

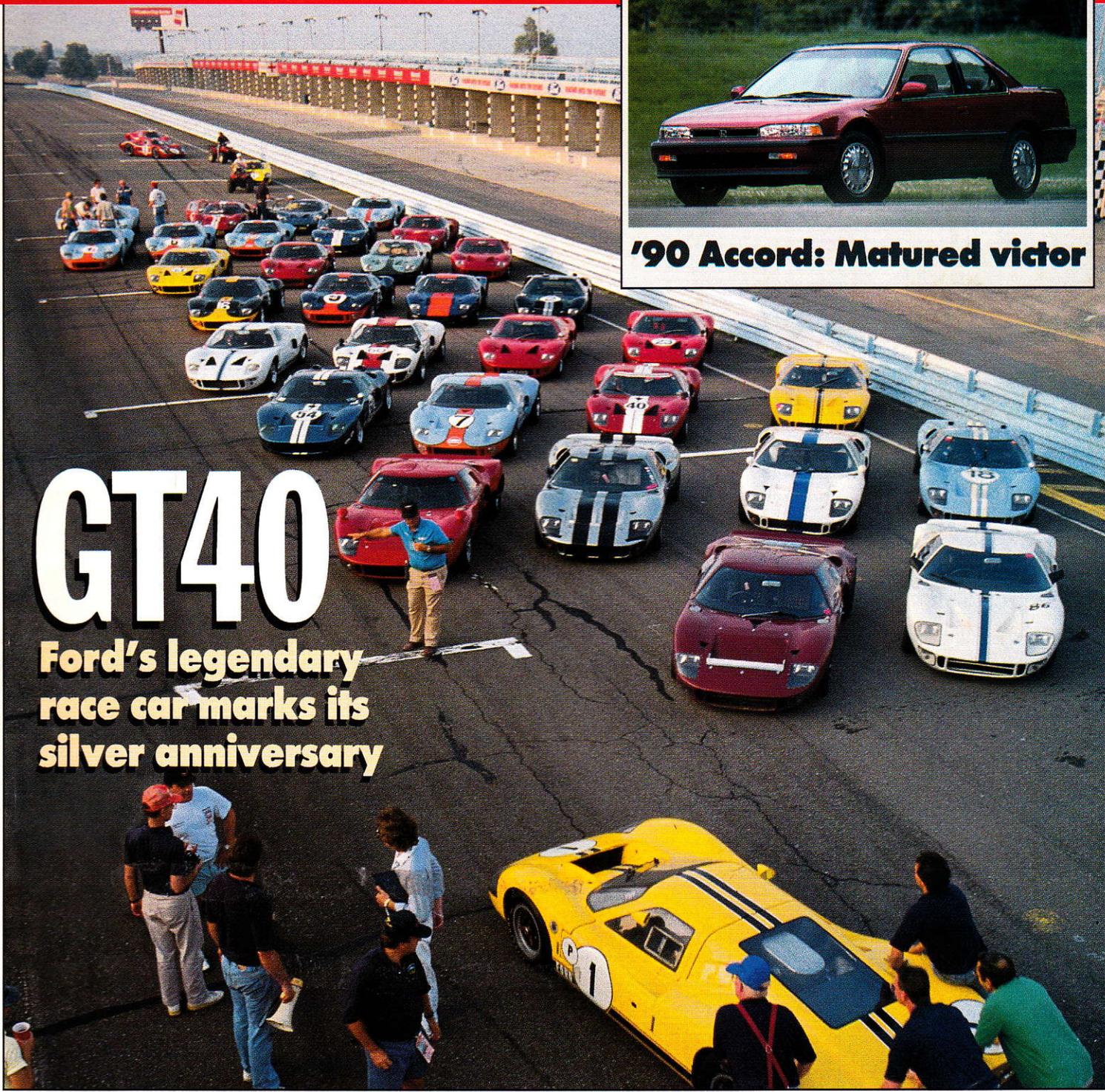
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GT40
Ford's legendary
race car marks its
silver anniversary

