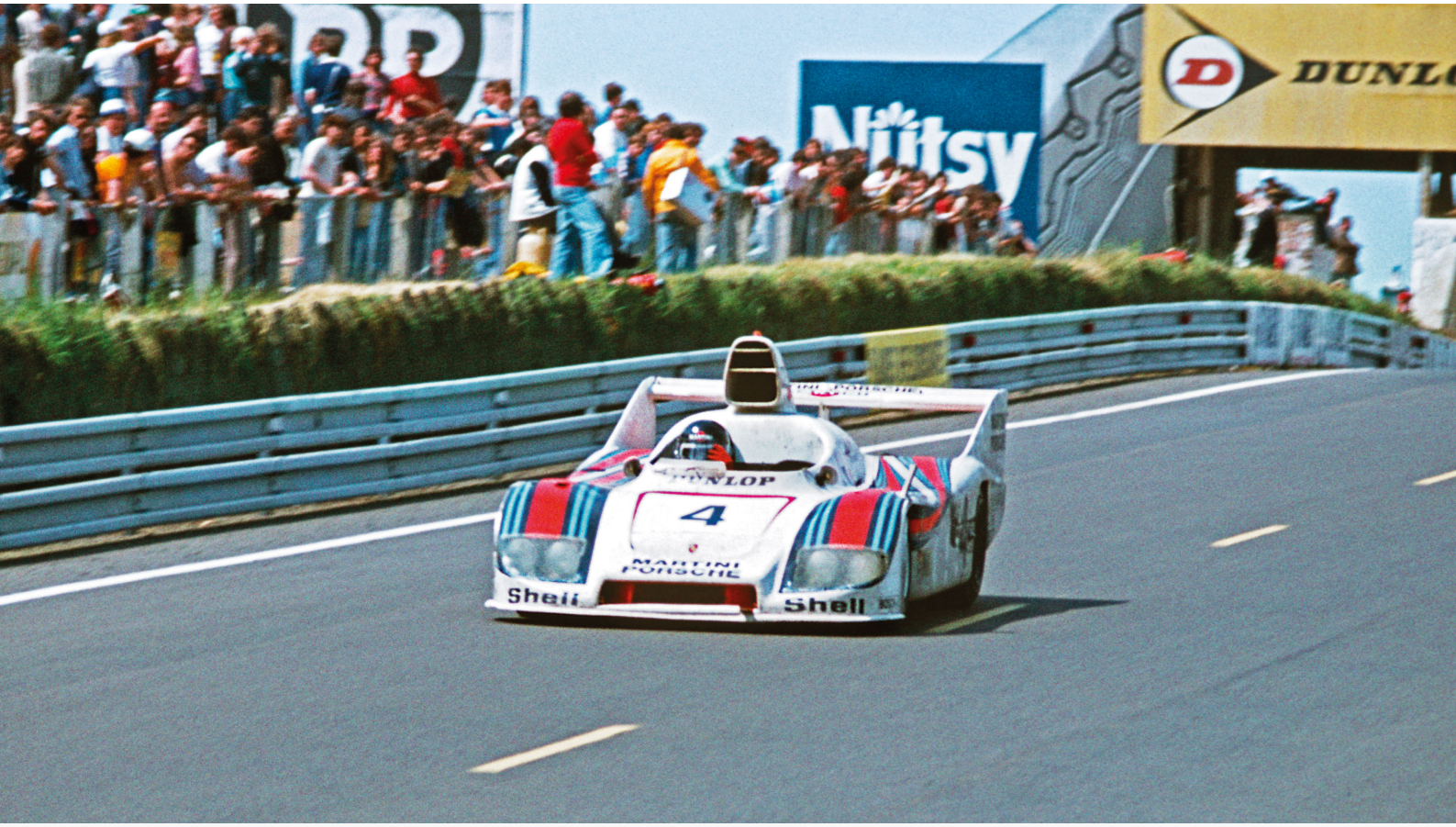

3:36.50 minutes: Catching up in Le Mans

11/06/2025 In 1977, Porsche sends three factory cars to Sarthe: two 936 long-tails and a 935/77. Things go south early on in this memorable 24 Hours of Le Mans when the 935/77 blows a head gasket, taking Rolf Stommelen and Manfred Schurti out of the race at 7:40 p.m.

And then the fuel pump of the 936 with starting number 4 gives up the ghost. During the time it takes to repair the car, the competition manages to secure a monumental lead of nine laps, pushing Porsche pilot Jürgen Barth and Le Mans newcomer Hurley Haywood back to 41st place. And in the 936 with starting number 3, Jacky Ickx and Henri Pescarolo have to call it quits after just 45 laps due to major engine damage.

To make the most of the situation, Porsche decides on the spot to send out last year's winner, Ickx, in the remaining 936. What happens next is one of the most impressive comebacks that Le Mans has ever seen. At around 8:30 p.m., the 32-year-old Belgian gets behind the wheel of the Chassis 936-001, the winning car from the previous year, which already has more than 22,000 kilometers on the odometer and has flawlessly completed a 28-hour test.

Once again, the vehicle has the opportunity to demonstrate its durability. Known for his high speeds, Ickx pushes starting number 4 to its limits for a total of eleven hours.

“That race was a full-throttle race. And I mean full throttle!” the Belgian confirms today. No one on the team thinks they have any chance of winning. Except for Ickx. “Back then, you had to handle your car with care, change gears with the utmost precision, not overwork the engine, and take it easy on the brakes,” recalls Ickx, who is now 80 years old. Porsche has nothing to lose. “I assured the team, the other drivers, and the mechanics that we still had a chance to win this race.” Lap after lap, Ickx manages to fight his way up through the field, drives triple stints, and delivers the performance of his life. Even when it begins to rain at dawn. “I'd never been able to maintain my concentration at such a high level for that long before,” says Ickx, still surprised all these years later. This energy allows him to break the lap record over and over and even achieve an astonishing lap time of 3:36.50 minutes, which is 3.1 seconds faster than the previous best time. When Ickx stops to take a break, Barth and Haywood complete the flawless performance. Technical failures also take down some of their strong competitors, and by 9:30 a.m. on Sunday morning, number 4 has a lead of 19 laps. What could possibly go wrong?

A blown piston, for example. With just 46 minutes left of driving, Haywood limps back to the pit at 3:14 p.m. The mechanics immediately cut ignition and fuel supply to the damaged cylinder, as the regulations state that you have to drive over the finish line in the final lap to win Le Mans. At 3:50 p.m., the ailing 936 crawls out of the pit lane with just five functional cylinders, and Barth guides the vehicle carefully around the course. It's the two longest Le Mans laps in Porsche history.

“By the end, I was physically and emotionally drained,” says Ickx, recalling his fourth of six Le Mans wins. “But we did it. It was absolutely amazing. A fantastic team achievement.”

Info

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Path: 3:36.50 minutes: Catching up in Le Mans/Images/img_1.jpg
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Subline: Winner: an autograph card from 1977, signed by Jacky Ickx

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