

Night moves

Get there early and stay up late with the night owls for the best event on the classic racing calendar: the Spa Six Hours

Words: Johnny Tipler Photography: Dave Woodall/Johnny Tipler

There's nothing like the Spa Six Hours. For a start, it's an annual, rather than a biennial meeting like the Monaco or Le Mans Classics. And, for the main event, you get six hours of exhilarating racing – which makes Goodwood's hour-long TT retro seem meagre. The ace in Spa's deck is the topography, as the track climbs, weaves and plunges through the majestic Ardennes hills.

Now in its 14th year, the Six Hours is one of the premier events in Europe – and the HSCC organisation is relaxed and efficient. There were 79 cars in this year's event, spanning 1959 to 1965, seven of which were Porsche 911s, plus a 904/6. Fastest qualifier was the Sean Lynn/Dean Lanzante Ford GT40 with 2m:51.53s at 146.40kph, the slowest a BMW 1800Ti with 4m:01.32s at 104.06kph. The 904/6 of Klaus-Dieter Frers/Armin Zimtbl

was 2.9 secs adrift of pole, and the quickest 911 – Duel's Roman Caresani/Pascal Pandelaar car – was 13 secs down.

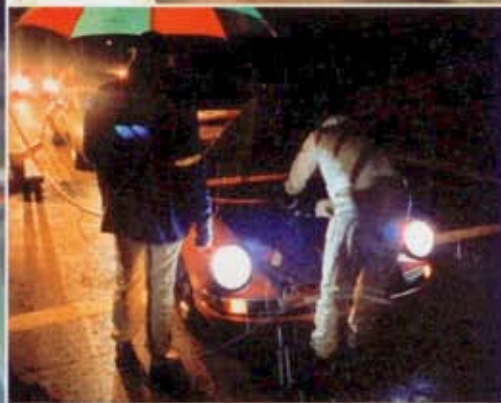
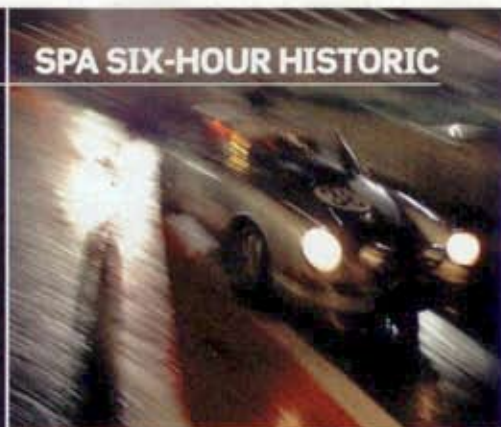
The Six Hours brigade was conveniently confined to the prestigious pit garages, in echelon down the hill beside the old start-finish straight. Not chaotic, then, but the vibe was more reminiscent of a 1960s' club race than a modern international meeting. But, beneath the laid-back veneer, there were serious contenders on the prow: perennials like Frers, who was anxious to consummate the potential form of his 904/6, and Ed Poland's Duel concern that was fielding its pair of red '65 911s and a yellow customer car. Ed's been a regular class winner here (see 'Duel Purpose', 911 & PW, December 2005). Up front, the E-type, Shelby Mustang and Cobra heavy mob provided the muscle-car action. The usual suspects were on hand, including our own Mark



SPA SIX-HOUR HISTORIC

Hales (winner in '04) peddling a TVR Griffith. Famous names included Sir Stirling (sporting period cork helmet), driving an OSCA in the RAC's Woodcote Trophy sports car race, tin-topped Jackie Oliver (BMW) and John Fitzpatrick (Galaxie), plus Richard Attwood who was crewing an E-type in the Six Hours.

At 4.15pm on Saturday, 15 minutes behind schedule, the Six Hours commenced with a rolling start. The cacophony of 79 race engines went on for ever – and Spa's geography meant that it was audible for the duration of the race. Our favourite for a podium, the pretty 904/6 of Frers/Zumtobel started well from its second row grid spot and hung on to third place for the best part of two hours, but the Six Hours was dominated from the outset by two cars: the Lynn/Lanzante GT40 and the Fred Feuerstein/Barney Geröllheimer Ford Fairlane Thunderbolt. When did you last even see a '64



You can't beat the atmosphere of night racing, particularly at a classic track like Spa. This main shot shows off the legendary Eau Rouge sequence and captures both the line and elevation. Right middle: it's not unusual to have some 'weather' at Spa as a 911 crew carries out a fuel stop



Fairlane, let alone one starting an endurance race from the front row?

As the hours ticked by, these two remained steadfastly ahead, the rest of the big bangers thundering round in vain pursuit. On the old pitlane wall there was a deafening blast as they sped down to Eau Rouge, the drivers savagely cutting the left-hand kerb before twitching right and throwing the car up the arching curve in a truly awesome spectacle.

I headed out into the countryside to watch the racing with DDKer James Puttock. He'd got a movie-camera mounted in the nose of the

loneliness of each driver in his cockpit, with the added uncertainty of dusk and, soon enough, the blackness of night. But what was this? One or two tail-enders were circulating without headlights, and another without rear lights! Electrical glitches, maybe – but, incredibly, it didn't seem to slow them much.

For a Porsche fan, the most memorable sight was the Duel trio of narrow-bodied 911s, lapping in close touch with each other, showing the assorted British sports cars scant respect and hustling anything bigger that came in their way or passed them. Along with headlights and

conditions over two hours, consuming fuel at the rate of approximately 2.2 litres a lap. The last two hours we didn't use that much because of the rain. At this point, the Duellists were running seventh, 14th and 25th overall, with several other 911s placed in the mid-30s.

The rain stopped and, although lap times had dropped in the wet, there was still the wonderful atmosphere of endeavour as cars pounded round. We wished it would never end, but I guess six hours is a decent blast.

When the chequered flag unfurled at 10.15pm, the Caresani/Andelaar 911 (no 25) was classified eighth overall and class winner, with Duel's yellow customer car of Hank Melde/Théo De Prenter (no 8) 11th overall and third in class. A minor altercation with the Armcro dropped the Ed Poland/Cees Kooy car (no 35) down the order for a while, but it recovered from 44th to 20th place. 'It hit the barrier and lost its tail lights, so we had to tape some bulbs on to the wiring to go into the night, and we lost 15 minutes because of that,' explained Ed. It was an impressive demonstration of reliability, first-class presentation, preparation and driving skills.

Later, we learnt that the 'Flintstones' Fairlane of Fred and Barney was excluded for having electronic ignition, which seemed a trifle harsh but bumped everyone but the winners up a place.

After the post-race bonhomie I made my way back to Malmedy. I overshot, and a blat down the old Masta Straight proved irresistible. **12**

Top: The Spa Six Hours always attracts a premier grid of historic racers from around the world. **Leading Porsche was the 904/6 of Klaus-Dieter Frers/Armin Zumtobel although, sadly, it didn't last long. Note the green TVR Tuscan – that's 911 & PW's driving guru, Mark Hales. Below:** The Duel 911s were the class of the field, the no 25 car of Caresani/Andelaar finishing eighth overall

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911 of Spa first-timer Paul Aslett to record a lap of the swoops and dips. The gradients and cambers out here are akin to elements of the Nordschleife – but less relentlessly varying, with elevations higher and longer than Brands Hatch. The Rivage and Stavelot corners are daunting enough, but it requires a special kind of commitment to hurtle several hundred horsepower into the trough of Eau Rouge.

'Apart from Paddock Bend at Brands Hatch, this is the only one which I think about every time I go into it,' said Malcolm Ricketts. 'And every lap I tell myself to keep off the brakes, but every time I have to dab them! It's fantastic in any car.' At night I noticed that the quick 911s were not braking for Eau Rouge, although there was an audible lift-off, whereas most other cars braked quite significantly just beyond the dip.

As twilight fell around 6.00pm, the lights came on. That's when nocturnal races take on a magical quality, the darkness emphasising the

spotlamps, they carry tiny riding lights above their windscreens for ease of identification. But it was their characteristic sound that left no doubt about their arrival at my vantage point on the inside of La Source. Duel has developed a special exhaust system that produces a distinctive high-pitched shriek from the tuned 2.0-litre flat-six – and it's like nothing I've ever heard from a 911. The race had now taken on a different sensory experience: like being a bat, it had become more about sound than sight!

About 8.00pm, when there was a rush to refuel, the Ardennes weather department did its party piece and the heavens opened – it was stair-rods time. Brollies raised, the refuellers in the F1 pits remained unflustered, especially when collecting the euros. I saw one of the Duel 911s take on over 80 litres – a great deal of fuel when there was probably less than two hours left to run. Ed Poland confirmed: 'We took on 84 litres, as that's what we need in dry