BORN TO SUCCEED AND STILL DRIVEN AT 25

Many of the Ford GT40s that won fame and glory at LeMans gather for a silver anniversary reunion marked most fittingly — by racing

By Cynthia Claes

Time allows us to modify our memories, to enhance the past, to make events fit our recollections. Even so, maybe it was the September sun that put a glow on our remembrances. After all, Watkins Glen is not a place noted for abundant sunshine. Especially in autumn. Watkins in the fall is a place where you can feel the wind rising, and where the rain falls hard and cold. And often.

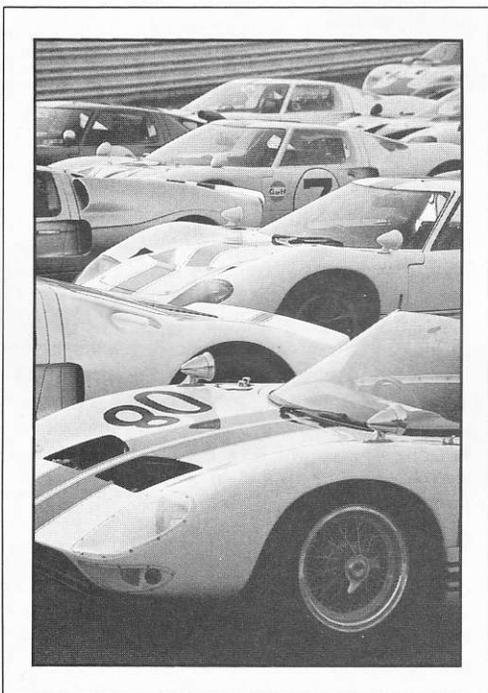
But this was a silver anniversary. And The Glen rewarded us with sunshine, Stirling Moss and old Fords. Very special old Fords. The GT40 was a quarter of a century young.

To celebrate, the Sports Car Vintage Racing Association (SVRA) organized a reunion. As part of its traditional Serengeti Drivers Cup weekend, SVRA, with help from Ford Motor Company, Aston Martin Vintage Racing (AMVR) and the Shelby American Automobile Club, designed a salute that included an all-GT40 exhibition race, parade laps, a GT40 and Shelby concours and a two-hour enduro race which pitted the Fords against the cars that faced them at LeMans in the '60s.

Moss was invited. So was six-time LeMans winner Jackie Ickx. Brian Redman was on hand to team again with Ickx in a Gulf/JWA Mark II for the enduro on Sunday, while Bob Bondurant shared driving duties with Moss in a red Mark IV, identical to the '67 Gurney/Foyt LeMans winner.

By the evening of Friday, Sept. 8, almost a third of the total GT40 production was parked in the Watkins Glen infield—the largest gathering of GT40s ever. By Sunday, this too, was history.

"I don't think most people actually believed it was really going to happen," said Alex Quattlebaum, president of SVRA. "But we've had calls about the reunion for over a year. There are cars here from all across the U.S., from England, from Scotland. The event just took off."



The reunion celebrated the first race appearance of the GT40, 25 years ago at the Nurburgring. But the Ford GT program really was born on May 21, 1963, the day Enzo Ferrari rejected Henry Ford II's offer to buy his sports car firm. Within a week the rebuffed Ford chairman had Dearborn working on proposals for a car built to one purpose—to vanquish Ferrari on the racetrack.

And it did.

"This car changed the face of LeMans," said Quattlebaum. "It won the 24 Hours four straight years—1966, '67, '68, '69. In fact, the cars were so successful that they triggered a rules change (when the 7.0-liter cars were banned at LeMans after 1967)."

It's been almost two decades since the last GT40 competed in an internationally-sanctioned event. But vintage racers, who began operating on a limited scale almost

30 years ago, have helped keep the cars on the racetrack.

