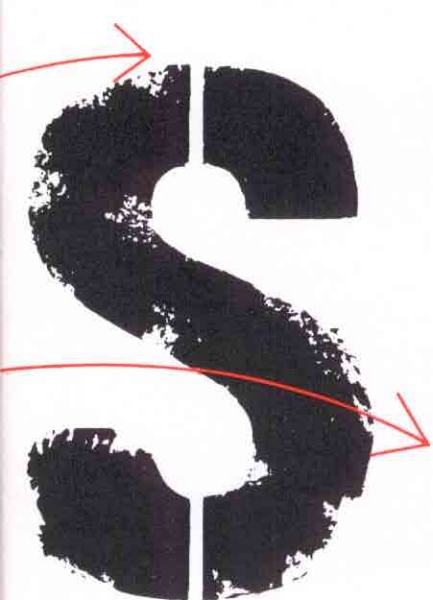


24 HOURS AT

LEMAN

the Corvette, the Circuit and the Color





THE CORVETTE

Le Mans 1960 had all the international flavor of an automotive Olympic Games. Cars built in France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy had been entered. And, after an absence of five years, America was represented. For the first time, the Corvette had been entered. Three had been selected to run flying under America's blue and white colors with the driving teams led by racing impresario Briggs Cunningham. Many felt this combination of America's only production sports car and Cunningham, whose reputation as a sailor, sports car builder and racer is legend, was perfect. He had been out of the race for five years. Now he was back with three Chevrolet Corvettes and a fourth car, a new competition experimental Jaguar. Many British hopes rode with Cunningham in the latter marque.

A fourth Corvette was entered by the Camoradi, U.S.A. team. They had also entered three carefully prepared Maseratis.

The question most Corvette owners and enthusiasts will ask is, "How did we do." And the answer is, "We did beautifully." When word first reached Europe that Corvettes were to be entered at Le Mans, most authorities refused to consider them as serious contenders. After all, this was the car's first entry in the gruelling race. They were by far the heaviest cars competing and this was felt to be a decided detriment. But the authorities had not counted on several unpredictable items, two of which were the power of the Corvette and the purpose of its drivers and mechanics.

One thing no one could have predicted was the violent rainstorm that took place at 6:10 p.m., two hours after the beginning of the race. It was here that things looked bleak for the Corvette entries. The unexpected came as Corvette driver Kimberly sped to the hilltop near White House. A torrential storm had struck and he was met by a hitherto hidden wall of rain. The downpour was so violent that Kimberly was forced off the track. After two hours of competition the first Corvette was out of the race.

It was not long after that the Corvette #2 of Thompson and Windridge slid going through the same treacherous White House section, cracked against the embankment and was forced to limp to the pits for repair. In just two and one-half hours, eight cars had been sidelined and two were Corvettes.

But these were also Corvette's brightest hours. As the rainstorm had begun, John Fitch was at the wheel of Cunningham's Corvette #3 riding in thirteenth place. This would have been a creditable finish, but with the rain, prospects were, at best, dismal. Fitch soon saw that other drivers were having considerable trouble holding on the slippery surface. More trouble than he was! He began to push his car and happily found the Corvette weight was "wiping the track dry." Picking up places in an amazing display of controllability, Fitch waved off R. M. Grossman who was to replace him at the six-hour mark. He then found himself in a struggle to pass the European entries, especially the Porsches, as they easily recognized the four headlamps of the American Corvette. But pass he did, and in the four-hour stint Fitch had jumped from thirteenth to seventh place in a phenomenal leap for the Le Mans race. The German Porsches never again seriously contested the Corvette position. Even the leading Ferrari team of Gendebien and Frère who had previously lapped the Corvette was passed by the flying Fitch.

Proving the Corvette #3's traction capabilities were no fluke, the Camoradi Corvette was also making steady headway while most other marques were losing precious ground. In fact, the Corvette team of Lou Lilley and Fred Gamble continued to gain throughout the race. They actually came from far back in the pack (41st at the end of the first hour) to a great finish of 10th at the end of the 24th hour. More important, it should be noted, the Corvette was the only Camoradi finisher. The Maseratis, after a fine early showing, had been dogged with ill-luck and all were out by the 12th hour.



A Le Mans Landmark, the Dunlop Bridge

In the end the Cunningham Corvette team of Fitch and Grossman finished in eighth position. Some have speculated that with a little luck they could have achieved an even higher place. But by all counts, the outcome was more than satisfactory. Especially so when one considers that, of only twenty-five cars able to finish the race, two were Corvettes. Three marques were represented in the first ten places, Ferrari, Aston Martin and Corvette. This was the first Corvette entry at Le Mans and it had beaten cars that would cost two to three times as much on the open market. There is little doubt that Corvette had done itself proud at Le Mans.

