Beat: Automobiles

LIVE from 24H DU MANS - Backstage

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USPA NEWS - The 24 Hours of Le Mans was expecting + 260 000 people attending this exceptional world's oldest active sports car race in endurance racing. It is held annually since 1923 near the town of Le Mans, France. The race is organized by the Automobile Club de l'Ouest and runs on the Circuit de la Sarthe

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The race has over the years inspired imitating races all over the globe, popularizing the 24-hour format at places like Daytona, Nürburgring, Spa-Francorchamps, and Bathurst. The American Le Mans Series and Europe's Le Mans Series of multi-event sports car championships were spun off from 24 Hours of Le Mans regulations. Other races include the Le Mans Classic, a race for historic Le Mans race cars of years past held on the Circuit de la Sarthe, a motorcycle version of the race which is held on the shortened Bugatti version of the same circuit, a kart race (24 Heures Karting), a truck race (24 Heures Camions), and a parody race 24 Hours of LeMons.

Competing teams race in groups called 'classes', or cars of similar specification, while also competing simultaneously for outright placing amongst all classes. Competing teams have had a wide variety of organization, ranging from competition departments of road car manufacturers to professional motor racing teams and to amateur teams. The race has also spent long periods as a round of the World Sportscar Championship, although Le Mans has always had a stronger reputation than the World Championship, and is a round of the FIA World Endurance Championship.

Since 1998, the American Le Mans Series held a second endurance race along with the 12 hours of Sebring every year called 'Petit Le Mans', as a 10-hour or 1,000-mile American version. Although all cars compete at the same time, there are separate classes. A prize is awarded to the winner of each class, and to the overall winner. The number of classes has varied over the years, but there are now four. Custom-built Le Mans Prototypes (LMP) are the top two classes, LMP1 and LMP2, divided by speed, weight, and power output. From 2011, the next two classes are production-based grand tourer (GT) classes, GT Endurance Pro and GT Endurance AM.

One of the keys to Le Mans is top speed, caused by the long straights that dominate the circuit. This has meant cars have attempted to achieve the maximum speeds possible instead of relying on downforce for the turns. A wide variety of engines have competed at Le Mans, in attempts to not only achieve greater speed but also to have better fuel economy, and spend less time in the pits. Engine sizes have also varied greatly. With increased speeds around the track, brakes become a key issue for teams attempting to safely bring their cars down to a slow enough speed to make the Mulsanne Corner turn.

Over the years, many manufacturers have managed to take the overall win, while even more have taken class wins (Porsche, Audi, Ferrari, Bentley, Alfa Romeo). Le Mans has seen a number of fatal accidents. The worst was in 1955, when more than 80 spectators and driver Pierre Levegh were killed.

Nevertheless, it is one of the most prestigious automobile races in the world and is often called the 'Grand Prix of Endurance and Efficiency'. The event represents one leg of the Triple Crown of Motorsport; other events being the 'Indianapolis 500', and the 'Monaco Grand Prix'.

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