

CLASSIC LE MANS – JULY 10TH TO 11TH, 2010



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Two years ago, I went to Classic Le Mans and raced there as part of the George Tuma team in his beautiful ex-George Loos 1974 Porsche RSR. Quite coincidentally, this RSR was the highest placed RSR ever at the “real” Le Mans 24 Hours in 1975, when it placed fifth overall and won the GT class in the hands of John Fitzpatrick, Gijs van Lennep and Manfred Schurti. It beat the next placed RSR in sixth place, driven by “Beurlys”, Nick Faure and John Cooper, by about thirty six miles.

We (George Tuma, Jim Pace, Mauro Borella and myself) had a great time, and returned again this year, although I had come to help and spectate as I had hung up my helmet in July, except for “occasional” runs in something interesting. Just become too slow, I’m afraid; water skiing and vintage hydroplane racing will have to fill the gap.



This year, Classic Le Mans coincided with a heat wave that was sweltering France, breaking all records; temperatures whilst we were there were in the 33 to 38 degrees fahrenheit range, about 90 to 100 degrees centigrade. Together with friends, we had taken over a house in the suburbs of Le Mans, twenty minutes driving time from the circuit. This was a welcome change after the extortionate hotel bills that we had paid in 2008. In fact, I worked out afterwards that my bill this year was exactly ten percent of that in 2008!

So to the race... We were in "Plateau 6", the last in the line of "plateaus", so that cars dating from 1923 to 1979 can be accommodated. Each "plateau" had approximately sixty plus cars in it, making a total entry of four hundred plus cars. And what cars! Where else can you see Porsche 917s, 910s, 908s, 935s (ten entered), plus Ferrari 512s, P4s, Comp. Daytonas, 250 GT Berlinettas, plus Matras, Ford GT40s, 'twenties Bentleys, Bugattis, Delahayes, C and D type Jaguars, in fact the whole cornucopia of Sportscar racing of anything that was truly significant over the years. Drivers of note were David Piper (still racing at eighty years of age), Richard Attwood, Henri Pescarolo, Gerard Larrousse, Alain

Prost, just dozens, in fact, of the drivers who had manned these machines at “Le Sarthe” in the past.



Our first race was scheduled for six p.m. on Saturday and our professional driver, Jim Pace (victor of Daytona 24 Hours amongst his many successes), was to drive. I watched the race by the chicane that led into Arnage and Jim simply dominated his class, pulling away from the nearest RSR by seven seconds per lap! Just when victory in class appeared to be in the bag, he failed to come around for the final two laps of the race. When I got back to the paddock, I found the car had returned and the sad story emerged that a bearing had fallen out of the throttle linkage and Jim had not been able to get more than 2000 rpm from the engine. Nevertheless, he had got back to the pits but by that time, there was nothing to be done. Heiko, the Brun team's mechanic allocated to the RSR, swiftly got to work and replaced the bearing in time for the night race, which Mauro had “volunteered” for (i.e. no one else wanted to do it, as his start was at 4 a.m.)



Mauro had a good race, moving us up twelve places, not without coming back to report on how many cars had crashed or were broken down on the grass verges.

In between these races, I had taken to walking around the other paddocks, visiting the “village”, where shops selling just about everything were to be found, viewing some of the cars up for the auction and looking at car club displays. What a display. If you’ve never been, a visit to this great event is a “must” for sportscar fans.

George was the last driver in our team to take the start of the third and final race at midday on Sunday and all went well, despite George still recovering from some broken ribs sustained in a crash at Watkins Glen a month previously.



The RSR has now completed two Classic Le Mans races, despite suffering some small problems that were not expected (are they ever?) and it was a tired but happy band that left Le Mans that Sunday afternoon. Me, I drove straight back to Alcester in England, where I was staying with my daughter before flying home a couple of days later. I drove a rented diesel-powered Ford Fiesta, which cruised happily at 95 mph on the autoroutes, giving 53 mpg also! I covered the 450 miles in seven hours, including the Calais to Dover Ferry crossing and arrived back in leafy Warwickshire at just after midnight on Monday morning.





