

Le Mans History: The art of reading a rule book - The Dauer 962 LM

By Werner Kirchmann

Le Mans 1994: months before the race most people at the Toyota Motorsport Division were already smelling Le Mans victory. Peugeot had left the battlefield after two consecutive wins and other works prototype competitors were not showing up. The Toyota people had sent two well funded semi works teams on the long journey from Japan to France: the SARD Team and NISSO TRUST. And where was the opposition? OK, there was the annual Courage and Kremer effort but this time nothing should really keep the Japanese manufacturer from scoring their first overall win. Everything was well prepared by Toyota; even the "inevitable" all-Japanese driver teams were left at home.



Winner 1994: #36 Dauer 962 LM driven by Yannick Dalmas, Hurley Haywood and Mauro Baldi

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The World Sports Car Championship was gone so the A.C.O. had set up its own rule book. In an effort to promote the GT-1 class and lure supercars like the Bugatti EB110, the Ferrari F40, the Venturi 600 LM and the McLaren F1 to the track, appropriate rules were drawn up accordingly. For the GT-1 class that meant 40 litres more fuel tank capacity with just 50 kg more weight compared to the prototypes. On top of that a larger air restrictor was also in the book. The only prerequisite to enter a car in the GT-1 class was the existence of at least one road-going, street-legal version.

The Porsche engineers, an always very creative and imaginative bunch of people when the task was to find

loopholes in a rule book, chose a completely different approach to what the A.C.O. had in mind. Instead of allocating a budget for the conversion of a road-going Porsche production model to a GT-1 race car, they thought about a much more sophisticated procedure:

1. Take a well-proven Group C prototype racer and convert it into a road-going, street-legal version.
2. Take that homologated street-legal car and make a GT-1 compliant race car out of it.

In fact, the first steps had already been made only a few years before. In 1991, Jochen Dauer, 1988 European Sports Car Champion and proprietor of a small automotive company, bought five 962 Group C chassis from Porsche: these would serve as the basis for his own road-going 962 project. Porsche was helpful in sourcing parts and gave Dauer significant technical advice, such as a hydraulic suspension system which was added in order to meet German minimum ride height requirements. The interior saw the addition of a second seat, a little bit of leather for the dashboard and a VCD player with a video screen. The luggage compartment (A.C.O. GT-1 mandatory) was in the left door sill. This road car did not have to meet any racing regulations, so the air restrictor was removed, actually giving the engine a higher output (730 hp - 544 kW) than the race version.

The narrow tires of the 962 Le Mans would unfortunately hinder the performance of the car over the long laps at Le Mans, even with the increased power from the GT-class air restrictor. However the engineers at Porsche believed that the larger fuel tank they were allowed in the GT-1 class would compensate for this lack of speed by spending much less time in the pits than anybody else. They were surely right: pit stop time is, and has always been, a key factor for success at Le Mans.

The first version of the Dauer 962 LM made its debut at the Frankfurt Automobile Fair in September 1993. In December 1993 the idea of co-operation between Porsche and Jochen Dauer to form a team for the 24h of Le Mans was born. Porsche took two of the Dauer road-going cars and converted them back



The Dauer #35 without its race livery at the Prequalification

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into what they were: race cars. The whole operation was under enormous time pressure. The A.C.O. had published the full details of the rules relatively late, and the Porsche CEOs also needed some time for their final decision, so the actual work on this project started in mid January 1994, just five months prior to the start of the race...

That January, the A.C.O. was fully aware of what was happening in Stuttgart. Hoping to level the playing field a little, the French changed the rules and introduced a flat-bottom rule for the GT-1 class: every car's underside had to be flat in the whole central section between the wheels. As a result the 962-based design lost all ground effect completely and this caused quite a few headaches. Jochen Dauer had to homologate a new high downforce version of the road car and the People at Porsche had to modify the race version accordingly. In April 1994 the two cars were ready and works driver Hans Stuck was able to do a shakedown at the Weissach test track. More tests at Paul Ricard and a full 24h simulation at Magny Cours followed over the next few weeks.



The #1 SARD Toyota driven by Eddie Irvine, Mauro Martini and Jeff Krosnoff finished in second place

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slower and just scraped into 12th position on the grid. Official statements from Porsche at that time still said that their target was a class victory in GT-1, not an overall victory. No-one believed this.

On 19th June 1994, a warm and sunny Saturday, about 140,000 spectators saw a 48 car field starting their engines. Not surprisingly the Courage and Kremer prototypes took the lead from the start, but the first round of pit stops revealed the 962 LM for what they were: wolves in sheep's clothing! The Toyotas and the other prototypes raced with a weight of 950 kg and an 80 litre fuel tank, whereas the Porsches' weight was 1,000 kg but they carried a 120 litre fuel tank. While the prototypes had to stop about every 11-12 laps to refuel, Hans Stuck and his teammates could easily squeeze 14 laps, sometimes even 15 laps per stint out the fuel tanks. They also had the race pace. On Sunday it was Thierry Boutsen in the #35 car who did the fastest lap of the race with a time of 3:52.54 (210.544 km/h) – much quicker than in practice, so the qualifying times were probably just sandbagging.



