

B13 DAY TWO AT LE MANS

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B13 DAY TWO AT LE MANS SCRIPT

DATE: 13 JUNE 2011

We stayed at the track at Le Mans until well past 10 PM Saturday. By then the race was only into it's 7th hour. An Audi was leading with a trail of Peugeots in hot pursuit. The rivalry was still alive. We were seated safely in the Aston Martin hospitality center, finding ways to acclimate to the continuous din of cars passing just outside it's doors. I found that a glass of wine or two helped settle the nerves while Louise chose constant conversation as her remedy. It was well past midnight when we crawled under the feather cover of our comfortable bed at Le Tertre.



MG at Le Tertre

Sunday morning dawned bright and clear. I spent a few minutes wiping the morning dew from the MG and got the weather report from our hostess, Corinne. "Possible rain" she said as we drove down the gravel driveway. During the 16-mile drive the wispy little clouds knitted themselves into a grey blanket overhead and darker clouds to the west seemed ominous to me.



So far we were lucky with the weather. Rain has been a problem in years past...specifically 1958 when we first were there. I was with the American Forces Network and assigned to cover Le Mans on radio for our troops. In a monument to poor timing, Louise and my mother were flying to Paris

to prepare for our wedding; just one week away. I picked them up at Orly Field in a hastily acquired Simca Aronde 4 door. This was nowhere near the car I wanted but it solved two problems. One: transportation to Le Mans. Two: I was unable to get room reservations but the seats made into a bed. It would be an adventure for them both I told myself.



Aston Martin Pits 1959

My mother, who had never been out of the U.S., accompanied Louise as a form of chaperone. We still argue about whom she was trying to protect. She now found herself in the infield of a major racing event surrounded by people who spoke little to no English with a son who was too busy reporting the race to spend time with his mother. Louise, feigning interest in car races, tagged along with me as I sought out interview material.

About midnight it began to rain and I was caught without a hat or umbrella. Louise was wearing a hooded raincoat so gave me her scarf as protection. We were at the bottom of the Dunlop bridge with a packed crowd waiting to cross. Suddenly I felt a pinch on my bottom, then another. I turned slowly and stared directly into the beady eyes of a little Frenchman wearing a



beret. He looked at the rain dripping off my beard, shrugged his shoulders, said, "Pardon" and melted into the crowd. At that very moment my scarf wearing days were over, rain or no.



This morning we pulled directly into the parking lot and were greeted by a lineup of Aston Martins, Ferrari's, Porsche's and a lone Mercedes. We neatly parked in a space near the front and were an immediate draw for passing photographers. The MG sat there like a dowager queen turning up her nose at the surrounding expensive iron. I was taking my own photos when Louise tugged at my elbow saying excitedly, "I've found our next car."

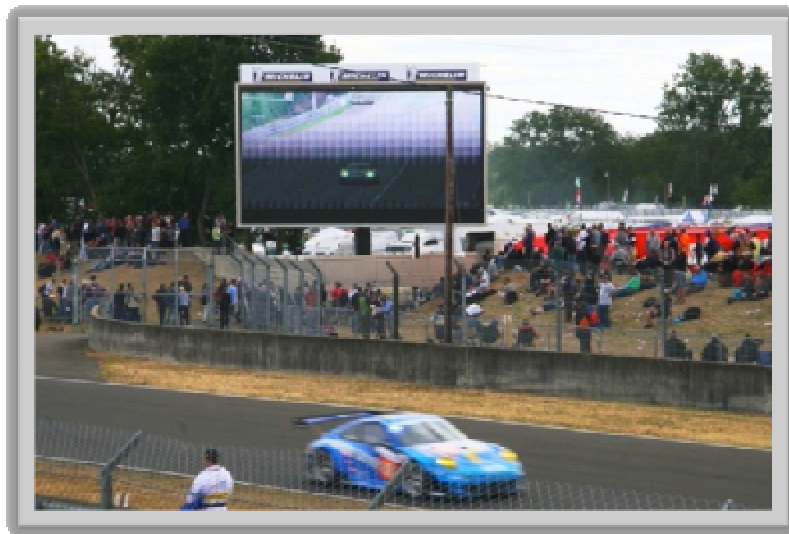


I read about it in Road & Track but had never seen one. It was a Cygnet, a genuine but not-yet-sold in the States, Aston Martin mini car. This was no ordinary mini car, however. Even though a Toyota under the skin, it reeked of quality both inside and out. It is designed for those living in urban environments that need a much smaller car for town use but don't want to sacrifice quality.



