Behind the Wheel: Leading the Legacy of Brumos Racing at Daytona

03/03/2021 A firsthand account from the driver's seat of the first IMSA GT winner.

Sitting at the end of the pitlane, she glances in my direction and raises five fingers to indicate the time left before I can unleash the flat-six symphony that is throbbing under my right foot. Just behind me are five racing champions poised to do the same – a lineup that includes America's greatest endurance racing champion Hurley Haywood, 2009 Rolex 24 winner David Donohue, both 2011 Rolex Grand-Am GT champions Andrew Davis and Leh Keen, and finally, 2019 IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar GTLM Champ Earl Bamber. Looking through the front windshield of the classic Porsche 914/6 GT, the vast expanse of Daytona International Speedway's turn one stares back with a welcoming glow on this bright Florida morning, January 30. The 59th running of the classic twice-around-the-clock sports car race starts in about two hours, but first, we are here to celebrate one of IMSA's (International Motor Sports Association) most enduring legacies – Brumos Racing and the famous number 59.

In the late 1990s, I joined the Brumos story at about its halfway point as a young Porsche salesman. Never did I think then that almost 25 years later, I'd be asked to lead the formation of such an iconic group. But Brumos has a way of making magic happen, and through the course of my time with the Jacksonville-based Porsche dealership and race team, I was thrilled to lead the retail group as their Sales Manager, then General Manager. Along the way, I even managed to carve out time to explore a professional racing driver's life before concluding that I would pursue business first. Today, within Porsche Classic, my professional work affords me the chance to stay in touch with people like The Brumos Collection's Dano Davis.

Dano Davis' first decision as the new majority owner of the Brumos dealership in 1990 was to take the dormant team racing once again. Suddenly, with the appearance of two factory 911 (type 964) Turbos, Brumos Racing was back in IMSA in a big way – just as they seemingly burst onto the international stage with Peter Gregg and Hurley Haywood's initial '73 Daytona win. For the next three decades, the team, led by Davis and the late Bob Snodgrass, continued to write Brumos and racing history. Always instantly recognizable, there was no mistaking the white liveries with red and blue "sweeps" and, of course, the number 59 prominently featured on the cars.

With IMSA hosting the 59th running of the Daytona 24 Hours in January 2021, the past and present aligned, and Davis was invited to wave the honorary green flag. That's when I got the call to pilot The Brumos Collection's 914/6 GT, a famous #59 that carried Gregg and Haywood to victory at the first-ever IMSA GT race back in April of 1971.

Her hand waves us on. The track is now ours! But, for only one truly flying lap with instructions to hold at sixty miles per hour. How am I supposed to gauge that? Vintage racing machines don't usually have working speedometers.

What's more, I can sense that the engine isn't happy at anything less than full throttle as the six of us roll out. We are entering the track without using the pitlane exit. Left, then right through turn two, we can see the International Horseshoe (turn three) as the roaring engines begin to clear their throats. Racer's instinct has me checking the rearview mirror as I exit the corner. The mind dreams for a moment; what if this was a real race and I was holding off Hurley behind me in his '75 911 Carrera RSR 3.0?

The successful racing history of the Porsche 935 – which Hurley would later contribute to – was slated to begin at Daytona in 1977, but the record books show that Haywood instead carried his two-season old Carrera RSR to a surprise victory. The Porsche 911 would have a way of doing that throughout its long racing career – and so would Hurley.

Even though this Porsche features the #43 of Ecurie Escargot and not the famous #59, its place in Brumos' heritage is significant. After all, that Daytona win led to *the* call, which saw Haywood become a Porsche Factory Driver at Le Mans only months later, his place among the top of the racing world secured with a maiden victory there. Yes, 1977 was quite a year. Few drivers could hold off a hard-charging Hurley Haywood.

Turn four, a.k.a. The Kink, is usually taken flat out. The other side of the fence is where the Porsche Club of America Corral takes place every Rolex 24. It seems only right to give a small wave to our friends as we pass by. Racing is nothing without the fans to share the enthusiasm for the sights and sounds. I hope they are enjoying the noise as "my" 914/6 GT sounds healthy, happier at the higher RPMs of the tach. With Hurley close behind in formation just over my right rear corner, I take it as a signal to use more RPM and grab another gear.

