

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Eric Thompson - 3rd at Le Mans in 1951](#)



The December 2004 issue of the recently re-designed '[Cars for the Connoisseur](#)' magazine contains the third part of Lloyds broker, Connaught and Aston Martin works driver, Eric Thompson's 'Racing Reminiscences'. The following is an abbreviated extract from the story of Aston's new DB3 not being ready in time to compete at Le Mans in 1951, and how the redoubtable Feltham marque entered DB2s as a stopgap - and came home in 3rd place with the previous year's famous car 'VMF 64'. A free sample of this issue being available to Classic Driver readers at the address below.

"For Le Mans 1951...John Wyer hurriedly built two lightweight DB2s. It became evident that no DB3 would be ready, and last year's VMF 64 which DB [David Brown] had been using as his road car was brought into play and after a lot of pruning got to within 150lbs of the Lightweights - all still with 2580cc engines.

"The Team was based in a chateau, so far out of Le Mans that only the most determined journalist would visit us, and before practice the lorries and mechanics went straight to the pits while the drivers and timekeepers had an early dinner in the Hippodrome Restaurant on the Mulsanne Straight, parking the race cars outside. We were just finishing when **VROOM!**, a car went past flat out. Then **VROOM!, VROOM!** Practice had started and we all piled into the cars leaving Liz, my future wife, to pay the bill. After an hour or so, I became a little concerned about her future and it looked as if she would have to stay there until the end of practice. I mentioned this to Reg Parnell who was just going out to practice and screaming to a halt outside the Hippodrome, pulled Liz into the car and set off again at full speed. She was wearing a voluminous 'New Look' cotton dress which the car's ventilation practically blew over her head - but despite the distraction Reg delivered her back to the pits.

"Lance Macklin, who was very much a 'coming man' as part of the Stirling Moss/Peter Collins HWM team, complained bitterly when he found that he was partnered by an unknown like myself and that we would be driving VMF 64, last year's car. John had elected an average speed which was ten seconds a lap faster than the previous year when the cars had come 5th and 6th. VMF 64 was going like a train and after 12 hours we were lying 5th behind Eddie Hall's 4.1-litre Ferrari. At this moment, John lifted his speed embargo. Long distance racing can often be very lonely and the thing that I have always enjoyed is 'the chase'. It was raining and shortly before dawn I would see another DB2 far ahead of me. Little by little, I closed the gap and recognised Brian Shawe-Taylor. Our speed down the straight was just about the same, but with the Lightweight he could leave his braking later and his acceleration was superior. However, you had to be very determined to take the crest of the hill at Mulsanne and go through White House without lifting. Pierre Marechal had been killed in an Aston at this point in 1949, but your pace through that kink determined your speed up the incline past the pits. We circulated together for some laps and I could sometimes see a flash of red from the brake lights ahead of me. Then with the accelerator firmly on the floor, the extra 200 revs carried me past Brian as we passed the pits.

"Lance had started the race and I did the final stint coming third as a sandwich between the 4.5-litre Talbots of Mairesse and Levegh missing second place by 9kms behind the winning Jaguar.

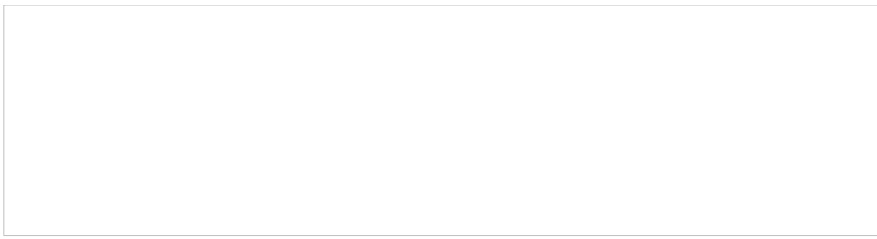
"In his race notes John Wyer wrote 'Thompson had the worst of the weather during the night but this did not prevent him from making the fastest speed of any Aston driver. He also put in the highest speed in any one period and the fastest lap'".

For 1952, as well as pursuing his career in the City, Thompson raced extensively for the 'English Gentleman' par excellence, Rob Walker. Cars driven included the ERA Delage and GP Connaught. Further details of these cars and the colourful stories about racing in the '50s can be found in future editions of 'Cars for the Connoisseur'.

The Editor, Charles Harbord, has generously offered subscribers of Classic Driver a FREE sample of the December Issue. Those interested should telephone his 24 hour hotline : +44(0)1747 830 755

Or e-mail him at: charles@carsfortheconnoisseur.com - mentioning classicdriver.com.

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