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3:19.08 min.

Never in the storied history of Le Mans had someone driven a lap as fast as Kurt Ahrens did in the 917 Langheck. The top qualifying time that enabled the first overall victory for Porsche at Le Mans.



Le Mans, France. June 11, 1970. Training: The day is hot and humid, as was the day before. But now cooler air from the Atlantic is streaming in – a boon to the air-cooled, 4.9-liter engine in Kurt Ahrens's Porsche 917. The thirty-year-old German race-car driver shares this long-tail car with Englishman Vic Elford. But for now the Braunschweig native is making his preparations in the cockpit. His goal is to take the pole position.

The heart of the renowned Circuit de la Sarthe – then 13.469 kilometers long – is the legendary Mulsanne straight, which at the time was untroubled by even the slightest chicane. It was a 6-kilometer slash through the landscape – a straightaway made for the 400 km/h barrier, says Ahrens. He feels no fear. Ahrens never feels nervous in the 917, as long as the tires last north of 350 km/h. Tires have been known to part ways with their treads at such speeds. Ahrens goes for it anyway. The clock stops at 3:19.08. Three seconds faster than the pole sitter the year before. Ahrens and Elford are at the front of the pack.

Le Mans 1970, the race

Eight Porsche 917s head into the fray against eleven Ferrari 512s. Porsche wants its first overall victory at Le Mans. Badly. And the car driven by Elford/Ahrens with starting number 25 is the lure, the pacesetter that runs off the front and wears down the red racers from Maranello. From the start, they push it to the limit. "We knew from the get-go that we wouldn't be able to finish the race at that pace," says Ahrens. For a long time, his 917 holds the lead. The expected breakdown comes unexpectedly late: "On Sunday morning at 8:35, after 226 laps, an intake valve came off. Just as I had shifted from second into third before the pits." Race over, mission accomplished. In the end, their teammates Hans Herrmann and Richard Attwood bolt out of the blue from the middle of the pack to secure the first Le Mans victory for Porsche.

Info

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