"The SVRA believes that past racing history should not be a static display in a museum," said Quattlebaum. "Our goal is to encourage the restoration, preservation and use of historically significant race cars." Quattlebaum's emphasis is on *use*.

And SVRA's president sets a good example. He recently returned from Europe, where he competed in vintage races—at Spa and Nurburgring—his Devin SS a surprise winner at the Belgian event and on hand to compete again this weekend.

"The Europeans are very serious about vintage racing," he said. "All manner of cars turn up. Imagine five 250 Maseratis rounding the La Source hairpin at Spa. Five! And Aston Martins, handfuls of Ferraris. That's what we're (SVRA) trying to do here. And part of what we want to do is to tie significant automobiles with significant venues, like Watkins Glen.

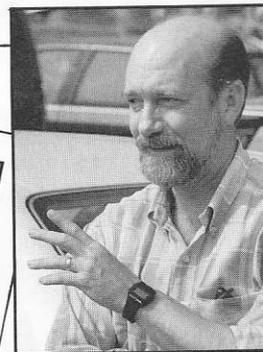
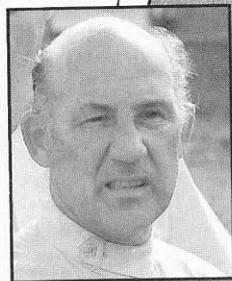
"It's so neat to come out to The Glen or Road Atlanta and race these things," said Quattlebaum, pointing to William Wonder's burgundy GT40, its nose removed, the mechanics fitting a new fire bottle.

"It's addictive—for the racer and the spectator. Wonder there has owned his GT40 for over 20 years. It's the oldest GT40 left, and he's raced it continuously since 1966."

But while Ford, Chevrolet, Lotus, Porsche, Jaguar and Aston Martin were well represented, there was one marque conspicuously outnumbered. A quick scan of the 250-car entry list for the Serengeti Drivers Cup weekend revealed only three Ferraris—a '69 512, a '69 312P and a '70 365GTB.

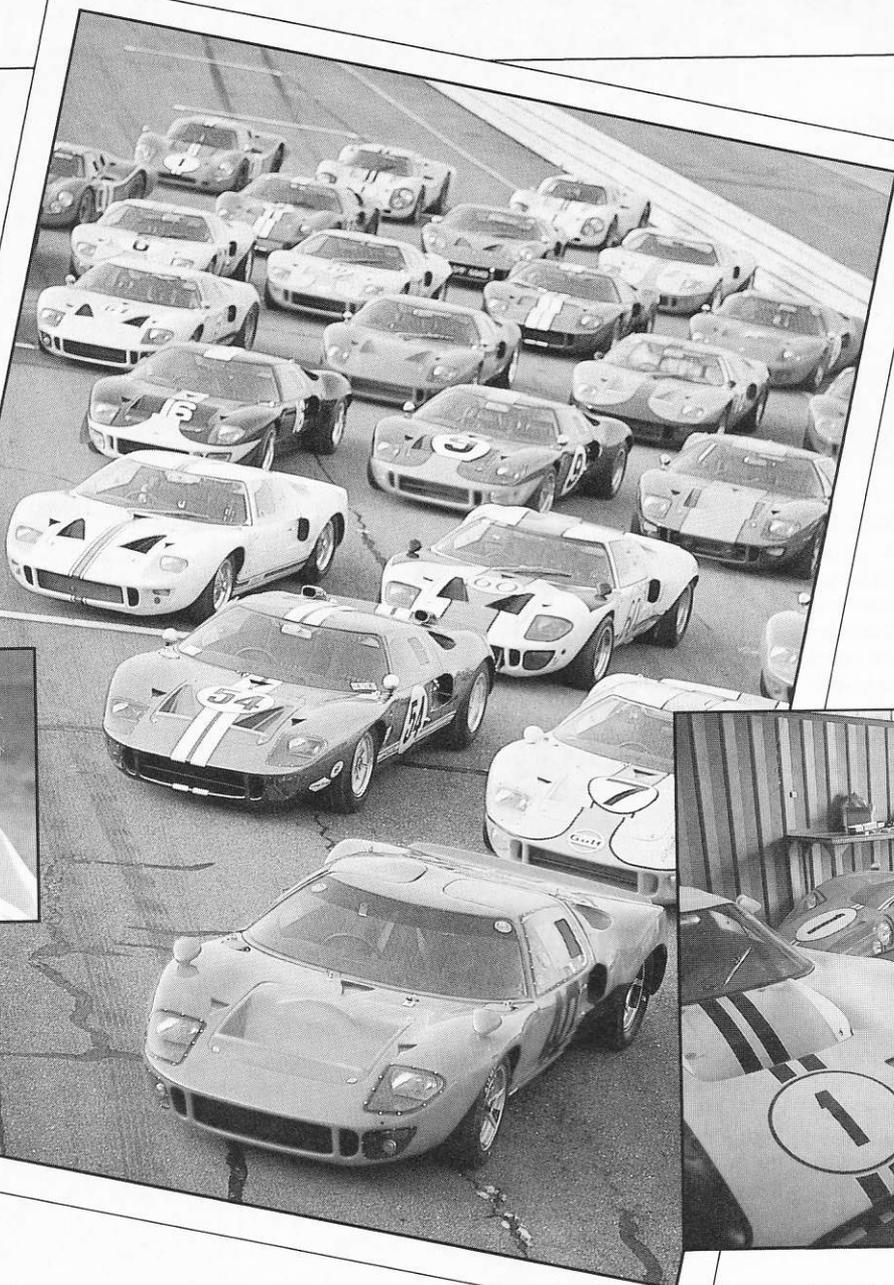
What's happening? According to Quattlebaum, too many Ferrari owners have succumbed to the tyranny of figures. Six- and seven-digit figures.