THE CIRCUIT

You are about to drive the Corvette around one lap at Le Mans. The starter has dropped the "tricolore" and you run across the track and leap into your Corvette. You are rolling. There is a distance of exactly 13.461 kilometers or 8.3 miles to cover. You are not out to beat the lap record of 124.67 miles established by Mike Hawthorne in 1957. But you will be moving.

From the top of the hill beyond Dunlop Bridge, you race down toward the Esses and the pine woods. A sharp

lefthander of 90 degrees is followed by an equally sharp righthander on a rising gradient. You are taking these turns in second gear . . . at 70 miles per hour!

From the Esses there is a brief straightaway, but you must be wary as you approach the extremely difficult Tetre Rouge Corner. Brake down—because at anything over 40 m.p.h., you will find yourself in the sandbank that lies just off Tetre Rouge. As you come out of this corner you find yourself barrelling down the fastest and most famous straightaway in sports car racing—the Mulsanne Straight. You quickly build to over 155 m.p.h., flat out. You should have reached this speed about one-third of the way along the straight or as you pass the Cafe de L'Hippodrome. In that split second you may notice a few figures not ten feet away. These are spectators leisurely sipping *cafe au lait* and munching *croissants*, thoroughly enjoying your performance and their breakfast.

Some 500 meters from Mulsanne Hairpin you will begin to brake down—ever so gently. In that 500 meters you must reduce the Corvette's speed approximately 90 miles per hour. You must, if you desire to negotiate the turn properly.

Camoradi Corvette—their Maseratis failed to finish



Cunningham's Corvette No. 2

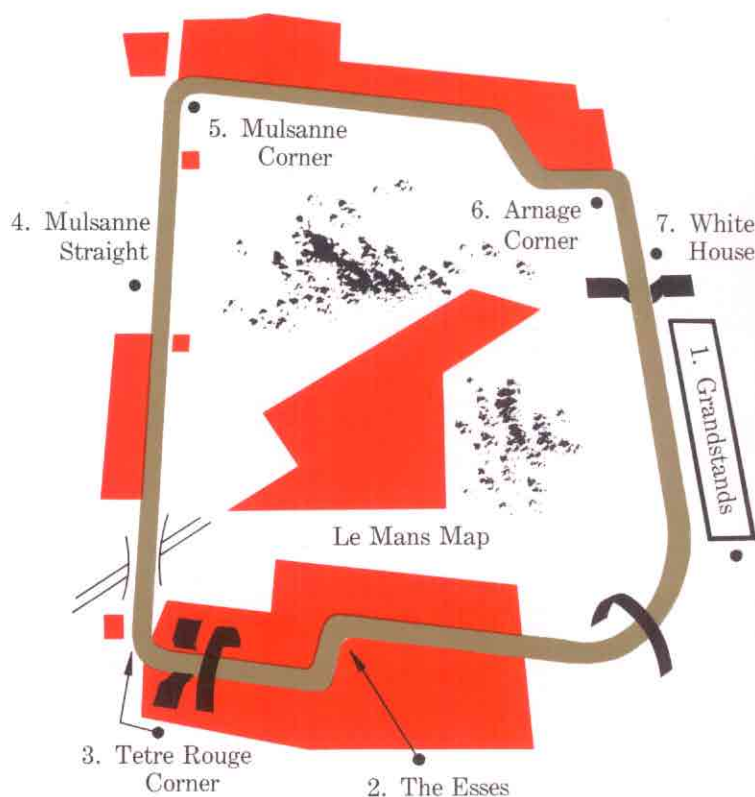




Flying Fitch sets the pace

It is a mile from the Mulsanne Corner to Indianapolis, which was originally given this name because its surface was paved with Indianapolis style bricks. There is a slight righthander followed by a much sharper lefthander, a short straight between thick pine woods, then a 90 degree turn to the right at Arnage Corner. Your speeds through this series have gone from 140 to 90 to 60 to 30 miles per hour. You are two miles from the checkered flag. You feel yourself weave as you pass the world's most mistreated farmhouse (see *The Corvette*). This is, of course, *La Maison Blanche*, The White House. Beyond here it is clear sailing. You zoom by the pits at 130 m.p.h. and you are home. It has taken just over four minutes to run the complete circuit.

Indeed, it is not nearly so simple as we have made it sound. Drivers spend weeks in preparing themselves for the course. Thousands of copious notations are jotted down on every configuration and zig-zag in the course. Regulations, too, must be completely understood, and it is said that the rules for Le Mans are the most complicated in motor racing. In every racing respect Le Mans is a demanding circuit. It is easy to see why drivers would rather win this one than any other.



