

The Spa Six Hours is the ultimate test for a GT40. It combines all the requirements of a shorter sprint race with factors involved in endurance racing. This year pole position was taken by Kenny Brack with a lap of 2:43.185. In the race this will only drop to 2:46 to 2:49, which means that the car needs to last pretty much the full distance of the race flat out. This puts enormous demands on all the systems, but if the driver looks after the car too much, then it's easy to lose considerable amounts of time. The engine, transmission and brakes come in for a serious pounding - it's not unusual for a GT40 to finish the race with boiled brake fluid and no brake pads left. Then throw into the mix that the starting grid is regularly in excess of 100 cars ranging from pole-setting GT40s to Mini Coopers. The potential for incidents is high, and then, as if any more ingredients for a thrilling 6-hour race weren't already present, you have to add in the unique climate conditions that Spa has to offer. So winning the Spa 6 Hours is not something you just turn up and do; it requires considerable experience, good planning and a heavy dose of lady luck!

This year I was fortunate enough, not only to be working for the winning team, but was also responsible for running and preparing the winning GT40. This is a brief account of the race weekend from inside the pit garage.

This year the Spa 6 Hours started for me on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September at 6am at the workshops of Historic Automobiles in Petersfield. I was part of the 11-strong team that Simon Blake had put together to prepare and run 7 cars at Europe's most challenging historic racing event. This year we would be responsible for 3 GT40s, competing in the main 6 hour race, and a Ford Mustang, Lola T70, Cooper Monaco and Lotus Cortina in supporting races.

The logistics of getting 7 cars, all their spares and all the tools and other bits and bobs down to and back from Spa could fill another article. So I'll just say that it's a mammoth undertaking!

The basic time table ran as follows:

- Wednesday track day - GT40 P/1022 testing
- Thursday untimed open practice day with noise limit!
- Friday support race qualifying & Six Hour qualifying
- Saturday support races & Six Hour Race
- Sunday final support races

The GT40 I was responsible for was P/1022, owned by Manuelle Ferrao and driven by his son Diogo and Martin Stretton. The car was already at the circuit, testing on the Wednesday, just to make sure there were no dramas with the freshly-built Mathwall engine that had only been installed on the Monday of the same week.

Upon our arrival at the circuit, we were greeted by glorious sunshine and temperatures that really only inspired us to soak up the atmosphere of this magnificent track. With all this lethargy we were very pleased to find that Simon and Neal had got the car dialled into

the track, the engine was performing well and the drivers were very happy with the setup of the car.

All we had to do now was wait for the lorry to turn up with the rest of the cars, tools and spares so that we could setup our pit garage for the weekend. This gave us the chance to go and see some of the circuit before things got busy. When you've got 7 cars to look after, you don't really get out of your pit garage, so the opportunity to take a pit bike out to the top of the circuit was one that I couldn't miss! It demonstrated the huge gradient changes and size of the 4.35 mile-long forest circuit that simply can't be appreciated by viewing a Formula 1 race on the TV.



The main pits are just visible in the far distance

The Thursday test day was open to all cars running in any of the races during the weekend, but it had a noise limit! So all our cars had to have their silencers fitted, just in case the drivers want to test.

As I mentioned in my preamble, the 6 Hours is a tough test for the GT40. Perhaps the biggest factor, after mechanically durability, is the fuel factor! As I'm sure you all know a GT40 is a thirsty beast at the best of times, even if being driven carefully on the road, so imagine how much fuel is used at full chat for 6 hours. Basically an original GT40 is capable of completing the 6 hours with just 2 fuel stops, within which driver changes will also occur. Any other servicing, such as brake pad or tyre replacement, will ultimately cost too much time and put you so far back down the field that you would need a major dose of luck to regain the time lost. Another feature of a GT40, that a lot of you will be familiar with, is how completely and utterly useless the fuel gauges are. This particular foible is not reserved just for replicas - the originals suffer the same problems. Therefore to gauge how much fuel the car is using at full chat, you need to measure the exact quantity used on several hot laps for each driver.

This testing is done during the practice and qualifying sessions of the meeting, and is repeated more than