"Ferrari participation? It's gone away," said Quattlebaum. "And yet the price of repairing a Ferrari hasn't increased proportion-



Stirling Moss (far left) was on hand to drive a Mark IV at SVRA's GT40 reunion. Club president Alex Quattlebaum (above) was pleased with the turnout when 38 GT40s were gridded and garaged at The Glen

Jim Frenak photos



ately to the cost of buying one. It doesn't cost significantly more to repair a Ferrari fender or to replace a gearbox or even an engine, than it did a few years ago. If it was \$15,000 for a body panel five years ago, it's not much more than that today. But the same car that five years ago was worth \$50,000 may now be worth \$500,000. So the owners don't bring them out anymore. Not to race."

Luckily, that malady doesn't appear to have affected the GT40 owners. Fifteen of the 34 cars competing in the Group 5 category were Ford GTs—GT40s, Mark Is, Mark IIs or Mark IVs. The Ford GT exhibition race had 16 entries, including the '68-'69 LeMans winner (chassis # 1075), the last Alan Mann chassis (# XGT3), the only remaining GT40-based Mirage (# M10001) and the oldest remaining GT40 (# 103).

Some significant racing history was at risk on the 3.3-mile Watkins road course. But for the GT40 crowd, the choice—risk versus revs, price versus passion—was easy.

And not because the cars were any less

pricey than their Italian counterparts.

The consensus in The Glen paddock was that there wasn't a single Ford GT present which would bring less than \$1 million, if its owner cared to sell. Some owners speculated that the few remaining Mark IIs could command close to \$2 million, more if the car had a significant race history.

And then there was GT40 # 1075. If there was a superstar among all this marvelous machinery, the No. 6 GT40 made a strong bid. Still in its light blue livery and orange "moustache"—the John Wyer/Gulf racing colors—this car possessed a most incredible log book.

In 1968 it won outright at the BOAC 500, Spa, LeMans and Watkins Glen and took its class at the Nurburgring. In '69 it won at Sebring and then another, unprecedented, win at LeMans—the first car ever to win the French classic twice.

