



# Ultimate endurance

The 24 hours of Le Mans 89th edition looks set to go ahead with fans in August, after the race behind closed doors in 2020 and postponement from June this year. Here's a wrap on its illustrious history – and what to look out for in 2021

It was announced in early March that for a second successive year, 24 heures du Mans would be postponed from its usual June slot to the northern hemisphere Autumn. But unlike 2020, which was raced behind closed doors, there is a chance of spectators attending the race this August, in strict compliance with health and safety measures of course.

This year's race will see new Hypercars make their on-track debut and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO) is pushing hard for fans to witness such a milestone moment. The new Le Mans Hypercar class, with regulations created jointly by the ACO and

the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) replaces the Le Mans Prototype LMP1 class.

"Although it was a tough decision to make, it is the right one," said Pierre Fillon, President of the ACO.

"Holding the 24 Hours of Le Mans behind closed doors for the second year running would be unthinkable. We are therefore doing all we can to avoid that happening and to give competitors

**Above: Peugeot and Jaguar on the starting grid during Le Mans Classic 2018. No other event in the world assembles so many old racing cars**

a clear view of the whole season. We are working very hard to put on a safe event, with all the necessary health precautions in place. This year's race promises to be another thriller as the new Hypercar class makes its debut."

The 24 Heures du Mans is the world's oldest active sports car race in endurance racing, held annually since 1923 near the town of Le Mans in northwestern France. It is considered one of the most prestigious automobile races in the world and is often called the 'Grand Prix of Endurance and Efficiency'. The event represents one leg of the Triple Crown of Motorsport, with the other events

being the Indianapolis 500 and the Monaco Grand Prix.

Unlike fixed-distance races whose winner is determined by minimum time, the 24 Hours of Le Mans is won by the car that covers the greatest distance in 24 hours. Racing teams must balance the demands of speed with the cars' ability to run for 24 hours without mechanical failure.

Academy Award-winners Matt Damon and Christian Bale put Le Mans back on the Hollywood stage with *FORD v FERRARI*, after Steve McQueen and Paul Newman were among the luminaries to have done so in the past. Based on the remarkable true story of ▶



the visionary American car designer Carroll Shelby (Damon) and the fearless British-born driver Ken Miles (Bale), Ford built the revolutionary GT40 to challenge Enzo Ferrari's domination prior to 1966. The team was successful and went on to win for four successive years before the end of the 60s when cars and the race changed substantially.

However, it wasn't Ken Miles that won that year. Originally, the car that covered the greatest distance from its starting position was the winner. With a dominant 1-2 lead, the two Ford cars slowed to allow for a photo opportunity at the finish line, with Miles slightly ahead of Bruce McLaren. However, since McLaren's car had actually started much farther back on the grid than Miles's, McLaren's car had actually covered the greatest

distance over the 24 hours. With the margin of victory determined to be eight metres, McLaren and his co-driver, Chris Amon, were declared the winners. The decision cost Miles and his co-driver Denny

Hulme a victory. Miles had already won the other two endurance races at Sebring and Daytona. With a win at Le Mans, he would have become not only the first man to win all three, but the first

to win them all in the same year. Denmark's Tom Kristensen has the most wins overall, with nine victories between 1997 and 2013, including the first six titles of the new Millennium. And while a record 32 different British drivers have won the prestigious crown, it is the French teams that narrowly lead the number of wins with 44 to Britain's 42. Germany rules the manufacturers' record tables with Porsche winning 19 times and Audi 13 times, to Ferrari's nine victories ahead of the UK's Jaguar and Bentley. Japan and Toyota have dominated recent years, with ex-Formula 1 driver Sébastien Buemi (Switzerland) and Kazuki Nakajima winning with F1 great Fernando Alonso in 2018 and 2019, and then with New Zealand's Brendon Hartley in 2020. The trio of Buemi, Nakajima and Hartley are set to return to the start line again in 2021.

Information on tickets and VIP packages, and full details on the race format will be released at the end of April.

[24h-lemans.com](http://24h-lemans.com) ■

**Above: Christian Bale in the Ford and Matt Damon the brains behind it in *Ford v Ferrari***  
**Right: The opening of the 24 hours of Le Mans in 2019**

