

The Petit Le Mans powered by Mazda (French for little Le Mans) is a sports car endurance race held annually at Road Atlanta in Braselton, Georgia, USA. It uses the rules established for the 24 hours of Le Mans by the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO), which are slightly modified if necessary, mainly to allow additional cars to



compete.

The race was founded by Road Atlanta owner Don Panoz and first run on October 10, 1998 as part of the IMSA season. The 1999 edition was one of the original events of the American Le Mans Series. This year will mark the 2nd Annual Intercontinental Le Mans Cup, which connects the races in North America, Europe and Asia.

The Petit Le Mans covers a maximum of 1,000 miles (1,600 km) (which is approximately 394 laps) or a maximum of 10 hours, whichever comes first; only once, in the rain-stopped 2009 race, has the leading team failed to complete 1,000 miles (1,600 km). In addition to the overall race, teams of two or three drivers per car compete for class victories in four different classes of cars, two for Le Mans prototypes and two for grand tourer cars. Class winners of this event receive an automatic invitation to the following year's 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Get your tickets for the October 16-19 race, see back page for info!



Petit Le Mans 2013: 15 Years of Memories

By Dean Richardson

For me, Petit Le Mans started in 1999. I missed the inaugural race in 1998 due to family obligations. Since then I have been in attendance every year. During that time Petit Le Mans has been one of the crown jewels in the American Le Mans Series calendar. The race is a baby when compared to the 12 Hours of Sebring and the Rolex 24 at Daytona, but in a short amount of time it has become a prestigious race with teams from around the globe coming to Road Atlanta to try and conquer the course and the competition.

Next year, Petit Le Mans enters a new era with the TUDOR United SportCar Championship which is combining the ALMS and GRAND-AM into a single series. As this year's race draws near I have been reflecting on some of the memories this race and this track have created for me.

I thought I would share some of the most memorable moments I have experienced at Petit Le Mans over the years. It's not a complete list but rather a compilation of recollections over the years. Some memories are things many of you will remember, others are more personal.

1999 - "Why is he pushing so hard?..."

My introduction to endurance racing very well may have been one of the greatest

Petit Le Mans finishes ever. That year was a battle between the BMW V12 LMR prototype and the Panoz LMP1-Ford. With less than 10 minutes left in the 1,000-mile race, the BMW driven by Joerg Mueller looked to have the race pretty much wrapped up. I attended the race with my father, who had become my number one racing companion. He always liked to time cars and see for himself the lap times they were posting.

As the laps wound down he was timing the BMW, and commented to me, that the BMW was turning some of the fastest laps of the day. As the BMW swept past spectator hill my father leaned over and said "Why is he pushing so hard with such a big lead?"

Moments later, with less than five laps remaining, we watched on the "Jumbotron" in shock as the BMW plunged down the hill, out of the darkness into turn 10a and spun straight into the gravel giving the lead and win away to the Georgia-based Panoz Racing Team much to the enjoyment of many of the fans in attendance.

2000 - Another great finish

It's easy to forget now but back in 2000 the Corvette Racing Team was still in its early stages. On a global stage the factory supported Dodge Vipers run by the French Oreca team were the class of the field. Up to that point, anytime the Oreca Vipers and the Corvette Racing Team met head-to-head in a major endurance race, the win had gone to the Viper.

The 2000 Petit Le Mans saw an epic battle

between these two teams. As the sun set the Viper was leading but the Corvette C5R was closing little by little. With only a handful of laps remaining the Corvette was right behind the Viper. As both cars entered turn 1, the Corvette made a move, and the Viper pushed wide and went in the grass exiting the turn, allowing the Corvette to make the pass and take its first endurance race victory.

2000 also saw the last member of "Air Atlanta", to date, as Bill Auberlen's BMW V12 LMR somersaulted into the air and crashed after cresting the "hump" on the back straight. The interview that followed as Auberlen described how he thought going airborne could never happen to him is still one of my favorite driver interviews.

2003 - Solitude

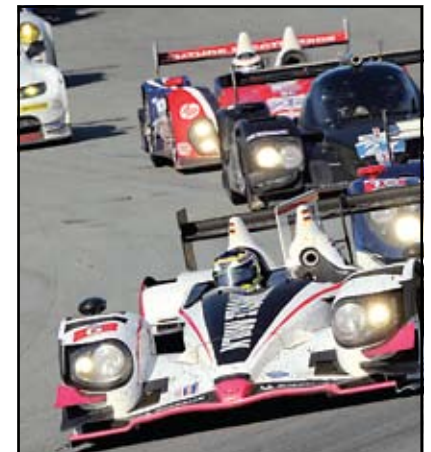
To be honest, I don't remember anything specific about the 2003 race itself. The Sixth-running of Petit Le Mans was memorable to me because the race occurred just months after my father's sudden passing. My father and I had been attending races together for many years, and Petit was always the highlight of our racing calendar.

I knew the race was going to be strange attending by myself but I had a lot of friends at the track, many of whom I got to know through the old ALMS message boards. The camaraderie and friendship during the days leading up to the race was much needed.

The day of the race, I decided at the last minute to spend most of the day alone. Soaking in the race and walking from

vantage point to vantage point. I won't go as far as calling the experience therapeutic, but I will say that for many reasons I look back at that race with very fond memories. I will add that it is the only race I ever spent in such a manner and probably the only one I ever will. I'm too much of a social animal to spend that much time without talking. 2003 was a special race for me and is proof that even with a tens of thousands of people and millions of dollars of racecars all around you, you can still find much needed solitude.

I hope that if you haven't already made plans to come to this year's race you will consider making the trip. I can't promise you the best memories of YOUR life, but I can promise you one of the best races at one of the world's greatest tracks!



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