Owned for years by Gulf Oil and on

loan since 1976 to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum, the winningest GT40 in history was purchased recently by noted Ferrari collector and GT40 enthusiast Harley Cluxton.

Cluxton has owned a series of GT40s, including one he bought and sold three times. If paddock gossip was accurate, he now owned not only the winningest GT40, but the priciest—# 1075's value was estimated at \$6 million to \$7 million.

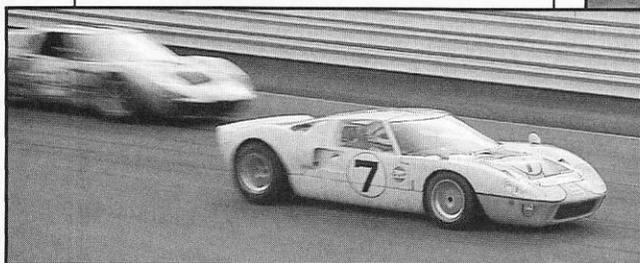
Friday evening, 38 GT40s gridded along the pit straight. The crowd, theorizing the collection's combined net worth, settled on \$50 million for this gaggle of "old Fords."

Add to that the 250 other vintage and antique cars parked in the paddock and across the infield—the concours entries gridded behind the pit buildings, the Peterbilt rigs and transporters colorfully aligned behind the garages—and the dollar figure soared into the hundreds of millions.

But, regardless of value, they raced.

The scene from the pit roof Saturday morning could have been the start of the

Marty Yacobian pilots the JWA/Gulf car (below) which raced twice at LeMans and now competes in vintage events



Six Hours of Endurance, circa 1968. Behind the pit lane, on the false grid, staged for a practice session was a butterscotch McLaren M8, a Porsche 908, a red Lola T-70, a cream-colored Porsche 906, two GT40s, another Lola (white), three more GT40s, a Lotus 23, a Chevron and a tri-colored Corvette Gran Sport—a view through a time warp into the '60s.

But the Testarossa and Geo Metro parked in the infield near the skidpad were a constant reminder. This wasn't 1968. The atmosphere was too casual. It was less urgent than 1968. But no less mesmerizing.

The GT40, without question, is one of the most purposefully beautiful race cars ever built. Like a modern Group C car, it has a squared nose, doors that bite into its roof and wide, rounded hips.

Only 40.5 inches high (hence the name), its stance—at speed or at rest—is threatening and intimidating. Incredibly photogenic, the Ford GT is also capable of speeds faster than thought. And its impact on the racetrack produced an aura of romance, a romance still evident after 25 years.

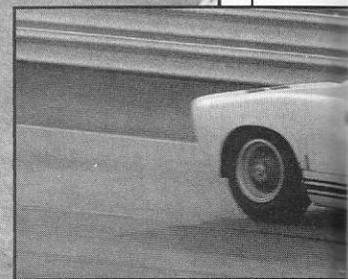
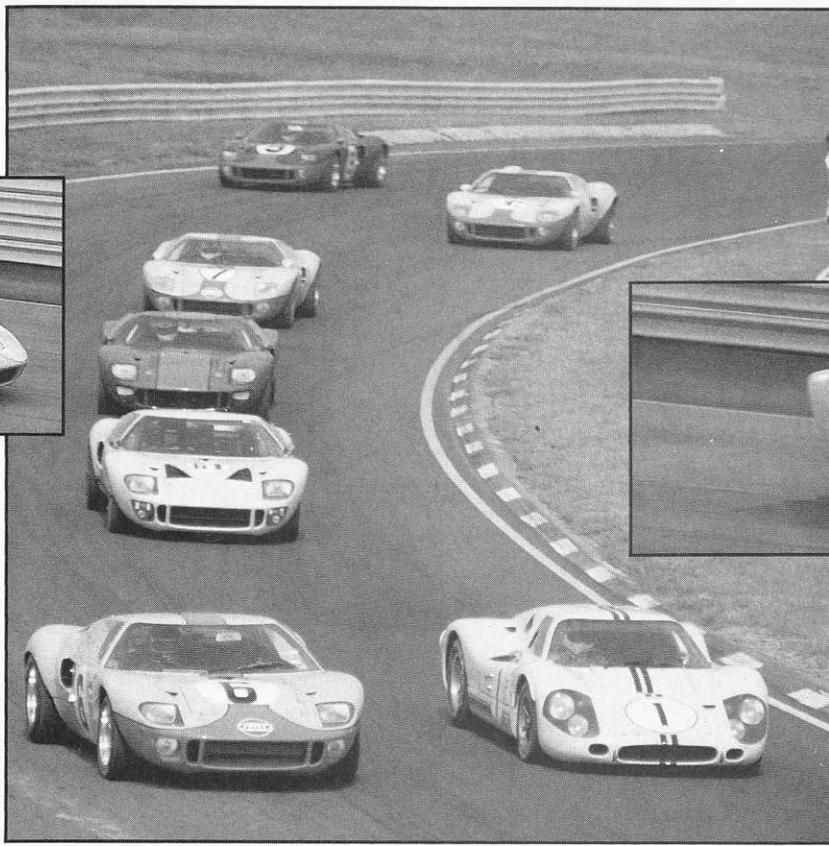
Perhaps that's the main reason nearly all of the GT40s produced—some 134 chassis in total—have survived.

