

Ferrari



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FOC visits Le Mans

... and we just
couldn't say 'no'



When we first saw the publicity for the FOC invitation from Motoring Adventures for the trip to the 24 Heures du Mans it didn't take us long to decide that we had to go, so we promptly sent off our cheque to express interest in participating.

Incredibly, we had never been to watch the race. Also, we own a 250 GTE (The Old Lady) and we thought it would be quite apposite to take her to Le Mans, particularly as part of the weekend's activities was the opportunity to drive round the full 24-hour race circuit. You will no doubt have read in Above: La Place des Jacobins.

Below: Place de la République.



Hugh Doran's article in *Ferrari*, issue 142 (summer 2004), that the 250 GTE was unveiled to an unsuspecting public when one was used as a course car at the 24-hour race in 1960.

Over winter, after our trip to the Nürburgring last July (see 'Sunshine and silly grins' *Ferrari*, issue 139) we had both fuel pumps on The Old Lady refurbished. Incidentally, Ferrari UK now stocks repair kits for the Fispal mechanical fuel pump which includes the diaphragm. There is no similar kit for the electric pump, so this was just stripped, cleaned and rebuilt.

With the car fettle and loaded, armed with the Road Book prepared by Motoring Adventures, who put the package together for the Club, we set off with a light heart and not too heavy a right foot. It is amazing how one can have half a day to get ready and still leave later than intended!

Portsmouth-Le Havre

The package offered to Club members gave a choice of channel crossings and hotel accommodation. Our chosen route was the overnight sailings between Portsmouth and Le Havre, with dinner on board included. After a reasonably gentle potter we arrived at Portsmouth quite early to catch the 22.45 sailing.

Our request to the ferry company marshals "to be loaded as flat as possible as we have long, low slung exhausts" usually ensures we are put with other similarly afflicted cars such as Morgans and Caterhams. When we came to board, we were delighted to be on the lowest vehicle deck with no steep ramps to contend with. Also on this crossing were Martin and Anne Woodhead and John and Alison Moore in 355 and 550 respectively. A touch of silliness with a cabin key which refused to function resulting in a change of cabins prevented our joining

report: Paul Skinner

photos: Sue Skinner

them for dinner. However, we happened to meet and dine with Lindsay Williams, the Motoring Adventures representative who would be looking after all the members who were staying at Chateau de l'Aubrière.

Having been assured that we wouldn't be able to ignore the ship's wake up call, we did not bother to set our alarm. Inevitably we didn't hear it and overslept, missing breakfast on the boat. Undaunted, we drove to the terminal for a coffee and croissant. Being in dire need of petrol, a P&O chappy advised us that the filling station nearest the dock gates was also the most expensive but that 500 yards further on the road we needed to take there were two garages which were more reasonably priced. Guess where we went?

Once both we and The Old Lady were suitably refuelled, we set off for our hotel following the suggested 'scenic' route in the Motoring Adventures' Road Book, which used mainly back roads through some interesting villages. Mapping and writing up the routes must have been a daunting task given that FOC members were staying at four different hotels and using different channel crossings.

We have driven between Le Havre and Pont de Tancarville many times, although recently we have also used the new bridge. Consequently, we thought we knew that bit of the route and did not study the Road Book closely. Not being awake, we saw a big sign for 'Pont de Normandie' and erroneously turned off. Having realised our error, a wonderful piece of navigating by Sue soon brought us to Tancarville and back to the suggested route.

We have not driven in France since our trip to Mas du Clos in 2001 and had forgot-



Group photo at the Chateau de l'Aubrière, the Countess (wearing the little black number) is pictured front centre, with Lindsay Williams (in red).

ten what a pleasure it is, with well-surfaced, well-engineered roads and very little traffic.