Porsche in the pits

Third place Aston-Martin takes the Esses





Then the rains came



Corvette's weight was "wiping the track dry"

THE COLOR

It may come as a surprise to learn that Le Mans is first and foremost a city and not merely the scene of an annual summer road race. Le Mans is located some 130 miles west of Paris and its tradition and history can be traced centuries before the advent of the motor car. Among other things, Le Mans is famous for its interesting cathedral, a particularly fine example of Gothic architecture. The tomb of Berengaria, Richard the Lion-Hearted's Queen, lies within this cathedral. It was also in Le Mans that Henry II of England was born.

Over 800 years later Orville and Wilbur Wright demonstrated their flying machine to many of the crowned heads of Europe. The demonstration, which was the first flight ever achieved in Europe, took place in the center of the present Le Mans racing circuit.

A tourist could occupy himself for days before the race by investigating the sights, sounds and structures that are Le Mans. But as the event grows closer there are other diversions. In the center of the city, La Place de la Republique, thousands of holidaying Frenchmen, cloth-

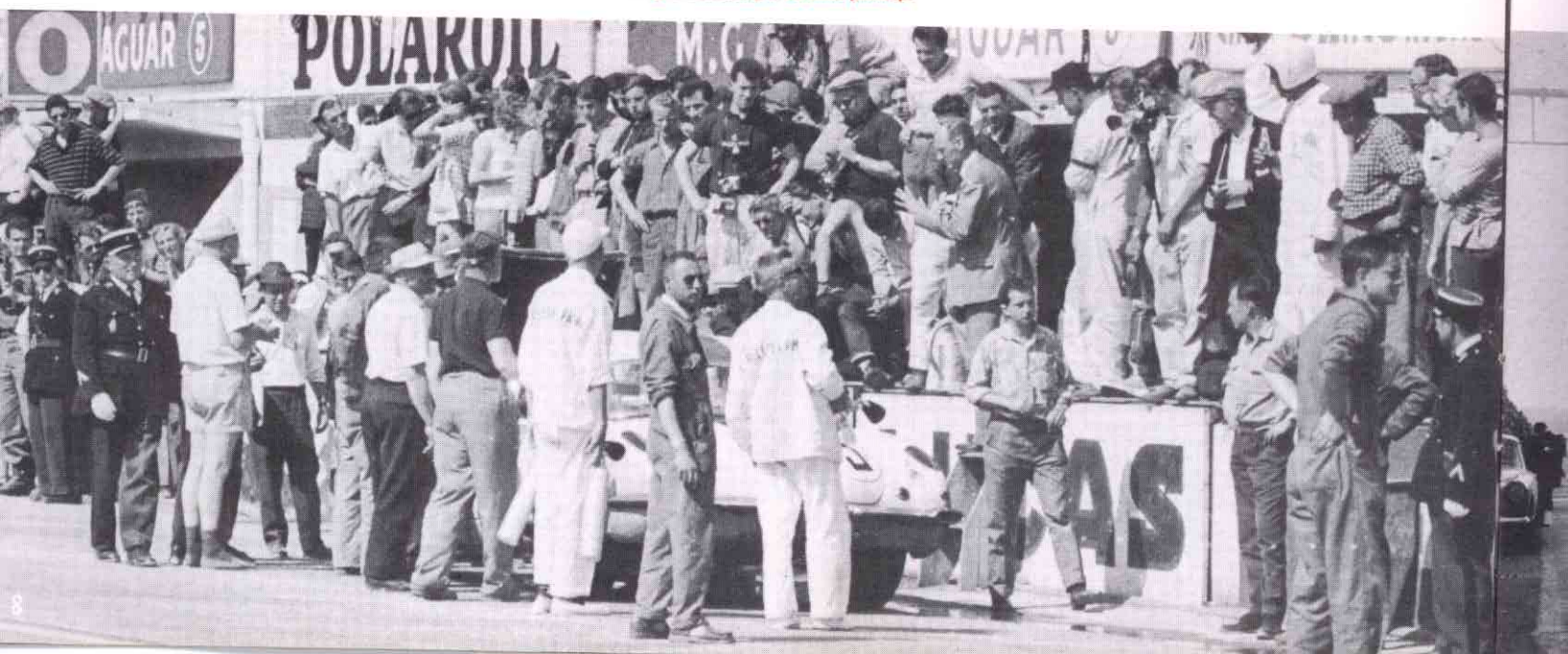
capped British enthusiasts and what looks like several divisions of U.S. Army soldiers will be milling. People from countries all over the world and the myriad of passing motor cars are all one needs for a pleasant morning of free entertainment.

