

# LE MANS 1958

by Jesse Alexander  
and Karl Ludvigsen  
*The Races*

**E**XCEPT FOR THE FIRST HOURS and for a brief time on Sunday, it was a typically wet and soggy Le Mans, the rain coming in sudden vicious cloudbursts, completely inundating the track in certain areas. At one time vision was so restricted that the big cars reduced speed almost 50 percent, drivers peering over the windcreens straining to catch sight of slower cars out in front.

Coming up behind small displacement machinery on the Mulsanne straight in a charging 3 liter under such conditions, provided drivers with exciting moments, for the small cars would be completely obscured by blinding sheets of spray. All the driver of a Ferrari could see in front of him would be a cloud of white billowing vapor, making it very difficult to overtake a group of small cars, even in daylight; what it was like at night beggars the imagination.

So much for the weather. The race itself evolved into a duel between the Hamilton/Bueb Jaguar and the Hill/Gendebien 3 liter Testa Rossa Ferrari after six hours of the race had elapsed. By then not only had the two Scottish Jags gone out with piston trouble, but Stirling Moss, having led for a bit more than two hours was forced to retire at Mulsanne with engine failure of unknown cause. He had certainly not over-revved the Aston during his two hour stint, (keeping the revs at 6000) he had merely gotten through the corners much faster than the rest, as well as doing some superb "traffic driving". Lewis-Evans was at the wheel of the second DBR1 when he spun at Dunlop in an avoiding action, clouting the bank sufficiently hard to damage the front end. This forced him to retire. The third Aston, Brooks/Trintignant driving, dropped out at 6 a.m. Sunday morning with transmission failure.

Bent machinery and wreckage littered the side of the road for the entire eight-mile distance. Under Dunlop bridge lay Chamberlain's Lotus; close by was Picard's Ferrari, farther on up the hill before the rush down into the esses lay "Mary's" Jaguar and on the opposite side was the Gurney/Kessler Ferrari. Sadly, "Mary" (a pseudo-name for a Belgian driver) lost his life in the accident which occurred at night in the heaviest of the downpours when vision was down to practically nil.

The Hill/Gendebien Ferrari led after the third hour till 4 p.m. the following afternoon, except for a short period at

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## The Cars

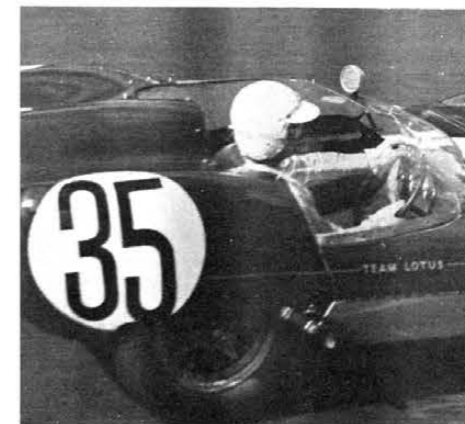
**S**PEAKING TECHNICALLY, this year's Le Mans was outstanding—outstanding in that there were very few notable new designs. Understandably, manufacturers and owners tended to fall back on machinery that had already proved itself capable of enduring the 24 Hours, though thanks to a multiplicity of prangs this foresight was not reflected in the proportion of finishers to starters.

The most successful first effort was without question the AC Prototype. There was no doubt about the ability of its Bristol engine and gearbox to last the race, but its chassis and bodywork were new to AC and thus worth testing. Le Mans not being very hard on chassis components, this aspect is inconclusive, but the AC's shallow space frame looks very light indeed in relation to its apparent strength. As before, John Tojiero and his shop had a great deal to do with design and construction of the prototype, the front suspension (parallel wishbones and coils) and frame, as well as the upward tilt of the tail being obviously related to his Climax-powered Le Mans car. AC's interest lay mainly in the new angled-axis (about 20 degrees to the longitudinal axis) and low-pivot swing-axle rear suspension. Also, with long coil springs, this arrangement is light and neat and well worth following up. Handsome in light green and somewhat after the style of the second-series Lister-Bristols, the new AC's bodywork was tested adequately by this year's rains.

Since Le Mans is not a chassis test and since we already know the Triumph engine will run fast for 24 hours, there isn't much to be learned from the sixteenth-place finish of the new Peerless. The two works cars (one didn't start) were equipped with oil coolers below the main radiator, these not being standard equipment. The cars were also bedecked with racing-style equipment like big back-window filler caps and plexiglas vents which provided hairy though rough appearance in contrast to modest performance by Le Mans two-liter standards. Cornering with the de Dion rear end appeared flat and steady, and though Jopp and Crabb were naturally going easy to ensure a finish, the fact that the Peerless stayed on the road during the rain sets it apart from some other marques in this respect.