The rest of the journey was uneventful (with a pleasant stop for lunch at Mondoubleau) and we arrived at the Chateau mid-afternoon. After meeting the Countess and checking in, we set about cleaning The Old Lady. Gradually other guests arrived, some before the thunderstorm and downpour, which made cleaning the car a bit of a wasted effort. Over pre-dinner drinks, the conversation centred on the journey down, the odd brush with the law and, of course, distances covered. From Keighley, West Yorkshire, we covered 465 miles including our mistaken detour, 270 to Portsmouth, the rest in France. Others who used the Channel Tunnel mentioned distances of up to 700 miles.

Chateau de l'Aubrière

Now owned and run by Count and Countess Régis de Lussac, the Chateau de l'Aubrière, just north of Tours, was built in the 19th century during the Napoleon III era. It is an interesting building set in 15 acres with a stunning view across the valley. It is

run by the Countess, a very charming lady and exceedingly helpful. As an example, 24-hour filling stations in rural France are unmanned and do not appear to accept British credit cards (I blame the UK card issuers for not getting their act together).

Late on the Friday evening, the Countess went with a few guests to the local garage using her personal credit card to enable them to fill their cars ready for the early morning start. The ambience at the Chateau and quality of the meals were superb and the Countess welcomed us and treated us like one of the family, inviting us to use the Chateau as if it were our home. During dinner on the Thursday night she gave us an insight into the history of the building.

Friday dawned a beautiful sunny summer day. This was a day to do what we pleased. Go to the circuit and walk the pits, visit the chateaux of the Loire, or watch the antics on the Mulsanne Straight. Our intention, after a lazy breakfast and a quick rub down of The Old Lady, was to do the pits walkabout and then go on to San Saturnin to muster for the drivers' parade in the evening.

With the combination of leaving later than intended (does this sound familiar?) and heavy traffic between Arnage and the circuit, we decided to go straight to 'The Classic British Welcome' at San Saturnin to meet up with other Club members, including those of



On the circuit.



our group who were honoured to be asked to participate in the 'Parade des Pilotes'. Here there were various activities on offer like eating, drinking, giving our cars a final polish and looking at cars of other marques as well as the Harley-Davidsons.

As well as familiar faces from the Club (including Len Watson and Heath Gray) there were other famous people in attendance. In an exhibition hall adjoining the main dining area, Derek Bell was chatting to all and sundry amidst a display of racing Porsches. We came into the room just as Derek was being presented with a number plate '41 DB 72' honouring his year of birth, initials and, of course, with '72' representing the registration number of the home of the 'Vingt Quatre Heures'.

A classic welcome

It takes 80 volunteers to run The Classic British Welcome. A nice touch was that the organiser arranged for a number of the volunteers to be given a lift to the centre of Le Mans in Ferraris, Porsches and other exotica, as a 'thank you' for their efforts. Ralph Palmer and Sue and I were able to take a couple of people in each car, who were surprised and pleased with this token, and to be riding in a Ferrari.

The run between San Saturnin and La Place des Jacobins in Le Mans was phenomenal. We were escorted by police on motorcycles as well as members of the local Harley-Davidson Chapter. Between them, these disparate groups went ahead to stop other traffic at junctions and roundabouts to give us a fairly free run into the centre of Le Mans. Not that they were the only people interested in our journey. The children at the

Left: Basque band plays at La Place des Jacobins.

Below: Parking line up at the Chateau.



school at San Saturnin were on the street cheering us all on as we left the village. Once at La Place there was more waiting around until the parade started. The drivers were paraded within their team in open topped vintage vehicles. Accompanying them were various troupes of musicians and dancers. One group to capture our attention was a Basque band dressed in white shirts and trousers with red cravats and berets playing a distinctly Moorish sounding tune. After the Basques, the carnival girls and band with a Rio de Janeiro feel and other exotic performers, the Scottish Pipe Band seemed more than a little out of place. We have nothing against bagpipes but the only good thing was they were being played in the open.

