton James Calado as he arrived at the garage. He didn't reference one particular moment as such, but rather the sheer bravery required to attack Indianapolis at over 300kph, lap after lap. "Seriously, you clench everything every time you head down there," he said. "It takes a while to build up the speed and come qualifying, you know you're still a bit out of your comfort zone – you have to have a word with yourself and psyche yourself up. You turn in and hope. When you nail it, it feels really good!"

### From Hollywood to Les Hunaudières



"I really love racing because it's my passion and gives me a far greater adrenalin buzz than acting," replied Patrick Dempsey when we asked him if he preferred to be behind the wheel of a racecar or in front of the camera on set. The Hollywood actor, amateur racer, and owner of the Dempsey Proton Racing's passion for motor racing is well known and in 2015, he fulfilled a dream and finished second in the GTE Am category driving a Porsche. Ahead of this year's race, Dempsey was awarded the Spirit of Le Mans.



"I just love this race," he told us after taking the time to show us around the garage as the sun began to set. "I first raced here in 2009 and what was amazing about that year was that one of our drivers was sick, leaving just two of us to carry the team. I thought that was really cool because it reminded me of the races and hardcore drivers from the past. I made the mistake of falling asleep and when I woke up, I was immediately thrust back into the car. For the first couple of laps, I remember thinking to myself where the hell am I? But I was realising a dream and was going on pure adrenaline – I had to finish that race, and we did."

### Beautiful confusion





For the three-time Le Mans winner and Rebellion Racing driver André Lotterer, his maiden victory in 2011, driving for Audi Sport, is his most memorable. And were it not for a simple case of confusion that forced him to drive for his life, it might never have happened. “During my penultimate stint, I thought I was second, but I was actually in the lead and increasing the gap,” he recalled. “My engineer was announcing the gap every lap, but because I thought I was second, I thought I was dropping further and further behind the leader. I was giving it my all and I just couldn’t understand it. That moment gave us enough time during the last pitstop to change all four tyres and we won the race, beating all three Peugeots by 13 seconds.”

### Gallic glory



Porsche Works GT driver Richard Lietz is a veteran of 13 Le Mans races, each of which behind the wheel of a 911 – now that’s brand loyalty. His debut outing at La Sarthe was particularly special for Lietz, however, and not just because he won it. “I drove for the French IMSA Performance Matmut team and shared the car with Patrick Long and Raymond Narac,” he explained. “To win on my first attempt, not knowing how challenging it was and as part of a French team with a French driver, was pretty special. It was also the one and only race my grandfather attended, and for that reason, it was especially emotional.”



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### Gallery













































































































































































































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