

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bentley Victorious at Le Mans 2003



Amid scenes of extraordinary emotion in and around the pits, at 4.00pm on Sunday, Guy Smith drove his number 7 Bentley Speed 8 over the line. He was followed by David Brabham in the sister number 8 car to realise a dream that was a lifetime in the making. In the process Team Bentley broke Audi's three year stranglehold on this race, delivered maiden Le Mans wins to Dindo Capello and Guy Smith and allowed Tom Kristensen to join Derek Bell and Jacky Ickx as the only people ever to have won this race more than four times.

The great question at the start was whether the proven extra speed of the Speed 8 was enough to counter the extra time it would spend in the pits compared with the Audis. Brilliant driving from all six drivers, flawless pitwork, Michelin tyres that allowed triple and quadruple stints and legendary Bentley reliability provided the answer.

Dr Franz-Josef Paefgen, chairman and chief executive of Bentley Motors said, "this is one of the greatest moments in our company's long history. On behalf of everyone at Crewe and all those who work for Bentley around the world, I'd like to thank every person at Team Bentley who helped make it possible. After 73 years we are delighted to have taken Bentley back to

its roots with it's 6th victory at Le Mans."

Tom Kristensen: "This was a great way to win my fifth Le Mans. We had a near perfect race on the track and a perfect one in the pits. I was able to do quick laps, especially at night. It was great to win with my long time driving partner Dindo; Guy has done an excellent job with the development of the car as well as driving a great race today. My thanks go to whole Bentley team."

Guy Smith: "Winning Le Mans was obviously a huge ambition but being on the podium was special for two other reasons. First I got to share it with Stefan Johansson who gave me my first chance in sportscars; secondly I was driving for Bentley who have shown great loyalty to me over the last three years. I hope that today I have repaid their faith in me."

Dindo Capello: "I have dreamt of winning this race. Le Mans is the biggest sportscar race in the world and it is great to add this victory to those I have at Sebring and Petit Le Mans. The team did a perfect job in the pits, we were able to push when we had to and then limit the risk to get the Bentley to the finish."

Johnny Herbert: "We had a number of small problems but we had the speed on the track to compete, but not the luck. It was great to come into a team that was the best prepared for the race and be able to drive the car to such a fantastic result for Bentley. Of course we are gutted we didn't win, but Tom, Dindo and Guy did not put a wheel wrong the entire race and fully deserved the victory."

Mark Blundell: "It is an excellent result for Bentley, congratulations to Tom, Dindo and Guy - they ran a faultless race. There can only be one winner and it wasn't us today. It was a great experience and ranks right up there with my win here in '92. It was great to represent Bentley and share in the experience. For a Brit, it is extra special."

David Brabham: "Full credit to the number 7 car. They drove an excellent race with no problems. There's no way to beat a car that runs a perfect race. We had two small problems but to finish with a Bentley one-two is great result. This is my best result at Le Mans and I'm delighted it came when driving for a British marque."

Derek Bell: "This is a classic Le Mans win. A few niggles put the number 8 car in second place but number 7 car ran an perfect race on the track and in the pits. The drivers didn't put a wheel wrong, and the team provided maximum support. This is a great victory for all those who have worked to bring a Le Mans win back to Britain."

Brian Gush, director of motorsport: "I am so full of admiration for this team. We had some minor problems with car 8, but every member of Team Bentley worked flat out and delivered a dream result. We'd have settled for the win but to take the first two places, considering the opposition we faced, is quite fantastic."

John Wickham, team director: "I'd like to thank the whole team who have come together to make this possible and great credit must be given to the design team for producing such a quick, strong car. Le Mans

has so many variables, you can only hope everything comes together the way you plan. Today it did in the biggest possible way."

Text/Photos - Bentley Motors

Gallery

Hide gallery

Hide gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/bentley-victorious-le-mans-2003>

© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.