"It has genuine English hides," said Sarah Durose, our Aston Martin contact. "And you can custom design your own interior just like our more expensive models." That quickly brought up the question, "How much?" She gave the price in pounds and my rapid calculation puts it at 45,000+ dollars. "Wouldn't you like to be the first in the U.S. to own one?" she said with a grin. "Only if we hike the price of the MG," was my response.

The race had 7 hours and Audi was still in lead but only one of cars was left to carry honor of Germany. Their other two cars suffered spectacular accidents earlier. The leading car was trailed by four or five Peugeots but only of them was in the



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and running less than 15 seconds behind. This could be a real squeaker. The Aston Martin crew worked feverishly to get car 007 back into the race but it went around and the driver said the engine wasn't up to it so it was withdrawn. To his credit, Chairman David Richards assembled the crew and staff in the lounge and apologized for the poor showing. There just wasn't enough time for proper development and testing from conception to race day. "We'll be back," was his promise.

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After a hearty English breakfast, I took off to shoot some still photos and video while Louise took up her favorite position in the upper lounge where she was in her element. She selected a centrally located couch and began spinning an invisible web that snared anyone unlucky enough to sit within earshot. As she drew them in they began sharing the most personal aspects of their life. Louise, always a good listener, primed them with innocent questions and out would tumble even their darkest secrets.



Louise was almost oblivious to the world-quality racing just outside the window and got mildly annoyed when a passing car would cover her queries. "I just hate to repeat a question because then it sounds like I'm prying," she said. "I just want to know about them." There were those, however, who wouldn't come near her. They were the very attractive women who populate events of this type and appear to be in May/December

relationships. While sugar daddy is discussing the qualities of the Aston Martin automobiles, they sit quietly and stare at themselves in any available mirror.

Through Louise I have learned quite a bit about these ladies. She's taught me to recognize hair extensions, falls, false nails, push-up bras, tummy tucks, facial work and botox lips...all the things that seem to be required to hold the attention of their older paramours. They are the ones who lounge around the pits and appear to be interested in anything but racing. Frankly, it is an attractive diversion to the intensity of competition.



In the final hour there were mild cries of protest that the laggard Peugeot cars were intentionally making it difficult for the leading Audi to pass them. It must have been happening where the flag marshals were not because no one received a black flag or penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct.



We watched the finish in the Aston Martin paddock above their empty pits while enjoying snacks and light drinks. At 3 PM the checkered flag was unfurled for the Audi as they reclaimed the prize from last year's winner, Peugeot. The winning margin was 13 seconds...a close race in anyone's book. The German national anthem was played over the loudspeakers and the crowd began to melt away. The dreaded rain had been misting for the past hour and once the checkered flag fell, the drizzles and then the drops fell too.



Arriving at the Aston Martin lounge it was clear that the party was over. The Customer Relations staff was busily dismantling all the glitzy booths and customer relations center. Janette Green and her able associates all knew their jobs and were packing items into vans for transport to the next event. I was typing away on the iMac when a crew appeared and began putting the computers into boxes. They waited, patiently, as I finished my e-mail and, suddenly, it was all gone. Louise's couch was carried down the stairs and the room was almost empty.



Before the coach completely turned into a pumpkin, I set out to act like a journalist by asking Sara Durose for a short interview. It was only as we sat face-to-face that I realized my reporter's notebook was sitting on my desk in Los Angeles with all the other things I had forgotten to bring. I was reduced to using a small notepad dropped off at our house by a real estate agent. After each penetrating question, I entered the response under the smiling face of

our local realtor. I hoped Sarah wouldn't notice this professional breach although she did look amused a time or two. We said an emotional goodbye to Sarah, Raphael Loheac-Derboulle and other staff members we had come to know so well. The bright spot is that we will be touring the Aston Martin factory on the 12th of July and will see many of them again.



The MG was dripping wet as we pulled back the tonneau and wiped up a few wet spots. It was back to drizzle conditions again so we chose not to put the top up. "If I go fast enough we won't get wet," I told Louise. And that's what we did until we reached the dry and comfortable security of our B&B, Le Tertre.