



The 24 Hours of LeMans

PHOTOS AND ARTICLE BY DAN MORRIS

Bucket list adventures are wonderful to achieve, a joy to experience, and when surrounded by car and race enthusiasts an adrenalin-filled opportunity to celebrate the joy of Porsche (and those other fun brands).

Over Father's Day weekend, I had the privilege of attending this year's 24 Hours of LeMans with my son, William. This 101st year of the endurance classic was spectacular, and I will admit that I look forward to at least one return journey. Attending LeMans is complex; the sheer travel distance involved, arranging tickets, lodging, and local transportation. Once there, the overall event requires almost an entire day to comprehend. Television is excellent at demonstrating the driver's view; yet it pales to the thunderous vibrations of speeding Hypercars, experimental cars, and GT cars as they zoom by along the nearly 8.5-mile country-road-influenced track.

The administrative coordination

including tickets, lodging, and VIP services were outsourced to a race tour company called *The Grand Prix Club*. Our LeMans journey began in Paris at Charles de Gaulle Airport where approximately 70 enthusiasts met up for our four-hour bus ride to Tours. While en route, the conversation next to me mentioned Arizona Porsche Club drives. I interjected and introduced myself. When I mentioned being the Treasurer

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for the Oregon Region, the gentleman across from me said "well, if you are the Treasurer, then you must know Peg. He quickly introduced himself as EC Mueller and explained how his affiliation with ORPCA was instrumental in introducing Peg to our club. We must certainly thank EC for that. Of course, I snapped a photo and texted Peg (at about 3 AM her time) and soon thereafter she replied, with a smile, and even texted EC. The Porsche family is certainly special and we share a common bond - our enjoyment of our cars and our collective friendships of fellow club members.

The next morning, we boarded our buses eight hours before the start. Traffic to any race can be miserable, but traffic to a race that has 300,000+ spectators is a new experience. The French countryside is always pleasant as we passed family farms and watched all types of supercars pass by.

Once inside the official track area, we found ourselves just above the famed Porsche Curves. With a trackside private viewing area along with our official seats just on the other end of the Curves, we were never far away from the action.

Just outside our hospitality tent was the Porsche center (imagine – they are in the middle of their own curves) and with a PCA Membership or a key fob, Porsche owners were

admitted, provided some swag, access to the Porsche store, food, and new models, yet most importantly to me, nice, clean, and available restrooms. When 300k + people are all seemingly standing in line for facilities, it is nice to have options.

Prior to the race we were able to participate in the famed "grid walk". Now I have been to pit lanes, paddocks, and the like, but I have never been on a track among 90+ cars, and likely 100,000+ people all enjoying the opportunity to look, touch, and photograph their favorite cars and frequently even the full racing teams. I focused on enjoying each type of car and specifically the various Porsche versions. Although I will say the Aston Martin and BMW GT3 cars were also not only beautiful up close, but they were also fun to watch as they attempted to keep up with the 911 GT3 that ultimately won the GT3 division.

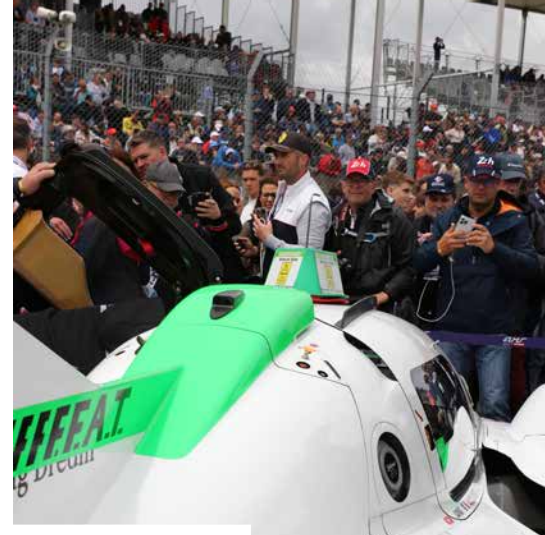
The race itself is a complete experience. It begins with the French Special Forces rappelling from helicopters with the French Flag prior to their national anthem and highlighted by their flyover with Red/White/Blue trailing smoke from supersonic Mirage jets. This flyover is impressive on TV – it is thunderous and bone-rattling in person.

Once the flyover departs, it is "start your engines" time and the (of course) 911 pace car sets off for a couple of warm up laps. The race focuses on the Hypercars – these are the technological marvels that are pressed to survive the grueling 24 hours of racing. Along with the Hypercars, this year also included the famed LeMans Prototype group

(these look a lot like a Hypercar) and this year the GT3 class. For 2025, I understand that the Prototypes will not participate, and they expect upwards of 40 entrants in the GT3 division.

Weather at LeMans plays an important role. If you think about France, this part is a lot like our Willamette Valley during our late spring. We frequently have three if not four seasons in a day. Add to that the extreme distance of this race circuit and there can be a torrential downpour on one side, extreme winds and cold on another, and yet on the third side, it can be sunny and bright.

While my son and I had the opportunity to spend the night at the race, it turned cold, windy, and rainy and we departed around six and a half hours into the race, returning to our hotel for some much-needed sleep. We returned about 12 hours later to much





improved weather as there were still nearly seven hours to run in the race. Overnight we missed four hours of the pace car leading under a yellow flag as fog and rain made it too dangerous for unfettered racing. Thinking about this, the 911 GT3 safety car not only drove so long it had to be relieved in the middle of the night as it was almost out of gas, but from a time and lap standpoint, likely led the LeMans race for more laps than any other car.

Once the weather cleared, racing began again with full throttle. The leading Porsche Hypercar drove hard against Ferrari and Toyota. In the end, Porsche #6 missed its place on the podium by less than two seconds after 24 hours of racing. The final 10 laps were simply thrilling as everyone's favorite cars were doing their best to outperform their opponents. On the GT3 side Porsche GT3 91 prevailed and won its class.

To provide perspective, during the race, the winning Hypercars completed 311 laps or approximately 2,650 miles whereas the winning GT3 completed 281 laps for about 2,390 miles. The Hypercars were simply that much faster.

Along with the race there are plenty of opportunities

to shop your favorite brands and I even was able to ride the iconic Ferris wheel that is just before the Porsche Curves and that provided excellent racing perspective. Music and entertainers were common and if you got tired of your current trackside view, you could hop a shuttle to the Indianapolis Curves and Mulsanne Straight. At each location, LeMans maintained trackside viewing for all ticketholders, nearby food and facilities, and an overwhelming opportunity to enjoy the race.

Finally, LeMans is famous for its trackside camping. From tents on top of 911s to classic motorhomes, to thousands of homogenous nylon tents, some of them with supercars alongside, LeMans provides ample opportunities for all enthusiasts to experience the 24 hours of racing in a time and place unlike any other.

My parting thoughts include 1) I will definitely return, 2) I will arrive earlier and stay longer, and 3) I will happily join other sportscar enthusiasts by fully immersing myself into this two-day extravaganza known as the 24 Hours of LeMans.

Here are some photos from Dan's time at LeMans. ■