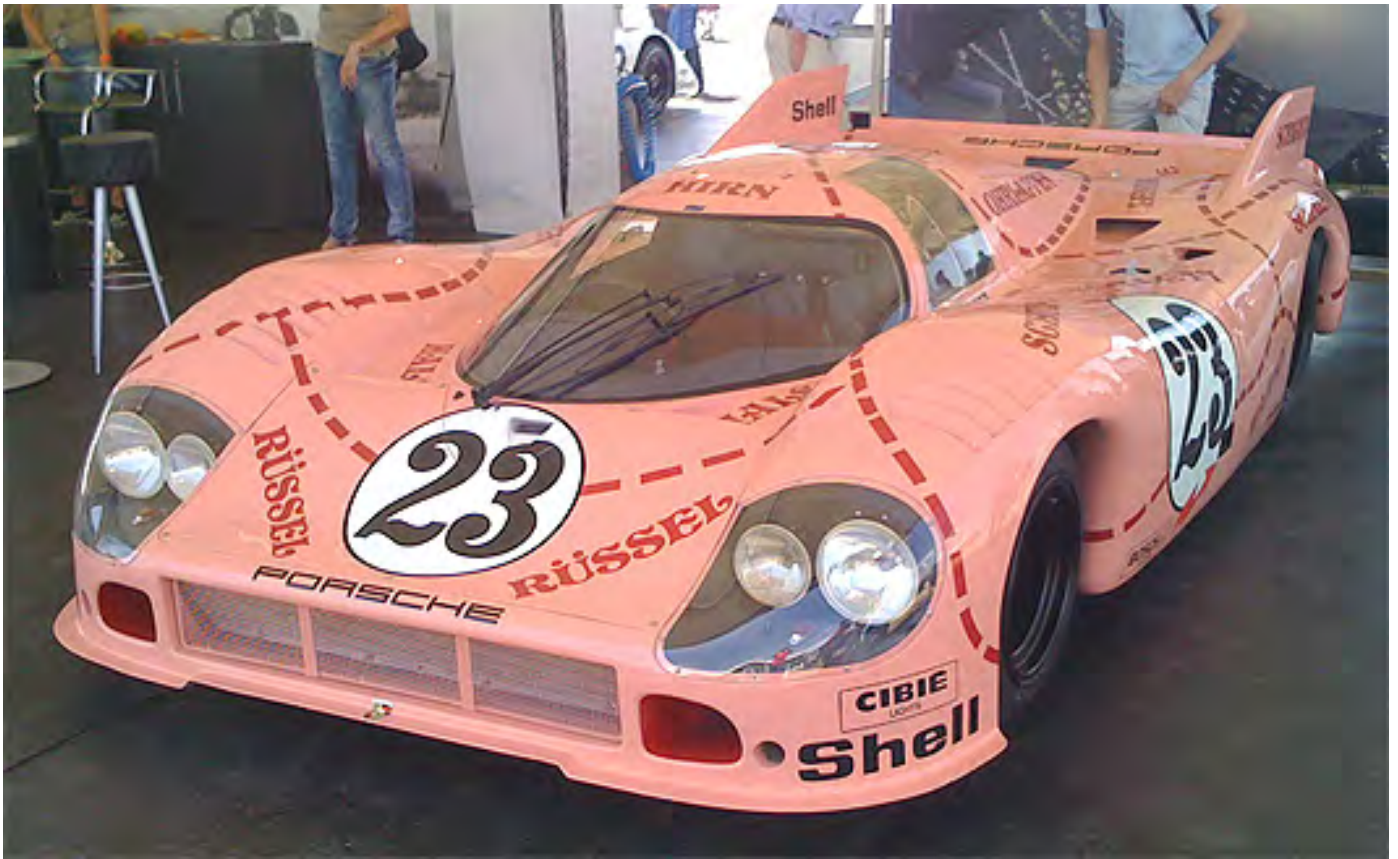














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