Suddenly, we were aware of some of our group rushing back to their cars and we were ushered out to join the parade. Words on a page cannot convey the atmosphere of the occasion and the warmth of the spectators. To an extent we all played up to the crowd, sounding horns, revving engines, some even inviting children from the crowd to sit in their car. As if setting off on a major rally, we went up a ramp onto a raised platform where a brief description was given of each car. Here, the MC interviewed both Peter Everingham and Jack Sears, commenting on Jack's participation in earlier 24-hour races at Le Mans. At three other points in the



parade commentators again described the cars. It has to be said that the route of the parade, although not a great distance, took quite a while to complete. It was a warm evening and in an old V12, which does not have the luxury of air conditioning, it was even warmer in the passenger compartment, but not as hot as under the bonnet.

Anxious moments

Towards the end, we were paying rather more attention to the water and oil temperatures than to the crowds. With both gauges heading towards 260F we slipped the bonnet open slightly to aid the airflow over the engine. We made it to the end without boiling or other catastrophe. Whilst the parade caused a few anxious moments, we were very pleased and honoured to be part of the attraction and would not have wished to miss the opportunity of participating.

Eventually, we were back in La Place des Jacobins where we left The Old Lady to cool down and regain her composure while we set about replacing some of our lost body fluids and, guess what, looked at some more cars and talked to their owners. We rounded the evening off with a stroll round the cathedral precincts up in the old town and a gentle drive back to the Chateau via a filling station. We, too, found that we could not use our wonderful new UK 'chip and pin' credit cards (although they work in hypermarkets).

Fortunately, we were not the only motorists wanting fuel. What was even more encouraging was that the other motorist was French. It must be said that he was a little reticent about our suggestion that he use his credit card to provide us with fuel and that we would then reimburse him, until we actually produced some money. 39 Euros later, we thanked both him for his kindness and our lucky stars, as we now had enough fuel for the early morning trip to the circuit and the parade laps.

Five o'clock came all too soon but we were all up and ready for the obligatory car cleaning and breakfast. At the Mulsanne rendezvous, we gathered with a group of Rileys celebrating their 70th anniversary and a nice collection of cars they had too. The best laid plans of mice, men and Motoring Adventures could not take the actions of the French police into account. For various reasons, we were moved on by the police and left for the track earlier than the appointed time. Once at the track, we were picked up by the pace car and set off on our parade laps of the full 24-hour circuit.

Digressing slightly, we have often driven the N138 between Le Mans and Mulsanne in both directions, even before they put the roundabouts in the road and chicanes in the circuit. We mostly encountered an old corporation lorry chugging along at 50kph with no hope of legally overtaking it.

Now, here was the opportunity to drive the Mulsanne Straight with it closed to all other road users. Because of the hiccup earlier in the day, a number of marshals were still driving to their positions, which made our parade laps even more entertaining. Whilst we were driving somewhat slower than the guys after 4.00pm would be, The Old Lady took the bends extremely well and handled beautifully.

Unfortunately, she must have become over-excited for, on the last part of the last lap, as The Old Lady decided to run out of electricity and we suffered the ignominy of having to be recovered from the track to the Club's secure parking area by the circuit recovery vehicle. All was not lost. We belong to the RAC via the FOC as a club affiliated to the MSA, this brings certain benefits, not least that no questions are asked if you seek recovery from a race track. A quick telephone call to the RAC brought an external recovery vehicle which took The Old Lady to

continued on page 24

continued from page 23

their premises. It was pronounced that the dynamo was kaput. Undaunted, we watched the start of the race and later enjoyed the buffet dinner that was provided for us all. The only drawback was that we could not easily watch any of the 'night racing'. However, Lindsey Williams, the Motoring Adventures rep, very kindly drove us back to the Chateau where it was a case of a few drinks in the pleasant company of Lindsey and some of our group and, to quote Samuel Pepys, so to bed. But not before a surprise entertainment put on by the village of La Membrolle. Apparently, there had been an antiques fair that day and to celebrate there was a fireworks display. From the Chateau's slightly elevated position we all had a fine view of it.