And the master chronicler of those chassis, the undisputed authority on the GT40, is Ronnie Spain.

A six-foot, red-haired, bearded Scotsman, Ronnie Spain is a walking data bank of Ford GT minutiae. His book, *GT40, An Individual History and Race Record*, is regarded as the marque bible. Like a museum curator inspecting a newly-acquired Matisse, Spain made his garage rounds at Watkins Glen, painstakingly examining each chassis, scribbling ownership changes and updating body modifications in his ever-present notebook.

Owners relied on him to adjudicate disputes and confirm provenances—as he did with GT40P/# 1015, a white Mark II, thought for years to be chassis # 1016.

Co-owned by Gary Nufer and Dr. Richard Cohen, # 1015 is the Ken Miles/Lloyd Ruby car which finished second in the famous "staged ending" at the '66 LeMans race. After Jo Schlesser crashed it in '67 at LeMans, the car was stored at Holman & Moody, where it was eventually rebuilt and a different chassis plate was fitted. And that's



when the confusion began.

But Spain confirmed its authenticity. "Here, right here," he said, reaching into the side duct. "Ah, yes. There it is." Spain looked like a proctologist as he probed the bodywork of the Mark II.

"This car, you see, had a vent right here to cool the fuel pumps. It was sealed up in the Holman & Moody refit. There's the weld. Yes, no doubt. This is # 1015."

Suddenly a dark green GT40 emerges from the garage, heading for pit lane.

"Where did that come from? That's # 1021!" Spain shouts gleefully. "It lives in Scotland. It's the closest one to my house and I've never seen it up close." His eyes lit up like a miner uncovering his first gold nugget. "I've got to persuade these owners to send me detailed photos of their cars."

When last seen, Ronnie Spain was trailing # 1021, notebook open.

Friday evening, at a barbecue hosted by Ford Motor Company on the grounds at the revamped Glen Club, Ford GT folk-

A legend was born because Henry was hopping mad

Rebuffed by Ferrari, Ford sought revenge at LeMans

More than a race, LeMans is legend, history and heritage. It's a race that stands alone—like Indianapolis; a race where the winner is remembered long after the season championship is forgotten.

And Ford was desperate to win. After Enzo Ferrari refused to sell his company to Ford, Henry II launched a vendetta to humble the red racers in the most spectacular way possible—at LeMans. Here's a history:

- **1964:** The GT40 had raced only once prior to the 24 hour classic. But the Ritchie Ginther/Masten Gregory car managed to lead from the start. Phil Hill, in the second GT40, set a new lap record (131.375 mph). It looked like an auspicious debut. But one Ford spun, and others retired with gearbox failures.