The #4 NISSO TRUST Toyota driven by Steven Andskär, George Fouché and Bob Wollek

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At the end of the second hour the Dauer cars were first and second, but then the German team hit unexpected trouble. First of all leading American driver Danny Sullivan in the #35 car experienced a puncture, unfortunately right behind the entrance of the pit lane and as a consequence he had to do a full lap at very slow speed to make it back

into the pits – losing almost two laps to the leading cars. The next incident happened when Thierry Boutsen ran out of fuel some 50 metres short of his pit, so the marshals had to push him. Shortly after that the #36 car needed a lengthy repair session: a driveshaft had to be replaced. Later in the night it was again Boutsen who ran into trouble: he lost the front cover in the Porsche curves – and this meant that his head lights were gone too. *“I had to wait for another car to arrive to see where I was. But he was going too fast, so I had to wait for another!”*



#35 Dauer 962 LM driven by Hans Stuck, Danny Sullivan and Thierry Boutsen
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After midnight everything was looking favourable for the Japanese, but in the early morning hours the leading NISSO TRUST Toyota driven by Steven Andskär, George Fouché and Bob Wollek ate its gear box – resulting in an almost one hour long repair stop. Meanwhile a very racey Hans Stuck had retrieved one of the two laps lost in the puncture incident, but a broken wishbone before breakfast meant another 15 minute repair stop for them. From Sunday sunrise until lunchtime it was the SARD Toyota driven by Eddie Irvine, Mauro Martini and Jeff Krosnoff which was clearly in the lead and it looked like the Japanese team could finally take the holy grail – the first overall win for Toyota at Le Mans.

Life is sometimes cruel – and Le Mans is no different: Irvine, Martini and Krosnoff lost the race because of some bad welding by a Japanese mechanic; a gear linkage

broke with just 98 minutes to go. The linkage broke immediately after a regular pit stop, just past the end of the pit lane. American driver Jeff Krosnoff got out of the car, managed to find 3rd gear by the transmission casing and completed a slow lap. He brought the car back into the pits for a quick repair and got back on track again in third position behind the two Dauer 962 LM. A couple of very spirited laps with Eddie Irvine at the wheel brought the SARD Toyota into second place on the penultimate lap, but overall victory was lost.



Sunday morning in the Esses – competitors view of the Dauer 962 LM

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More than 12 years after its initial construction and 7 years after its last win as a Group C prototype in 1987, it was a Dauer 962 LM # 35 which took the chequered flag as the winner, having completed 345 laps. This was the 13th overall victory for Porsche at La Sarthe. One lap down were the SARD Toyota and the second Dauer #36. The 4th place car, the NISSO TRUST Toyota, was a distant 15 laps behind. Reliability was also a key factor in 1994. None of the leading cars had a clear run and just 18 out of the 48 starters were classified. After the race the general opinion among the organizers, the fans and the competitors was relatively clear – most people felt that Porsche had cheated. In a sense they were wrong – the Dauer 962 LM was within the letter of the regulations, although admittedly not within the spirit of the rule book. Some of the competitors started to blame the people from Stuttgart openly for a lack of fair play – but maybe they were just jealous that they didn't have the same neat idea. The A.C.O. let Porsche and Jochen Dauer know that this car would not be welcome anymore and started work on the rule book immediately after the race. Not surprisingly the minimum number of road going versions for GT-1 cars was increased for 1995.



1994: Approx. 140,000 spectators watched the race

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So what happened to the Dauer 962 LM project? The Le Mans winning car never raced again. Until 2002 altogether 13 road cars were built, all of them based on original 956/962 race car chassis, so the customers buying these also bought a piece of endurance racing history. Six cars were bought by the Sultan of Brunei, the list price at that time was \$853,000.

With 730 bhp, an acceleration from 0-60mph that took just 2.6 seconds and with a top speed of 402 km/h, it had the title of the world's fastest road car for many years and was only just recently topped by the Bugatti Veyron. The road version is a good 50 km/h faster than the Le Mans race car because of about 40% less downforce and more horsepower. Besides this, there were actually no real significant differences between the

road version and the race car – OK, Stuck, Baldi and Co. did not have the VCD player on board in Le Mans.

A new version of the Dauer 962 was announced for 2002 but never materialized. Jochen Dauer also acted as a Bugatti dealer later on, but his company somehow went downhill in recent years. At the time of writing he is sitting in a German jail and is being charged with tax evasion.

At the end of the day, the Dauer Porsche 962 LM was just another fine proof for the thesis that the people who build race cars are always smarter than the ones who write rule books.

Le Mans Moments: The “Drinking for Holland” Friday Night Party 2008

