

We had attempted the Le Mans Classic twice before, without a great deal of success.

My first attempt was in 2008 as a co-driver, with Will l'Anson, to Martin Chisholm (the well known purveyor of very expensive investment cars) in one of his 'toys' - a most unlikely, but rather pretty, 1953 DB Panhard powered (if that is the right word) by a twin cylinder, horizontally opposed 850cc engine. We encountered some problems, such as running out of fuel in practice at the end of the Mulsanne straight at around 1.00 am, but eventually qualified and got to race in Plateau 2. The highlight was blasting down the Mulsanne in the middle of the night (at our maximum speed of about 90 mph) and seeing the D-type Jags roar past at well over 150 mph - a truly wonderful sight and sound.



The DB Panhard in 2008

The next attempt was with the GT40 in 2010, when I returned Martin's favour and enlisted him and another good friend and ex-colleague, Neil Daws, as co-drivers. We just about managed to qualify - but in reality there isn't enough time for 3 drivers to fit into the very limited practice time allowed. That was the year when the weather was exceptionally hot, and we were only saved by being able to jump into the hotel swimming pool at every opportunity (we were staying at the hotel in the Technoparc, which is only about 1/2 mile from the race paddock).

Unfortunately, I managed to break the gearbox half-way through the first of the 3 race sessions. The 'wideback' cars, with their wider wheels and tyres, have more grip, which puts more stress on the drive train in the event of any snatched gearchanges, or mismatched revs during a gear change. I was using 2<sup>nd</sup> gear for the Mulsanne chicanes and the Ford chicane, as well as 2 or 3 other corners. This turned out

to be too much and the box gave up, causing our withdrawal. Ironically, I had a rebuilt box sitting on my garage floor at home - fat use that was! However, we did then have plenty of time to watch the event unfold and enjoy some of the hospitality one never has the time or inclination for when driving.



Ready for action in 2010

Having tasted the feel of a GT40 at Le Mans in 2010, where the car really did seem at home and appeared to know what it could do well, a race there was definitely unfinished business and so I was eager to get an entry for 2012. As it happened, we were lucky enough to win the GT1 class of the 2011 CER championship, which brought with it a guaranteed Le Mans entry. That was one problem solved, but the regulations (which mirror the CER regulations) now allow much grippier Avon Historic all weather tyres. Clearly if one's competitors use those tyres, we have to as well, but this brings other technical problems. The Avon tyres are a modern design, and as such are lower profile, and so smaller diameter, which alters the suspension set up (lower ground clearance) and final drive/gearbox ratios - especially for a track with very long, high speed straights.

In the end, we developed a different suspension setup and had a 'Le Mans' gearbox built by our gearbox wizard, using a different final drive ratio and gearing that allowed us to use only 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> once we got rolling.. The usual gearbox would be taken as a spare, just in case.

The next problem was, would I invite a co-driver along and if so, who would it be? I felt that as an old man of advancing years it would make sense to have a co-driver to share the burden. I asked Neil to come again, as he has driven the 'Old Ford' several times, so it would be easier for him to get to grips with the circuit, particularly as he had spent 1/2 hour in qualifying at Le Mans 2 years earlier!