Ferrari finished 1-2-3, led by Guichet and Vacarella. Henry Ford wasn't pleased.

- **1965:** Ford arrived with four GT40s and a

pair of 7.0-liter Mark IIs. The big question was whether the gearboxes would last.

Hill again set fastest lap (138.443 mph) in a Mark II. But Ford's problems continued; one by one the cars retired, the last one at midnight.

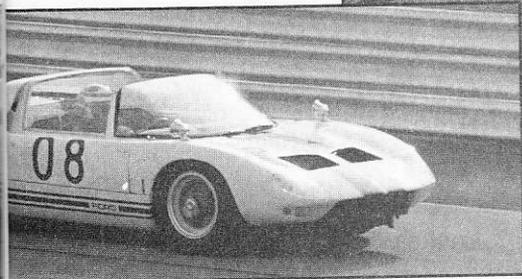
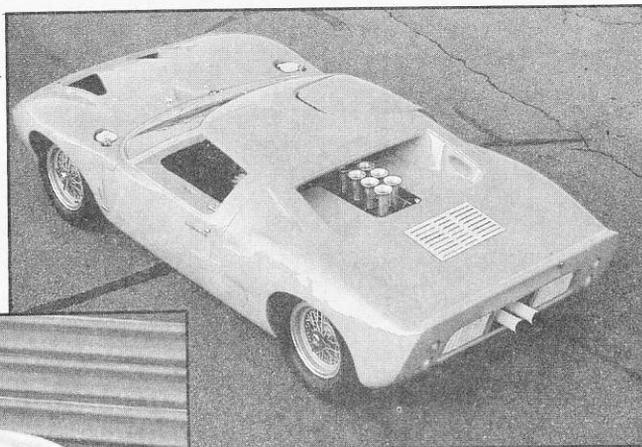
Masten Gregory teamed with Jochen Rindt in a NART Ferrari 275LM for the win.

- **1966:** Ford entered 13 cars—eight Mark IIs and five GT40s, and Jackie Ickx entered his first LeMans, driving one of the GT40s.

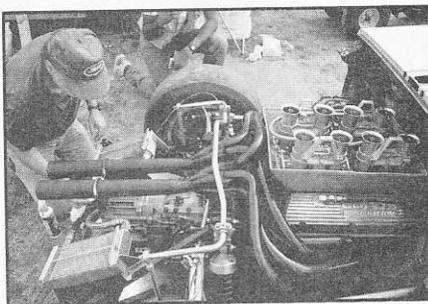
After the first hour, the Fords were 1-2-3. Dan Gurney set a new lap record (142.279 mph), swapping the lead with the Denny Hulme/Ken Miles Mark II for most of the race. But when Gurney's car DNF'd, Ford decided to orchestrate the finish.

The remaining Fords were ordered to finish three abreast, the first two on the same lap in a seeming dead-heat. But French officials ruled the McLaren/Amon car had started farther down pit road than the Miles/Hulme car, so it was the

Tom Congleton's 'Spyder' (below) is one of four surviving in original condition. Jim Kinsler's former GM GT40 (right) is fuel injected



Ronnie Spain (left) inspects Robert Ash's GT40 and James Jaeger's 'parachute car' which Ash is restoring. Below—the power behind the Fords



lore was embellished. We listened to the stories: Jim Kinsler won his GT40 in a sealed bid auction over 20 years ago, when General Motors decided not to crush its GT40 test car, but instead to raffle it off. Kinsler's winning bid was just a trifle over \$8,000.

An owner at the next table wished to

remain anonymous. He claimed his GT40 was assembled from parts secreted away when he worked for one of the race teams.

And then the tale of the Ford engine designer who described how his department decided "just for fun" to stuff a 427 sohc motor into a GT40 they spotted sitting behind an engineering building in Dearborn.

"We found out which division owned the GT40 and con-

signed it for 'engine development tests', he said. "After a few weeks playing with the 650 hp car on Michigan Ave. and Detroit freeways, scaring ourselves silly, we pulled the motor and the car went back to engineering along with some semi-official paperwork."