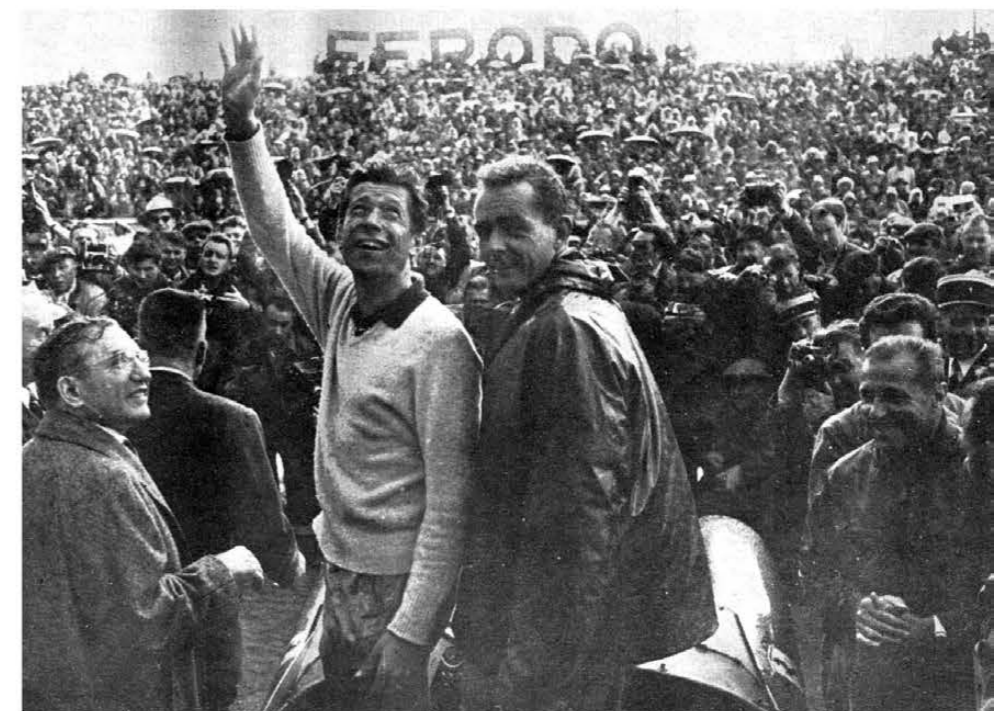
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Gendebien takes his turn at the works-entered Ferrari, at Mulsanne curve.



Living on borrowed design time, one D-type was a threat to the Ferrari; Bueb, in # 8 lasted for about three-quarters of the race before retiring. Touted from Class E to Class H, and for the Index as well, a Lotus took last. Hill, Gendebien and Ferrari proved to be a perfectly matched trio, as both drivers respected the limits of the car.

Olivier Gendebien and Phil Hill at 4:15, after the finish, reflect joy and fatigue.



## Le Mans

### The Cars

(Continued on page 52)

Porsche's 1588 cc Type 718, right, lost its chance for second spot with this halt to swap a front drum. Below, top-line drivers are not too keen on night racing for it really wears them out. Phil Hill at one AM tells Dan Gurney what he's missing. Bottom, vonTrips' face shows strain of three hours in rain at night.



#### RESULTS: 1958 24 HOURS OF LE MANS.

1. Hill/Gendebien (Ferrari 2,953)
  2. Whitehead/Whitehead (Aston-Martin 2,992)
  3. Behra/Hermann (Porsche 1588)
  4. Barth/Frere (Porsche 1498)
  5. deBeaufort/Linge (Porsche 1498)
  6. Beurlys/de Changy (Ferrari 2,953)
  7. Hugus/Erikson (Ferrari 2,953)
  8. Bolton/Stoop (AC-Bristol 1971)
  9. Pathey/Berger (AC-Bristol 1971)
  10. Colas/Kerguen (Porsche 1498)
  11. de Tomaso/Davis (Osca 749)
- Fastest lap: Hawthorn (Ferrari) 4 min. 8 sec. = 121.42 mph.