Tours to Le Mans

Sunday morning: the race was still on and due to finish at 4.00pm. A quick chat with the Countess about local public transport established that there was a train from Tours to Le Mans. What better way of experiencing life than travel with the natives? As Lindsey Williams was not returning to the circuit but was going to Villandry (à propos, the gardens of this chateau are a spectacular place to visit) she kindly gave us a lift to Tours railway station. Everything clicked into place. We caught the train, walked out of the station at Le Mans straight onto a shuttle bus and into the circuit. We were able to watch the end of the race

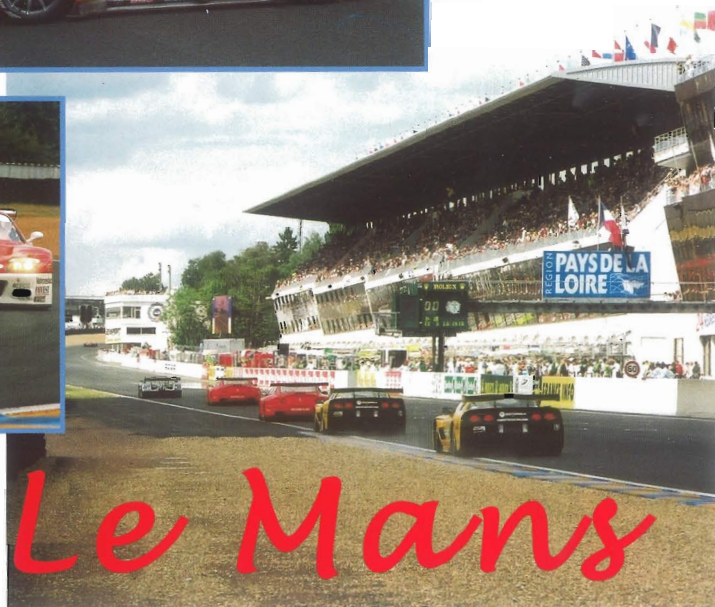
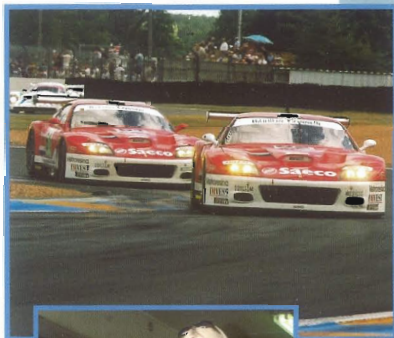
and the beginning of the celebrations before deciding it was time to leave for the return train. Again, everything fell into place and once back at Le Mans we had enough time to sit outside a bar with a beer before catching the train. After a short taxi ride we were back

at the Chateau. The effect on people of seeing several Ferraris together is usually quite interesting to watch and our taxi driver was no exception to that general rule.

After all the other activities of the trip it was now time to relax. With aperitifs and group photographs out of the way, we all settled down to another superb dinner prepared by our hostess, the Countess, and her helpers. Ray Ferguson and Sue paid tribute to Lindsay and the Countess, to hearty applause from the whole group.

Monday witnessed the breaking up of the fellowship as everyone took their leave, setting off on the journey home. We were due to catch the 23.30 sailing from Le Havre and the RAC

continued on page 25



After the poor showing of the GTS category Ferraris in the April test day - when the fastest one was some 4.5 seconds off the pace of the quickest Corvette - the possibility of repeating the category win of 2003 seemed remote. However, come the qualifying sessions on the Wednesday and Thursday evenings before the race, there was more than a glimmer of hope. The Prodrive built 550s had upped their game and were matching the Corvettes, which hadn't improved significantly since April.

With only ten minutes of the final qualifying session remaining, Tomas Enge in car #66, the Care racing Prodrive 550, stunned the opposition with a new GTS class fastest lap of 3min 49.438secs, giving him his third consecutive GTS class pole position.