It disappeared into Ford's bureaucracy.

If there was one unhappy individual present, it had to be Rod Leach, of Hereford Heath, England, owner of GT40 Mk IV # J-12. After a 10-year restoration, his white Mk IV was completed just prior to the reunion. Then, days before it was to be loaded on a plane for New York, Leach's insurance company upped the ante, bumping up his premium by almost \$25,000. Sadly, the Leach Mark IV stayed home.

And there were countless fish stories—laurels of GT40s that slipped the hook. The red Mark IIA, still in LeMans trim, owned by Dale Nichols, was this writer's constant personal reminder of one that got away.

On Saturday morning Jackie Ickx was reunited with # 1075 for the exhibition race, but managed only a third place, behind Bib Stillwell's green '66 GT40 and Marty Yacobi's Gulf-colored '68. Stillwell, a former Australian F1 driver, also won the Group 5 event Sunday, followed by Al May's '63 McKee, Ed DeLong's Lola T-70 and a string of GT40s, fourth through seventh.

But it may all end as the value of the cars continues to escalate and the ranks of investors begin to outnumber enthusiasts.

Ford's estimated cost to win LeMans in 1966 was \$9 million—less than half the estimated value of the 16 cars entered in the exhibition race.

The owners said they're committed. And that they'd be back. We hope so. It would be sad if these cars never turned another lap. Because nostalgia, despite being a distorted view of history, does have its allure. ■



Jacky Ickx's Gulf GT40 leads Hans Hermann's Porsche 908 to the closest-ever finish, in the '69 24 Hours of LeMans, driving the car that won the Sarthe classic the year before

winner because it had covered a greater distance (3009.350 miles to 3009.338).

Two Kiwis, Bruce McLaren and Chris Amon, gave the Americans a victory.

- **1967:** Ford was back with four Mark IVs, three Mark IIBs and three GT40s, including John Wyer's Mirage, a lightweight version with a 5.8-liter Ford V8.

From the second hour, the Gurney/Foyt Mark IV took the lead and held it almost continually to the finish. It was the first All-American (car/driver) victory. Ford set another new lap record (147.894) and broke the 5000-kilometer barrier.

- **1968:** A rules change eliminated the 7.0-liter

Mark IVs from competition and the works Ferrari team was absent as well. That allowed Porsche's 908s to dominate, running 1-2-3-4 early on.

The top GT40 was running 10th. With the big-block Fords eliminated, it looked like a walk for the Germans. But all of the 908s dropped out, as did the Matras.

Helped by attrition, Pedro Rodriguez and Lucien Bianchi were the winners in a GT40. The car designed to win LeMans in '64 had finally done it—four years later.

- **1969:** This was a year of firsts: the first armco along the Mulsanne straight, the first Porsche 917, the first win for Jacky Ickx.

But it was the last year of the traditional LeMans start. Ickx walked, rather than ran, across the track at the start to illustrate the dangers of setting off without belts properly buckled.

Five GT40s were entered, three of them 4.9-liter John Wyer cars. Porsche arrived with 917s, 908s and 910s. In addition, seven 911s competed in the GT category. Sixteen in all, it was Porsche, not Ford, with the seemingly invincible entourage. But early in the race, John Woolfe was killed when his 917 crashed near Maison Blanche. The remaining 917s ran 1-2, the 908s were 3-4-5, and the Matras were between Ickx's GT40 and the leading Porsches.

Gradually all but one of the Porsches suffered mechanical troubles, and with three hours remaining the Ickx GT40 was leading, but just narrowly, over the only surviving works 908 driven by Hans Hermann/Gerrard Larrousse.

In what Ickx called "less a matter of driving than a game of chess" he outplayed Porsche driver Hermann, by just 11 meters. But more impressive than the closest-ever finish was that the winning GT40 was the same car (# 1075) which won the year before. ■