Among the less novel nameplates, Ferrari stood out both in number of entries and in finishing position. Concerning the engine, front suspension, and portions of the bodywork, the factory Ferraris are kin to the production Testa Rossas; but many other features are different. One is the use of a de Dion rear axle located by parallel trailing arms and hung by a transverse leaf spring, in conjunction with a rear-mounted gearbox placed — traditionally Ferrari — just ahead of the differential. The front brake drum faces are simply vented by big drilled holes, while the drum rims have shallow, crude transverse finning and a meaty cross-section.

Having introduced the cut-away front contour for brake cooling just a year ago, Ferrari's works cars returned to rounded snouts with smaller radiator openings and separate ducts to the brakes. The carb bulge with rearward-facing air aperture was incorporated in the winning car and the Collins-Hawthorn record-setting machine, as per experiments on the Dino series sports and G.P. cars.

The Chinetti-entered car that was so beautifully handled by Dan Gurney and Bruce Kessler was last seen as a factory car at the Nürburgring. Though it looked "stock" Testa Rossa except for right-hand-drive, it shared a de Dion back end with the factory Ferraris but had its gearbox in unit with the engine, and was thus very much a Maranello Special. The six other Testa Rossas were the standard LHD car, all having simple circumferential brake drum finning. Half of them had smooth unvented brake drum faces, while the others had the centrifugal venting dating back to 1950. The Ferrari entry was rounded out by a single Testa Rossa of the old two-liter four-banger type, modernized by the latest in cutaway fenders.

All the pre-race form on the basis of sheer velocity was Aston-Martin, who fielded three DBR1/300 cars just as last described in SCI. They all had the alloy four-bearing blocks capped by the 95-degree heads which were experimental last year but which have now been standardized. Three twin-throat Weber carbs were used. So far the performance of the three-liter version of the seven-bearing DBR2 engine has not been good enough for a

Championship race, which is a pity since, as I said last year, three more bearings are what Astons need.

The 2nd-place Aston? To the best of my memory it was practically identical, but slightly inferior in distance covered, to the second-place finisher in 1956. Though it was a good day out for the Whiteheads, this does not constitute progress down at Feltham. Just as raced by the factory in '56, #5 had an iron crankcase, old-type twin-plug head and disc brakes. A Mercedes-like refinement on this car was the fitting of a small window near the top of the fuel tank as a guide during quick fill-ups. The new Astons also had specially painted slots under the front for instant insertion of the wheel jack.

It would have surprised nobody if Porsche had won the race. Finishing third and placing four cars in the top ten is just an ordinary weekend at Le Mans for them. Their two best places were taken by RSK's of the latest type, the Behra/Hermann car having the 1588 cc engine. This car could easily have finished second had it not been for a malfunctioning in the brakes which prevented proper withdrawal of the shoes and led to the complete wearing away of the left front brake lining. Both shoes and the drum were replaced during the race, and another set was ready had the right front needed it too. Porsche front brakes are large and helically-finned, but so completely shrouded by the wheel that one wonders if cooling is adequate. Of course the face of the drum is exposed through the use of a large bolt circle.

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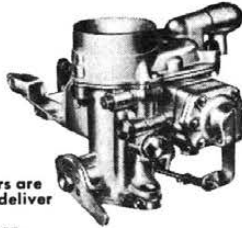


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## The Cars

(Continued from page 50)

The RSK's were given a very clean cockpit outline by a high tonneau cover mating with a rounded, faired engine hatch, and in spite of their (to me) repellent shape they must be very smooth aerodynamically. The same must have been true of the two Oscas, the less obviously streamlined of which walked away with the index honors. It seemed that the Laroche/Radix car, with its small air intake, shrouded front wheels and Lotus-like cockpit, was prepared in France without any actual aerodynamic advice. In relation to the de Tomaso/Davis car it also suffered from "cockpit trouble". The standard Osca in 750 cc form is certainly a beautiful little car, and the first man to run one in the States will own Class H for as long as he chooses.

Streamlining is a perennial feature of the DB's and Panhard Monopols, all of course based on the Panhard flat-twin engine. DB presented two coupes with conventional doors plus two open cars; one (with a Lotus-style cockpit) finished second on index. Unlike some earlier versions these cars have ducted fan cooling, the ducts also embrace and cool the starter and generator. Panhard brought three coupes, two very nicely executed in detail with 300SL-type doors, and one open car which was powered by the sole engine novelty. To shorten pushrod length it had two separate camshafts placed in the extremities of the sump, akin to late BMW flat-twin cycle engines or to the AJB four-barrel. Weird and wonderful carburetor arrangements are to be seen on these cars, from downdraft to sidedraft, from single-throat and twin-throat Solex to twin-throat Zenith (one carb per cylinder!) as used in the new production Porsches.