What was even more amazing was that he had crashed the car quite heavily in the earlier evening session, necessitating major repair and set-up work for the final hour of the second session. The team's second car was three places further back, split from its sister by the pair of works Corvettes, then the Prodrive-built Larbre Competition entered example, followed by the pair of Barron-Connor 575 GTCs. In the GT category, the JMB

entered 360 GT was quicker than the newer Cirtek-entered 360 GTC and, like the 550s, had found some added pace since April as it was 2nd in qualifying, headed only by the White Lightning Racing Porsche 911 GT3 RSR.

However, its good qualifying run came to nothing, as on the race installation lap the gear selection cable failed and it had to be pushed off the grid and into the garage to effect repairs, eventually starting two laps after the rest of the field.

The whole race was incident packed, fortunately none too serious, but there did seem to be some penchant for throwing the machinery at the scenery or at other slower cars on the track. Before the race was an hour old, Ron Fellows in the #63 Corvette had dumped it into the barrier at Arnage corner, inflicting body damage which cost it an extended pit stop for new panels to be fitted.

Just before 11.00pm on Saturday evening it was clattering down the Armco again after a brush with a sports prototype, necessitating a slow limp back to the pits to replace a punctured tyre and more new body panels. The second works Corvette also suffered an off track excursion at the Ford chicane after being in collision with the leading Audi just after 1.00am, losing four laps in the process.

Unfortunately, the Ferraris couldn't capitalise on these problems as they were having their own. Despite having stamped their authority on the Corvettes at the start, albeit marginally as the pair of Prodrive 550s, the two Corvettes and the Larbre 550 were running like a high speed train in the early laps. With the #64 Corvette getting the advantage



photos: David Wright and Paul Jarmyn.



24 hour race 2004

by Keith Bluemel

at the first round of pit stops, the 550s, like many other runners, suffered a variety of maladies, some mechanical and some self-inflicted. These included the burned-out clutch on the #65 car when Colin McRae was attempting to get out of the gravel after a spin towards the end of a three hour stint on Saturday evening.

Then there were gearbox problems for the same car, which with the new rules this year not permitting complete unit changes meant that the box had to be stripped and repaired.

The #66 car lost time early in the race when it went off on oil, but it was fortunate not to make contact with anything solid, thus the pendulum continuously swung back and forth in favour of either the Ferraris or the Corvettes, as there were so many incidents.

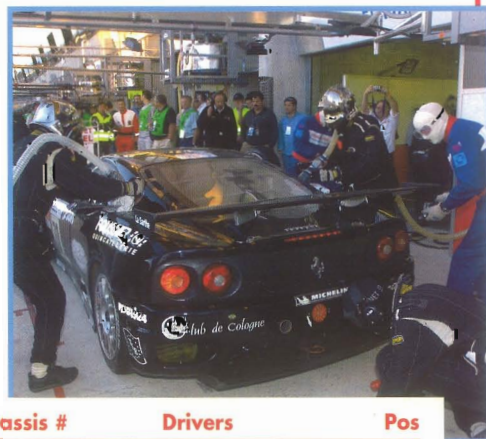
The decisive one came at around 11.30am on Sunday morning when the then class leading 550 driven by Tomas Enge had a left front wheel bearing failure, the wheel projecting horizontally from under the wing as he slowly had to complete virtually a full lap from the point of failure at Tertre Rouge corner.

This enabled the Corvettes to claw back the time that they had lost during their own incidents to go on to take the chequered flag first and second in the GTS class, followed by the #65 and #66 Prodrive cars, with the Larbre 550 being the final class finisher. The Barron-Connor 575 GTCs had an even more torrid time, as they were never really in the hunt for class honours, their best hope

being that those in front would falter. But like those ahead of them they also had problems and the #61 car had its brakes catch fire during a pit stop at around 4.00am on Sunday morning, with it eventually being withdrawn as the team realised that it wouldn't complete the 70% of winner's distance necessary to qualify as a finisher. Their #62 car was still running at just after two thirds distance on Sunday morning, when it suddenly stopped at the Dunlop curves - out of fuel, red faces all round!

