

# A Mechanic Remembers



Photo by Gary Westbury

## Le Mans 1966

“I always knew that my late father, [Colin Westbury](#), worked for Alan Mann Racing and crewed for Graham Hill's XGT-2 #7 at the 1966 Le Mans. But, as is so often the case, you always leave it too late to find out the full story. He passed away a number of years before #7 resurfaced in the wonderful condition it is now. And so much has been made of the GT40s in recent years, what with races at events such as the Revival and the Members' Meetings. I really wish he was still around to take to these events. He never took a camera to Le Mans or to the 84 hours *Marathon de La route* at the Nürburgring; I suppose to him then it was just 'another day at the office'. But in recent years I have discovered a number of photos in books and online that show dad at work. He's leaning over the wall next to #8 in the book *The Ford That Beat Ferrari*, and my favourite is a picture I discovered only recently in the Haynes GT40 book (p33) where he's pictured centre stage holding what looks like a lighting wiring harness in his hand as a colleague behind preps the new nose for #7, I'm guessing after its crash in practice. After his passing I was sorting out his effects and happened upon this short account of his time with AMR, which I hope you will find interesting. It's not just for the racing and the atmosphere that I'm attending the LMC 2016, I'll also be carrying some of dad's ashes and hope to find somewhere fitting to sprinkle them.” Gary Westbury

It was at the end of 1965 that I answered an advertisement placed in a local newspaper by Alan Mann Racing, for an auto-electrician - and I was successful. Electrician was my trade, as I had served a five year apprenticeship with HWM where I worked for fourteen years after leaving school.

To start with, I worked on Ford Cortina and Ford Galaxie saloon racing cars, and then I was on to the two Ford GT40 MkIIs being built for the 1966 Le Mans 24 hour race. I was thrown in at the deep end, working on such sophisticated machinery, although I had been working on Aston Martins, Jaguars and Facel Vegas. Ford was determined to win in 1966, and entered eight cars, shared between three teams. Three cars were prepared by Shelby American, three by Holman and Moody, and two by Alan Mann Racing.

Our cars were to be driven by Graham Hill/Jackie Stewart, car number 7, and by Sir John Whitmore/Frank Gardner, car number 8. Jackie Stewart had to drop out because he broke his wrist in a race just before Le Mans, his place being taken by Dick Thompson. Time was short to build the cars, and many all-night sessions took place.

When we arrived in France for the race, we found that Ford had taken over a large Peugeot garage near the circuit. The two American teams arrived with a fleet of articulated transporters. One was fitted out as a machine shop; there was an engine workshop, a transmission workshop etc. Among the first pieces of machinery to be unloaded were some Coca Cola-

filled refrigerators. Ford brought with them an army of men, separate persons being in charge of the engines, transmissions, brakes, tyres, windscreens and so on, and so on, and so on. The Americans don't do things by half!

In practice, as Dick Thompson, in No.7, came over the brow of a hill, the Scuderia Bear GT40, driven by Dick Holquist, moved across in front of him. Holquist's car was shunted off the track and destroyed. The Le Mans organisers disqualified Thompson and his car

Author Colin Westbury leans on the pit wall during the 1966 24 Heures du Mans