With only one lame finisher among three cars, Stanguellini had an interesting range of rear end layouts. One car was conventional, with a live rear axle. Another had its gearbox in unit with the engine but had parallel-wishbone rear suspension, while the final finishing car had the same independent rear with a rear-mounted gearbox. Springing at the back in the two latter cars is provided by rubber in tension.

Highly touted in every class from E to H and for the Index prize as well, Lotus took an ignominious last. The 2 liter car and the twin-cam 1½ had wishbone front suspension (like all Lotuses that made the field) and the swing-axle rear suspension. Since these two could have encountered wheel or tire changes, they had wire wheels with Rudge hubs. To try to recoup the 15 or so horses that were lost in the

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original right-angled engine position, the twin-cam Climaxes now lean 17 degrees to the left, while a hood bulge takes care of the exhaust cambox. All the four remaining Lotus had de Dion rear ends and Chapman's alloy wheels, two having 1100 cc engines and the other two 741 cc. Also in the field was a neat Tojiero-Climax of the latest type, but it retired along with the Lotus in its class, leaving no finishers in Class G! Too bad Elvas weren't there.

The other Anglo-Saxon stalwart did about as well. It was really something of a comedown for Jaguars, though they have been living on borrowed time designwise for some years. Perhaps we may see the E-Type and a more serious attitude toward racing soon. Privately-entered cars #11 and #57 were production D-Types in general shape, though of course with the new 2987 cc engine, while the Hamilton and Ecurie Ecosse machines had the longer noses and exhaust pipes of ex-works cars. Astonishingly, none were injected.

Some hope was held for the two Lister-Jags, the Belgian car being a 1958 production-type edition complete with strange scoop for rear brake cooling projecting up between the seats. Bruce Halford's dark green #10 was much rougher in finish but had a newer, neater, more compact body shape that bodes of things to come from Brian Lister, who was Major Domo of Bruce's pit. The low finishing spot of #10 is of course a function of a change of camshaft during the race, a spot of work on the gearbox out on the course (and later at the pits), followed by prolonged motoring in third gear only.

There are a couple of Italians who deserve a mention. First it was sad to see a 300S Maserati in the race as a token effort only, no real development having been made on this basically sound car toward the three-liter formula. Let it be said that this was one of the latest 300S's, with the same wide, specially-finned brakes used on the front of the new V-12 sports car. Also entered was one of the sneaky-shaped, Kimberly-type 200SI Masers with a de Dion rear and gearbox in unit with engine. With Maserati, Ferrari, Lotus, Peerless, AC and Porsche all involved, the two-liter class held a lot of interest, but only the last three finished.

Also, that well-known Italian hop-up artist Conrero brought two Alfa Giulietta Sprint Veloces, both bodied by Zagato but in slightly differing styles. The rounded-nosed blue car was shod with Engleberts while the other featured Pirelli Cinturatos. In corners the Belgian tires made more noise, but judging by the downshifts that car wasn't being handled too competently.

Coopers weren't represented this year, John apparently being engrossed with the development of his Grand Prix program, but some Surbiton ideas were obvious in the squared-off tail of the single Renault-based VP. As if to underline the point the front body and fenders looked more Lotus than the Lotus did. Renault 4CV rear suspension was used complete, the engine being moved ahead of the axle and the radiator behind, and a single twin-throat Solex sidedraft carb was fitted. A lot of fun but probably the slowest of the 16 (!) cars entered in Class H.

Two other sidelights on Le Mans: Rain is an ever-present problem and was spe-

(Continued on page 54)

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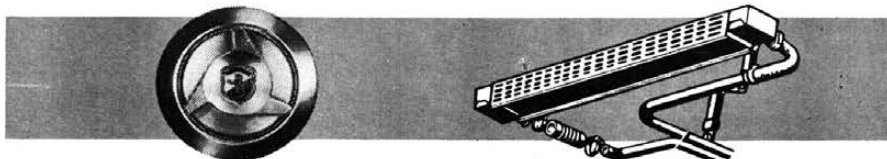
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## Le Mans

*The Cars* (Continued from page 50)

cially bothersome this year. Ferrari's rearward-facing carb opening must effectively keep water out of the gasworks, and in the hood scoop of the AC Prototype one could see a deflector which served the same purpose. Some other makes risked an uncontrollable amount of water injection.