In the GT category, the JMB 360 GTC hauled itself back up to 3rd in class after its delayed start and was running strongly and competitively until just before half distance, when the power steering pump failed forcing it into retirement. The Cirtek 360 GTC soldiered on, surviving an attack on its right rear corner,

together with a three minute stop-go penalty for exceeding the maximum permitted driving time of one driver, to make it as a classified finisher at the chequered flag. To finish the Le Mans 24-hour race is an achievement, anything more in terms of results is a bonus.



Race #	Model	Colour	Entrant	Chassis #	Drivers	Pos
65 (3rd Cl.)	550 Maranello	Rosso Scuderia	Prodrive	113136	C. McRae/ R. Rydell/D. Turner	9th
66 (4th Cl.)	550 Maranello	Rosso Scuderia	Prodrive	117110	T. Enge/P. Kox/ A. Menu	11th
69 (5th Cl.)	550 Maranello	Red-White Stripes	Larbre	108612	C. Bouchut/ P. Goueslard/ D. Dupard	14th
92 (9th Cl.)	360 GTC	Rosso Scuderia	Cirtek	F131GTC 2062	F. Mountain/ R. Wilson/ H. Hugenholtz	19th
62	575 GTC	Red-White	Barron-Connor	F131MGT 2214	M. Hezemans/ A. Barde/ J.D. Deletraz	DNF
61	575 GTC	Red-White	Barron-Connor	F131MGT 2212	J. Bosch/ D. Sullivan/T. Biagi	DNF
70	360 GT	Black	JMB	F131GT 2004	J.R. De Fournoux/ J. De Melo/S. Daoudi	DNF

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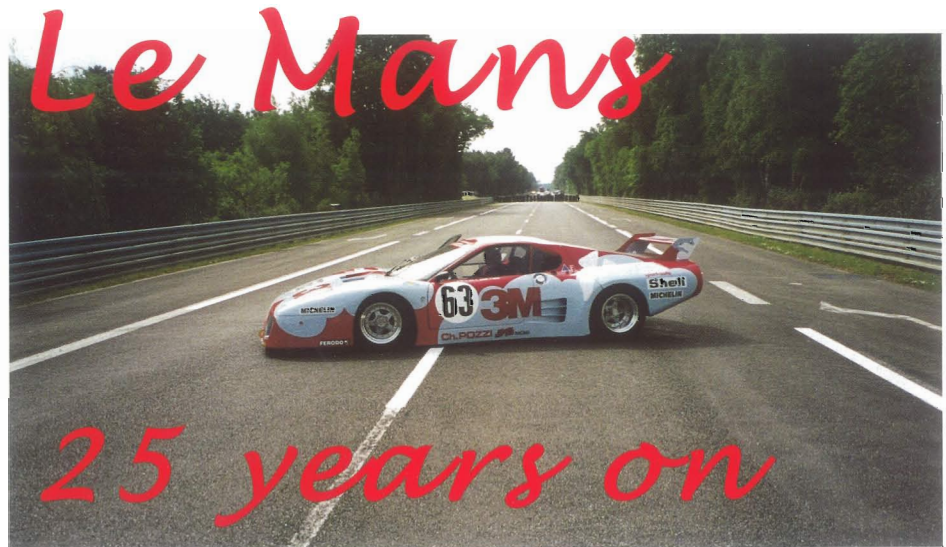
contacted us to confirm our booked travel plans. By 2.00pm, the Countess had provided with a spot of lunch: salmon (home-smoked by the Countess) with a simple salad (avocado, quails eggs, etc.) and a home made dressing of basil, mustard grains and balsamic vinegar. As we were finishing this, a taxi arrived to take us to pick up a hire car. This was arranged by the RAC so that we could drive back to Le Havre. At the same time, The Old Lady was being transported from Le Mans to Le Havre. The theory was that we would meet up at the dockside and then be transferred to the ferry. And it all worked. There were a few other cars which were hors de combat: three Caterhams, a TR6 and a couple of American cars. It was easy for the Caterham owners to push their cars onto the ferry. The ferry truck operators took one look at The Old Lady and 'refused' to tow her onto the boat (thank goodness). So several burly stevedores pushed her on board.