The West Horseshoe leads into a short chute where I can glance back to see how our group is holding. That's when I notice the nose of another famous #59. I imagine it's a familiar view to the many lapped by the late, great Peter H. Gregg on his way to the 1979 IMSA Camel GT Championship. Right now, that driving honor belongs to Andrew Davis (no relation to Dano Davis, by the way, other than being hand-selected by Hurley to co-drive with Leh Keen when it was time to bring Brumos Racing "back to our roots" in 2011). As I see that incredible white, red and blue 935 slant nose plunge forward, I think of the advice I overheard Hurley give Andrew back in the Rolex garage, sharing his experience from handling the power when the large, single turbo kicks in. I bet he's having a blast back there, and with the wide-open banking just around the next corner, it's about to get real!

Just like the Porsche brand it's so strongly associated with, the Brumos legacy is more than the story of a single person. Many actors have played a significant role over the years. The famous racing family name Donohue holds a special place. Yet, most associate the Donohue name with Penske Racing, and that's true when we consider Mark Donohue as a driving mentor to a young Hurley Haywood. In 1973,

Hurley took on the Can-Am series in the Brumos Racing 917-10, making the jump from a 300 hp 911 to over 1,100 hp in the twin-turbocharged Porsche Spyder. Mark won the championship, and Hurley finished third. Donohue's mentorship ,and friendship, meant a great deal.

Exiting turn six (the infield road course) opens the door to Daytona's most distinctive feature, the 31 degree-NASCAR banking. Now the cars have their best opportunity to stretch their legs. As the sound of the flat-six race engines rises, I grab each successive gear thinking I've failed for sure to maintain that 60 mph pace. I've raced here before, and I know that the faster you go, the narrower the 40 foot-wide track becomes – especially at that angle, where you must tilt your head to the left to see where you are going.

As I ease down from the banking and level off onto Daytona's backstretch, I can see far enough back to recognize the shovel nose of the Riley-Porsche MK XI Daytona Prototype finishing the turn. Capable of 200 mph, it will be less than that today as my chronological position upfront in the 914/6 GT "pace car" guarantees it – unless, of course, its driver David Donohue decides to go rogue. However, he's not that kind of driver, I know. Later on in life, Hurley had the chance to return Mark's mentorship favor with his son David. Extraordinarily talented and smart behind the wheel, David races a lot like Hurley.

Ask David Donohue about that last hour in 2009 behind the wheel of the ailing Brumos Riley-Porsche DP, holding off a hard-charging Juan Pablo Montoya to secure narrow victory in – at the time - the closest finish in Daytona 24 history. He'll be the first to tell you about his teammates and crew's success – that it was the solid team effort that won the day. Speaking of that day, it was precisely 40 years from when his father had won the race. Like I said, Brumos Racing is a family story, and for us, the 2009 Rolex 24 victory was an emotional one.

We are approaching The Bus Stop chicane (turns 8,9,10, and 11) as the speed of the back straight demands your attention heading into the braking zone. Track designers install chicanes to lower top speeds, and it's a fitting metaphor as I consider the racer that's holding station behind David's Daytona Prototype.

In 2011, Dano Davis decided to return Brumos Racing "back to our roots" and switch from a prototype car to a production-based Porsche 911 GT3 Cup. We were going GT racing once again. At first glance, it seemed like an option that might slow things down; however, the fans and our dealership customers loved it. The team, led by crew chief Skip Schinsing with driving talent provided by Andrew Davis and Leh Keen (joined in the endurance events by Haywood and Porsche factory driver Marc Lieb), promptly went out and battled hard for the title.

The winning championship connection that saw us "race what we sell" was now complete. And while the team itself was closed down mid-season 2013 (with the dealerships sold in 2015), Brumos was about to begin its next exciting chapter with The Brumos Collection's grand opening – a "must-see" experience in the Jacksonville area.

Exiting the Bus Stop, it's time for me to tilt my head again as we transition from Florida flat to that 31-

degree banking for turn 12. The revs climb effortlessly as I row through the gears. We are about to enter the tri-oval, the fastest portion of the 3.56-mile circuit. As we roar past the start/finish line, I can't help but think of Earl Bamber. Yes, his place in this chronological tribute lap may be last in the factory 911 RSR that carried the Brumos tribute livery on the Porsche factory team's entries from Daytona to Sebring to Le Mans in 2019; however, the idea that for many new fans, his may be the machine that opens the door to learn more about that Brumos magic only goes to remind us why we celebrated such an enduring legacy this morning on the 59th running of the Daytona 24 Hours.

Info

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