

Record in Le Mans

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02/06/2016 In 2015, Neel Jani established a record for the 13.629-kilometre lap in France. At an average speed of 249.2 km/h, the works driver achieved a time of 3:16.887 minutes. Here is a personal retrospective by the Porsche driver.

"It was just after 10 pm on Wednesday, still not quite dark. As there was a threat of rain for the Thursday, I knew that I would probably have just this one chance for pole. With new tyres for the first time and little petrol onto an all-or-nothing lap, I was nervous, cautiously running in the tyres on the warm-up lap and bringing them up to temperature. When I was driving towards the start and finish, I saw it – an LMP2. I worked out that if I now held back a little and then gave it everything, I would be able to overtake it at the start of the Mulsanne straight without any time loss. So off I went.

First chicane, Dunlop and the left-hander. I had already made up six-tenths on my best training time. Then came Tertre Rouge, the right-hander before Hunaudières, and I realised that it wasn't going to work. The LMP2 was too far away. I would meet it in the first chicane and lose time. To prevent this, I

boosted more than is healthy, because you miss the electrical energy later on. I just managed to pass the LMP2 before I had to start saving petrol. That's when I also made a compromise. The timing wasn't ideal, and I had to brake into the chicane. The tail swung out to the left, but the corner curves round to the right and so it straightened me up again. Through the chicane and then I accelerated out of it.

In the second chicane, I had to slow down somewhat earlier in order to save the petrol that I had burnt up previously. As a result, I had less speed than normal, which makes it difficult to find the right braking point. Then comes Mulsanne. You jolt over the bumps in the road, and when you brake, the wheels tend to block. This time I hit the curve perfectly and also the kerb coming out of the bend, without going into the rev limiter. I had just shifted up early enough because I was much faster than usual. Then over the crest towards Indianapolis. Damn! A Corvette in front of me. Indianapolis is a fast right-left combination.

I thought that if I took the right-hander with a lot of speed, I would in fact come out too far on the left, but then I would simply stay on the left and push in on the inside next to the Corvette. I flashed my headlights to warn him and drove in uncompromisingly on the left onto the dirty track. I knew the Corvette had a camera pointing to the rear and would have an arrow showing from which side a car was attacking. So then I thought, if this was going to work at all, then it would be with a Corvette. In any case, they're all professionals on the track in Le Mans. I was able to press myself into the steeply banked curve. Done it! Now Arnage, an extremely slow right-hander. Just like Mulsanne, it has an uneven surface in the braking zone. This time it was spot on. I accelerated towards the Porsche curves. At this point, you can see a good ten seconds ahead. There was no longer a car! My time had come.

At the limit through the Porsche curves, steering into the right-hander, in sixth gear. The first left-hander, the second – I gave it full throttle the whole time, as I had planned for this lap. Nothing had better go wrong in the Porsche curves, otherwise there'd be a dreadful crash. Yet in this qualifier, I risked a bit more for a few tenths of a second. So first the second left-hander, then the long right-hander. Don't slide out too far when changing direction because there's only grip on the inside. And it actually worked as well. Then comes Karting, a left-hander that slopes to the outside. The car always understeers there, you really have to make sure that you stay inside the white line.

I was now four seconds faster than the reference. Two more chicanes. Just don't make any mistakes. Lots of people drive straight on there because they have problems adjusting after the ultra fast Porsche curves. At the Ford chicane, the entrance isn't visible but I had noted the braking point. Avoid the artificial grass at the exit to the last chicane, otherwise you have no traction to accelerate. Full throttle. Finishing line. I was thinking about the LMP2, about boosting too early and the Corvette. Then I saw the 3:16.8 and thought to myself: I hope it's enough for Romain, Marc and me. After all, I don't want to have to risk this much on every lap."

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart