



Thoroughbred & Classic Cars - October 2000

ORIENT EXPRESS by Mark Walton

After thirty years hidden in Japan, a lost GT40, built directly after the famous Le Mans cars in 1968, is back in the UK, and beautifully restored. We drive it at Brands Hatch.

Gulf spec. Meaningless, to anyone who doesn't know much about cars: gobblegook, in fact, if you don't know anything about sports car racing: gibberish if you've never heard of Le Mans. 'Gulf spec' is not a phrase you'll find in the English dictionary. And yet, if GT40s or Porsche 917s have only one colour scheme in your mind, then Gulf spec might mean rather a lot to you. Gulf spec to those who know, is shorthand for the cars that took part in one of the greatest periods of international sports car racing, when the orange and blue livery of the Gulf Oil Corporation dominated Le Mans and the sports car World Championship. Gulf spec means iconic, race winning cars; endurance; Mulsanne; headlights sparkling in cold morning air: and Steve McQueen.



Despite the fame of those colours, only three GT40s raced in that paint at Le Mans, in 1968 and 1969 – chassis numbers GT40 P/1074, 1075 and 1076, and incredibly, one of them, 1075, won Le Mans both years, the only car to win the race twice.

But the influence of those seasons was strong, and the cars built directly after three Gulf cars were close relations to the Le Mans racers. Imagine, then, finding chassis 1077, the GT40 built directly after the Gulf cars in 1968, with the same engine, a lightweight body and a Le Mans gearbox: it's a car that never raced in Europe, a car that disappeared to Japan for 30 years, a car that, until now, has been the lost GT40. And now it's back.

LYNX MOTORS INTERNATIONAL of Hastings on the south coast is famous for Jaguars – D-type replicas, XJS shooting brakes and a 'barn find' lightweight E-type that you might have seen in this magazine last year. You'd be forgiven for thinking that GT40s generally speaking don't get a look in.

'In fact', says Lynx chief John Mayston-Taylor, 'we've been looking after chassis P/1003, the Ford France works GT40, for almost 20 years now on behalf of a client, and in that time we've restored it twice. So we're very familiar with GT40s – despite the fact it is not a Jaguar,' he adds with an ironic smile.

So when John and one of his clients saw chassis P/1077 for sale while wandering around RM's Amelia Island auction in Florida last year, the wherewithal, enthusiasm and knowledge were there to undertake a massive restoration programme on the car. And P/1077 seemed to be worth the effort.

By the end of 1967, Ford had won Le Mans twice in a row and had decided to withdraw from international sports car racing. The original Ford GT40, launched in 1964 with its shark nose and mid-

engined V8, famously named for standing 40in high, had developed considerably in three years, and was now in its MkIV configuration - which meant a hi tech aluminium honeycomb chassis replacing the original steel monocoque, and lengthened, more rounded aerodynamics transforming the original compact design.

At the same time, John Wyer, the ex-Aston Martin team manager who had been building 'production' GT40s in Slough under the banner 'Ford Advanced Vehicles', had become the autonomous (though still Ford supported) JW Automotive Engineering. Backed by Gulf for the 1967 season, JWA had begun to develop its own version of the GT40, called the Mirage - unlike the aerospace technology MkIV Wyer's derivative used conventional weight saving techniques and a more aerodynamic body.

Mirages and MkIV GT40s ran together at Le Mans in 1967, and when the Shelby-run MkIV of Gurney and Foyt took the chequered flag, Ford considered it Job Well Done, and discontinued its programme.

It seemed like a good time to quit anyway, because the rules were changing for 1968 - those fickle sports car authorities were nervous about the 200mph speeds now being achieved, so the rule book was rewritten. Now there was to be a 3.0-litre Group 6 prototype category and a 5.0-litre Group 4 'production' class (production meaning more than 25 built); both the MkIV and Mirage were running massive 7.0-litre engines by then, and at a stroke they became scrap. Well, almost - the GT40 wasn't dead yet.

After running a few earlier cars with special 256ci 'Indianapolis' engines, the MkI GT40 finally settled down with the 289ci (4.7-litre) all-iron V8, and by the end of 1967 the 'production' version had been built and sold to privateers in such numbers, it easily qualified for Group 4. Even though the MkI was four years old by this time (a geological age in racing), Wyer was convinced, using what he'd learnt from the Mirage programme, that the MkI could be brought back to race again, at least until he'd got his Mirage M2 up and running. Gulf agreed to run a team for the 1968 season.

And so in the winter of 1967, two of the three Mirages were rebuilt as MkI GT40s, stamped with their new identities - P/1074 and 1075. They looked standard at first glance, but beneath the surface both had a special lightweight Mirage chassis and suspension, lighter gauge steel in the roof and superlight bodywork.





The new Gulf cars soon started winning, taking victory at Brands Hatch, Monza and Spa. For Le Mans, delayed until September in 1968, Wyer built a third 'works' car, as regular chassis numbered P/1076, which was driven at Le Mans by Jackie Oliver and Brian Muir. That year, 1075 won Le Mans at the hands of Pedro Rodriguez and Lucien Bianchi.

But more remarkable than any of this, the same cars took part in the 1969 season too, despite the growing threat from Porsche and its brand new 917. In 69, it was lckx and Oliver who drove 1075 to victory at Le Mans. By now, after winning a total of four Le Mans, the GT40 legend was sealed.



Meanwhile, as the Gulf cars grabbed the glory, production of the GT40 as a customer race car continued at JWA throughout 1968 and 1969. Chassis P/1078 was shipped to the Channel Islands, 1079 went to Jean Blaton in Belgium, 1080 went to Angola and then on to Portugal and 1081 went to Germany. These and the others that followed were raced, sold, modified, stored, revived and raced again across America and Europe for the next 30 years, all known and documented as the GT40's status as a classic sports car grew.

All except chassis P/1077- Built for the Yamaha Motor Company, and dispatched for Japan on April 13, 1977 was the car that immediately followed the three Le Mans Gulf racers, but it disappeared from the racing scene as soon as it reached the Ear East. Yamaha, which had developed the

2000GT sports coupe for Toyota in the mid-Sixties, was carrying out research into a new Group 7 racer for Toyota to take on Nissan in domestic racing in Japan. Yamaha bought the GT40 to test, measure, examine and scrutinise, with fervent Japanese single-mindedness, as one of the most successful sports racers of all time, but not to race it themselves.

The car was soon in a warehouse, and Yamaha moved on to other things. P/1077 had disappeared from view.

This story seems strange now, in a world where manufacturers are so protective of their technology, that JWA would willingly hand over a car that, at that time, was winning a world championship. To answer that, and see if he could remember chassis P/1077, I call John Horsman, executive director and John Wyer's deputy at JW Automotive throughout the Gulf period, who now lives in Arizona. Horsman reveals there were no qualms about selling the car to a potential rival:

'We were happy to spec the car for whatever they wanted to do with it,' Horsman remembers. 'You've got to remember the GT40 was at the end of its racing career by then – it had been competing for nearly five seasons, and its specification was well known. Yamaha couldn't have bought a GT40 in 1964, but by '68 they were just another customer.'

Over the 'phone, I hear Horsman sifting through papers. Combined with an excellent memory, his files mean it's not long before we're talking in detail about the mysterious chassis 1077.

'It left the factory in yellow with a white stripe,' he says. 'It had a 289 fitted with the aluminium Gurney-Weslake heads. It had the lightweight roof and body panels, and Stage Two ventilated discs, the best brakes we had at the time. It had silver springs and the orange Konis fitted to the works cars, and it had the 8.5in and 11in wheels, so it wasn't quite up to the Le Mans spec, but it was close. A good car. It wouldn't have taken much too convert it into works spec.'

So how special were those three Gulf Le Mans cars?

'They had bigger wheels and tyres', explains John, 'I think chassis 1076 was the highest spec we had, with 10in and 12in wheels, which meant extra flaring on the arches. That car also had the 302ci (4949cc) engine, which we homologated for '68. But the biggest difference in the works cars was the bodywork. The GT40 was always a heavy car, and the works racers had very thin, lightweight bodies, using carbon filament between the layers of glassfibre to reinforce them. It wasn't true carbon fibre like they use today, but we were the first to use carbon in strand form – not Bruce McLaren as you sometimes read. I think we beat him by a few weeks.

I remember a boffin came down from some Ministry or other, and asked if we would like to try this stuff. We didn't realise how expensive it was at the time!



BRANDS HATCH, August 2000. The Lynx trailer opens its wide mouth, revealing a bright yellow GT40 with a perfect paint finish, its roof chest high even on the trailer. It seems amazingly compact, wide and squat, an impression amplified when it rolls on its fat tyres down onto the black tarmac; it's now at belt buckle height, and everyone looks down on it. In automotive folklore, the GT40 might not sit alongside the Daytona or Miura in the list of most beautiful cars ever, but sitting here in summer sunshine, it's mesmerising. It's perfect from every angle, with impeccable, flawless proportions, and all the curves seem to suck your eyes into those air scoops behind the doors, drawing your attention to the V8 beneath the Perspex window.

'The great thing was how original it seemed to be,' says John Mayston-Taylor, remembering the car at that auction a year ago. "The car was grey with a red stripe, the colours it was painted in Japan, and it looked pretty drab. American enthusiasts tend to react instantly to scruffy paint, saying "Oh, it needs a lot of work" but we said don't look at the paint, look at the gearbox, look at the wheels. It's rare to find a car that wasn't 'got at' during the Seventies - most were messed about and modified when people didn't care, but this one seemed original.' Original or not, once bought at the auction (for \$550,000) Lynx embarked on a huge programme to rebuild and restore the car, going to tremendous lengths to preserve that originality.





'GT40's are strong cars, but the chassis rusts,' explains Tim Card, who's been at Lynx for almost 20 years, and has worked on 1077 since it arrived in the workshop. 'Steel gave it its strength, but inside the sills the chassis is bare metal, not even primed. We stripped it, crack tested everything. In fact, this one was very good.'

The closer they looked, the more the car seemed right. The original gearbox is still there, a ZF five speed that looks standard. In fact, when Tim came to find parts for it, he discovered it's around 10mm longer than usual. He reckons, after a bit of research, it's one of 24 Le Mans gearboxes made. The car has also got the rare, original, magnesium BRM wheels that look like new; the correct lightweight steel roof panel between the cut out doors; and the correct lightweight body (without carbon fibre).

But the most obvious example of Mayston-Taylor's quest for originality is the 289 engine: 'Most people see it and say "Why go to all the trouble of running a 289? You can still buy the 302ci engine off the shelf". The 289 has a shallow wet sump, and the engine suffered from oil starvation under heavy braking or cornering. It wasn't the most reliable engine. We've modified the sump with baffles, but there's no doubt we're adding to the work. But... it's original. This is probably one of only three cars left with an original engine.'



Another weakness were the Gurney-Weslake heads. The first engines were standard, all-iron Ford units, until Dan Gurney commissioned Harry Weslake in the UK to develop an aluminium head, later badged 'Gurney Eagle'. It was a pure race head, and difficult to make reliable for endurance racing. Many broke.

'We sourced parts from all over the world,' says Mayston-Taylor, including an original Gurney-Weslake head still in its original box in the States. If you dig hard enough, somebody somewhere in the world has got something.'

As well as digging for parts. Lynx also looked into the history, searching archives in Japan. In Ronnie Spain's definitive book, *GT40 - Individual History and Race Record* (Osprey, 1986), chassis P/1077's entry reads: 'Nothing is yet known of 1077 in its Yamaha days... nothing is known of the car afterwards.'

In fact, all that was known was that the car was bought by a Mr Yoshiyuki Hayashi, a renowned collector, in 1976, who kept the car locked away in his private collection. Lynx discovered, however, the car was tested by Yamaha at the Suzuka circuit in 1968 before being mothballed. It was then bought by a Mr Kojima late in 1969, who wanted to turn it into a road car, but couldn't. Instead, it was raced twice in Japanese sports GT races in 1970, finishing fourth and second. Mr Hayashi bought it in 1976, and it arrived in the States in the early Nineties, before coming up for auction last year.

As Mayston-Taylor points out, it is probably the most original and least raced of all the competition GT40s.

Back at Brands Hatch, the door swings open beneath me, which is more than a door, it's half the roof, and I get a bird's-eye view of the cockpit. In a rather sad, anoraky way I can't help feeling, just for a moment, that it's beautiful: lots of dials, rocker switches, and the little ventilation holes in the seats make it look intricately detailed, like a mosaic. Step over the wide blue sill, and, feet first, wriggle down beneath the little steering wheel. Once in, you're practically lying down in the firmly spongy seats, with the steering wheel at bent-arms length, pedals deep down the hole. Because you sit low in the middle of the car, squashed up against the passenger seat and banked by those wide fuel cells on each side, the car feels big from down here, wide and intimidating.

Having a V8 virtually in the cabin doesn't help. I turn the key and hear the fuel pumps click loudly, and press the starter button. After a couple of fast turns and coughs, the 409bhp V8 erupts behind a little Perspex panel, a huge industrial noise, unevenly rumbling with lazy revs, buzzing the chassis with vibration, crashing into the cabin, drowning out Mayston-Taylor's voice. He shouts, to take me through the right-handed gearchange, which is tricky like nearly all older mid-engined cars, and then closes the door, the roof swinging over to cut out the sunlight. Fortunately for me, six feet tall, Lynx has manufactured a new identical driver's door with a helmet bubble, fitted on our photoshoot ready for the Laguna Seca historic races (see News).

So here we go. The gearbox is an open gate, with a dogleg first and a reverse lockout. The clutch is short and stiff; though not too tight for shoe room, and after a little coaxing with the throttle, the car rolls off.

The old GP loop of Brands Hatch is a fantastic swooping bit of road through the trees, and without bridges or sponsorship hoardings to spoil the view, it looks just like it did when GT40s raced here in the BOAC 500 more than 30 years ago. It's also beautifully smooth, so the ride of 1077 doesn't even come into it. Instead, two clear impressions bombard you as you drive - the noise and the steering.

Turning through the long curves, the small, hard, leather-bound steering wheel puts up plenty of resistance, and yet you can feel straight away, even without any real speed (relatively speaking) this is a balanced car, one that's happy to change direction for you. That impression of size and weight, surrounded as you are by so much car, soon shrugs off; and the GT40 feels like the small car it appears to be from the outside. But more than anything else, the GT40 experience is overwhelmed by the relationship between your right foot and the huge noise behind your head, a noise that has all the hair on your neck permanently standing to attention. It's hard to quantify the acceleration - after a fluff and stutter at low revs, the engine picks itself up and shoves you forwards, violently if you prod it, slowly but irresistibly if you squeeze it, but always with a feeling of that brute strength afforded by big cubic inches.





It's also hard to concentrate on how fast you're going, because your brain is paying so much attention to the ear-splitting music behind you, a gruff burble that quickens and sings until it becomes a high-pitched baritone howl, like a cross between a NASCAR and a Ferrari V12. Ease off and the engine braking lowers the note, squeeze the throttle again and up it sweeps. It is like music. With no need to change gear (362lb ft of torque and a 6500rpm limit mean you've got plenty of scope for acceleration in third) the sound seems smooth and oddly relaxing, despite enough decibels to crack teeth.

But if you do give it a harder burst, and grab another gear, the sound of the engine engaging on that upchange and driving forwards with a hard-as-nails roar is so gut-twistingly 'Le Mans' it makes you want to keep accelerating through all five gears and hold it at 200mph for a few minutes. Which I didn't do, but I like to think about it.

So why don't we all drive these things on the road every day? After five minutes, the downsides start to show up. First of all the heat soak is overwhelming - after just seconds at relatively low revs, the engine bay is like a boiler room, and stifling hot air is filling the cabin. The nits starts to rain, a short but vivid summer storm, and while my little wiper does a fair job helping me to distinguish between grass and tarmac outside, the sense of claustrophobia intensifies, and the virtually slick tyres start to wriggle over the standing water. The view forwards is limited (though lovely, with those curving front wings), the view backwards nonexistent, and out the side windows is fine, but then I didn't want to go sideways, thank you. Short wheelbase, light weight, massive torque and John Mayston-Taylor watching my every move? It's time to call it a day, after a frustratingly short drive.

But how could you ever be satisfied driving one of these? You can feel this car is a purpose-built endurance racer, feel it in every heavy control you use, in all the textures and surfaces you touch, in the noise, the strength, the deceptively lazy engine. It feels like a car that wants to reach 200mph, that wants to go on and on for hour after hour, and any short burst - hell, even a ten-lap sprint race, chance would be a fine thing - is, of course, underplaying its vast potential. You wouldn't be satisfied until you'd won Le Mans, let's face it. A crude mixture of steel, iron and glassfibre it maybe, but never forget that the GT40 is a four times Le Mans winner; history tells you that, but you can feel it too.

History has been kind to chassis number GT40 P/1077. Apart from some odd dents on the underside (does Suzuka have big kerbs?) it got through the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties unscathed, and then in 1999 landed in the hands of people who clearly care. Back in its factory colours and specification, 1077 will never be famous like the Gulf cars, or maybe even valued like a genuine Le Mans entrant. And yet, even without a competition history, this yellow GT40 has one of the most unusual histories of them all.

And anyway, wouldn't it be boring if they were all painted blue and orange?

