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1016 and the Le Mans Classic

It's 11.15pm on 5th July 2014. It's a dark and drizzly night and the 7-litre Ford is growling.

Yet all is quiet in the car - I don't hear the noise - everything is happening outside. The first race has just started and the drizzle is intensifying. The pack has been unleashed and I must keep that black Chevron, which sneaked by me in the chicane before Dunlop, close enough to get past him.



The mirror is full of lights dancing. Never mind the Chevron. I'll pass him as soon as we're on the Huerfandies straight. Must concentrate on driving with one hand. I'm in 3rd and it keeps jumping out of gear, so I must keep my right hand on it. Wouldn't do to pop out of gear in the middle of the Esses because the tarmac is getting shinier and drops are sliding up the windscreen at an increasing rate.

It's funny how the noise and glow of instruments come back as I tell myself to concentrate on keeping my hand on the gear-lever. Otherwise, it's all happening outside.

The Chevron is gobbled up well before the first chicane, which I negotiate not too elegantly in the wet, but I'm not concentrating on style. It's wet and I'm chasing.

Full acceleration after the chicane, sliding slowly to the right preparing for the next one. In P1016 it's 27 to 30 seconds before you reach the second chicane. It's a long time with your foot pushing through the floor! I must pass that red-striped white Corvette, which illegally pushed passed me before the green lights and the start line (regardless of all the lip service in the pre-race briefing, nobody will punish him).

The engine has just missed a beat. No, not just one, it's going on; the engine is misfiring, spluttering. Suddenly the lights are dimming. The engine has

by Claude Nahum >>

stopped. Completely black in the car. Totally quiet. Dark.

Suddenly everything is much faster, louder outside. Cars are passing me and I'm hugging the guard rail. I have no lights and, although I am coasting slightly downhill towards the second chicane, I feel totally exposed to a car hitting me from behind. It's scary. I finally reach the chicane, pull right and the marshals push me back behind the guard rail. I can see the powerful lights illuminating the chicane, the shining raincoats of the marshals, the drizzle and, once more, the cars racing by (one has just skidded into the gravel, exciting the marshals who otherwise look bored). As I watch them with a maelstrom of negative emotions and anger, I'm ready to throw in the towel, not only on Le Mans Classic but on racing altogether. I'm really fed up.

Take a step back 2 years to 23rd July 2012. Trevor Van Popering, my mechanic working for Didier at Burgol, but permanently dealing with my cars, writes to Lee Holman, who was inquiring 'I just got an email from Steve saying that you had problems with both the transaxles. I would like to know as much about the problems as I can'. Trevor is an ex-BAR F1 team mechanic who was responsible for Takuma Sato and Jacques Villeneuve.

I totally endorsed Trevor's answer, a cold, clinical description of the previous Le Mans Classic:

We did our shakedown at Magny Cours en route to Le Mans. Everything ran smoothly on P1016 and the original brakes that we'd reverted to, rather than the Wilwoods it had when I bought it from Livanos, worked perfectly. Also, the transaxle that you had recently repaired seemed to be running fine. We ran the car for a dozen laps or so and had no issues whatsoever.

At the same time we had the chance to test the Lola 5.7 litre carburettor configuration. It was quite a job converting the car, but again all ran like a Swiss watch without any leaks or issues. The following day was scrutineering and we had no issues getting the cars through.

GT40 P1016 cruised through without having the usual time penalties added to each race for non-conformity to specification. (4minutes per 45minute race).

On the Friday we had our first timed practice (Quali), which went well, with the Lola ending the session with the second best time and the GT40 26th. Then came the night free-practice session.

The Lola ran fine again, but this time the GT40 stopped out on circuit.

Claude telephoned me to say that the gearbox made a huge noise going down one of the straights and that he had parked up. The video suggests that the noise happened at about