In view of the fact that it used the notoriously high Bristol engine, the hood line of the AC Prototype was sweepingly low. Inspection showed that this was done by slinging the vulnerable sump about three inches off the asphalt, a stunt which can be pulled off only at Le Mans — certainly not, say, for the Targa Florio. The Peerless' exhaust system meandered about under the bodywork, giving it a similar ground clearance.

The noise prize this year? Downshifts just in front of the pits for the Dunlop bend were very impressive, and there's real pressure on the cardrums when the DBR1/300's tap is turned on after a corner. Well, as two years ago, that's one that Aston-Martin did take home.

—Karl E. Ludvigsen

## Porsche 1600S

(Continued from page 25)

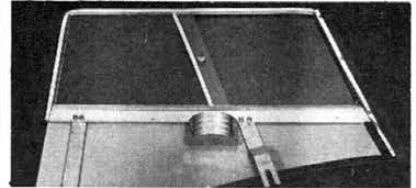
In Germany, the most docile model of the line has long been known as the Porsche *Damen*, literally, the Ladies' Porsche. While the earlier Supers have surely exhibited *certain* feminine characteristics, they could hardly have been called ladies at any time. But since the Carreras are now available for racing purposes, the formerly quixotic, temperamental Supers have been taught their manners and are now thoroughly at home in any road situation — race, rally or even thick traffic.

The flexibility of the latest 1600S engine is astonishing to say the least. It is mainly the twin-choke Zenith carburetors that have taken the sharp, unruly edge off of the old Super and with the substitution of a plain bearing unit for the complex Hirth roller bearing crank, the other major headache of owning a Porsche Super has been eliminated, too. These much less expensive cranks are rugged indeed, so much so that the new 1600 Carrera will also have a plain bearing one. The carbs are the same as on the "normal", but to suit the wilder cam grind considerably larger venturis (28 instead of 24 mm) are used with appropriately changed jets, as well as bigger valves and higher compression ratio.

The green area on the tach (2500 to 5000 rpm on the Super) indicates the range of engine speed suitable for continuous full throttle work; the red area (5000 to 5500) is OK for brief moments, such as accelerating through the gears on level roads. Hanging the tach needle above it for any length of time is needless over-revving, while to open the throttle sharply below the green is lugging it, though that's no longer as serious as it was with the Hirth crank.

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## Le Mans

### The Races

(Continued from page 27)



Moss leads thru esses on opening lap.

midnight when the Hamilton-Bueb Jaguar passed Gendebien. The Hawthorn/Collins Ferrari retired early in the morning with the clutch gone. The Trips/Seidel car went into the sand at Arnage shortly after midnight as Seidel attempted unsuccessfully to get around two slower cars blocking the road. The Hamilton/Bueb Jaguar made a pit stop at midnight; after this it never caught the Hill/Gendebien Ferrari, despite the optimism of the English commentator. By noon on Sunday, Hill had come up behind Hamilton and was about to lap him again. But the Ferrari stayed behind, Hill merely keeping the Jaguar in his sights. This undoubtedly harassed Hamilton and he tried to increase the gap. In doing so, he slipped up and left the road violently at Arnage, the car going end over end, finally coming to rest upside down in a ditch. Hamilton was just able to crawl out with minor injuries. From that point on the Ferrari had it all its own way: the second place car, the Whitehead Aston, was some 100 miles behind on overall distance.

Phil Hill and Olivier Gendebien had babied their Ferrari from the very beginning. As well as limiting their revs to 7000 rpm, the Ferrari's brakes were never left on for more than half a second at speeds over 100 mph. The foot came off the gas at the end of Mulsanne long before any of the others, making use of the Ferrari's high drag factor to slow it more than anything else. Gear changes were never rushed: they downshifted smoothly and methodically. At the end of the 24 hours, the Ferrari, having averaged slightly over 106 mph for 2,547 miles had plenty of brake potential left as well as being in near-perfect mechanical condition. Hill and Gendebien make an excellent team, possessing not only mutual respect for each other's abilities, but both have the intelligence to realize what is needed to make a car finish at Le Mans, then to agree on certain prescribed limitations within which they would drive.

The 1958 race average of 106 miles per hour compares with last year's speed of 113.7 mph. Fastest race lap was again made by Mike Hawthorn in 4 min. 8 sec., compared with his '57 ltd of 3 min. 58.7 in the 4 liter Ferrari. Thus, the FIA 3-liter limit resulted in a considerably slower race than last year, and enthusiasm for Le Mans among drivers sinks lower each year. But the crowds continue to swarm to the Sarthe circuit, and financially it is most interesting for the organizers. It looks like this annual 24 hour circus will be with us for some time to come.

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