The Old Lady returns

The voyage to Portsmouth was uneventful. We took advantage of the dinner provided and, following our experience on the outward journey, set our alarm. Once the ferry docked, the ship disgorged its load. Then a fleet of recovery vehicles boarded for the stricken vehicles. The Old Lady was soon loaded, we climbed into the cab and set off for Keighley. Once home, and a little frustratingly, some simple problems were identified and fixed. Fitting a new battery and securing an earth lead gave a full charge from the dynamo. An unrelated problem was that the metal end cap of the starter motor had become detached and seemed occasionally to be shorting out between the terminals, oil filler pipe and the engine block.

Ours was not the only car to have problems. There was a cracked windscreen and other mechanical hitches. We understand that at least one Ferrari did not reach Le Mans and so its owners were unable to participate at all in the proceedings of the weekend. Our sympathy goes out to them as they missed a tremendous trip. At least we were able to take part in all the events, even though we did not complete the last lap of the circuit. We had a fantastic time.

Whilst the trouble with the car was disappointing it bought its own excitement and entertainment and did not detract from the enjoyment of the trip and experience of driving the circuit. A big 'thank you' must go to Peter and Suzanne Everingham, Motoring Adventures and everyone else who made this trip such a fun and memorable event.



It's June 1979. Vic Norman, who at the time ran Rosso Ferrari, the official Ferrari dealers with Bob Houghton in Cirencester, rang: "Do you want to fly to Le Mans for the race, leave Friday night, stay up all weekend, then return Sunday night after the race?"

Fellow passenger would be Eric Stewart, lead singer of 10CC. We would be in the pit with Vic's friend Alain de Cadenet who was racing his own car, see Nick Mason racing The Wall Lola and finally get to watch the new Ferrari 512 BB LMs. I think that would be a "yes" then!

It's June 2004, 25 years later. We are on the road to Le Mans with one of those original racing 512 BB LMs that I saw racing back in June of 1979. We are to do some laps on race day on the full circuit at one of the greatest tracks in the world.

But how about the preparation? Although completely rebuilt and a concours winner, it has not been used properly since, so a good

by Nigel Chiltern-Hunt

tow-in in front of all those people. Ferraris do not break these days, do they? (eg. Michael Schumacher's F1).

So after the service and corrections, David wisely suggested a visit to the rolling road to ensure the engine would pull across the full range of revs and any necessary adjustments made. The car had to run cleanly to max. revs and I would have to be able to start the car 'on the button' as the only mechanic I was taking with me was Shirley, who, though fully experienced, preferred not to get her hands dirty!

Spitting fire and smoke

We went to G Force's superb establishment in Aylesbury with a little trepidation, how would she run? Chief Engineer Chris fired her up and after much spitting of fire and large amounts of black smoke she

cleared her throat and two runs were done to max. revs in third gear, approximately 130mph. The torque on acceleration was causing the car to ride up on the rollers putting huge strain on the retaining straps - quite an impressive sight as we were only a few feet away behind what appeared to be a bombproof screen. The noise and vibration was staggering. We adjusted

the mixture on the mechanical fuel injection to optimise the running and all was set, mission accomplished.

I thought it was also advisable to check the car out on the track, but where to go? I phoned Peter Everingham who suggested Bruntingthorpe. What a great choice. I had been there before: some years ago and



experienced look at the car was called for to make sure all would run well. After a call to David Cottingham at DK a booking was made. I was lucky to have Colin Clarke, a very experienced guy, to work on the car. Just as well as there were a few crucial items that needed attention along with cam belt service. I didn't want the embarrassment of a