On the afternoon of the race you will drive down to the circuit from the city. At any other time of the year this road is as straight and fast and traffic-free as most French roads, but today it will be a solid mass of cars being encouraged along by regularly spaced and excitable gendarmes waving their batons and blowing their whistles. Do as they say, go where directed and do not stop to ask questions. *Les gendarmes*, ordinarily affable, have a tough job to do today and are in no mood for conversation.

The nearest point of the circuit, the grandstand and pits area, is only two miles from the center of the city and you park in a huge sandy field. Canny veterans of previous Le Mans visits will raise their radio aerials and tie suitable pennants on the top for identification.

As you walk toward the enclosure, the special Le Mans atmosphere begins to enfold you. It will hold you in its grip for the next twenty-four hours. Your ears will be

A crowd gathers during a Corvette pit stop.





World's most mistreated farmhouse, La Maison Blanche

delighted by the inimitable sound of light French music underscored by the stirring sound of powerful engines revving in the pits area. On all sides you will see parties of French families carrying outsize picnic baskets packed with delectable foodstuffs, litre after litre of wine, collapsible stools, portable radios, folding picnic tables and probably a tent or two. These people, it becomes obvious, like to equip themselves suitably for the twenty-four hour festival.

Fortunately, you have a ticket in one of the big *tribunes* or grandstands, facing the pits area and scoreboard, each named after a famous French racing driver of the past. The view from these *tribunes* is magnificent, stretching all the way from White House Corner, almost a mile down a slight incline on the right, to the Dunlop Bridge, the first right-hand corner from the start and the hill beyond to your left.

The public enclosure below your *tribune* seat will be packed at least twenty deep, long before the race starts. Across the dark ribbon of track are the finest pits in the world. They have a curiously unfinished appearance as if the plasterers and painters had wearied of their work or had gone on a long, long lunch hour. Decked in

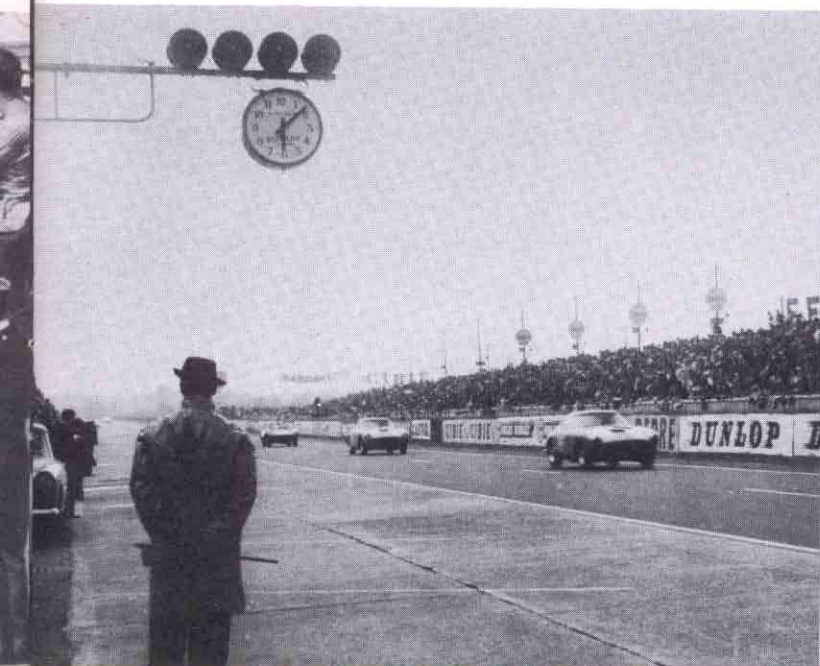
a colorful row of flags is a standing-room-only grandstand in two tiers. By midday on Saturday, there will be no room here even to light a cigarette.

Throughout the race you will be able to divert yourself in carnival fashion. When dusk falls you can make your way through the tunnel beneath the grandstands to *Mon Village* where accessory manufacturers' stands are brightly lit, interspersed with even gayer kiosks selling every imaginable form of food and drink known to man. There is considerable American influence here manifested in hot dog, hamburger and soft drink stands. They are always well attended.

Down by the Esses you find still another facet of Le Mans. The noise from innumerable loudspeakers and the contrasting intervention of exhaust bellowing and screaming tires is prodigious. The lights from the marquees and tents set up by enterprising entertainers challenges Coney Island. It's all there, shooting galleries, dodgem cars and even lady wrestlers.

This goes on all during the night, but so does the motor racing which is what most have come for. Without the color, however, Le Mans would not be the great spectacle it is.

Wide open on the Grandstand straightaway



Cunningham's experimental Jaguar gets the flag

