

Race Report – 24 hour ‘Oxigen’ Digital Le-Mans Event 2015

For the very first time MDMC were represented at this year’s fourth running of the ‘Slot-it’ sponsored, digital 24 hour Le-Mans ‘oXigen event, held at Warwickshire College at Henley in Arden over the weekend of 23rd to 25th of March.

Entry to this prestigious international event is notoriously difficult, so this year MDMC were particularly proud to be accepted to compete ahead of some of the top UK teams. For 2015 sixteen teams were invited, with representatives from Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands with MDMC being represented by team captain James Savidge together Chris Savidge, Nick Wade, Tom Williams and Allan Hopcroft.



The event is planned as a recreation of Le Mans but on 1/32 scale, excepting of course the most important thing of all, the time. For the 2015 event the era chosen was 2002-2005 and each competitor’s car had to be a faithful representation of an actual car, including livery that competed in the race during the stated era.



Run in a digital format, this means that all Teams run simultaneously on a four lane ‘Ninco’ plexi-track, specially constructed for the event from 776 pieces, including a 90ft long replica of the famous Mulsanne straight.

As in the real event, cars were split into classes, P1 (LMP1), P2 (LMP2) and GT with each team choosing their own chassis, running gear and gear ratios but choice of motor limited to Slot It Flat 6, or V12/3, a fixed issue of tyres and of course the ‘Oxigen’ digital chip set.

As this was to be our first experience of digital racing our team, for simplicity, opted for modifying a pair of Ninco BMW V12 LMP’s (some of you may recall using these at flyers slot car nights in the past)



Whilst modifying the cars had not been as easy as expected, mainly due to installing the requisite running night running LED’s, our intrepid racers went into the weekend with great anticipation, not really knowing how competitive the models would fair against such a strong field.



Friday pre-qualifying then was the first opportunity to try the car in anger and it soon became obvious of how strong the competition was, our model soon being identified as lacking in top speed. Working with our available gear ratios it was soon discovered that in order to be competitive top end speed along the Mulsanne was essential. After a few tests the team opted for an 11/24 ratio, almost the longest available to us and essential to prevent us being mugged on the long straight. The down side of this of course was slower acceleration, compromising performance through the twisty sections, especially without the extra torque of the Flat 6 motor that we had discounted.....

Once the gear ratios were sorted then it was down to each team member to acclimatise to the feel of the car and the intricacies of digital racing however we were still some way ahead of our Quorn rivals, 'Hopeful six', who had yet to complete the building of their car.

Saturday morning commenced with practice 2 to enable us to get in some well needed experience prior to scrutinising and then the all-important 1 hour qualifying sessions that would determine grid position for the rolling start. As we really expected, qualifying was not going to be our strong point, with our gallant MDMC team entry occupying the last available grid slot. We were however still determined to give a good showing in the race.



3:00pm on the Saturday afternoon then we were away with Nick Wade taking the first drivers slot having been the fastest MDMC qualifier. The race quickly developed with the German 'No Limits' team setting the pace from last year's winners 'Dutch Touch' racing.

Early on however we soon started to discover that perhaps this digital format is no Gentleman's sport, with the tactics of the faster players seeming to either come up behind and effectively 'woodpecker' you up the rear end until you come off or apply a similar deft touch at the corner apex, sending you spinning off into the scenery. Despite this and one hour in we had clawed our way up to twelfth place

Whilst learning to cope with these tactics the team settled into an early rhythm, each driver taking a one hour driving slot, one manning an obligatory marshalling post, two in the pits and one resting.



As the early evening wore on and with 4 hours in, with car reliability being good, despite frequently ending in the scenery, we began to make a bit of progress and with others suffering mechanical issue we were managing to cling on 12th position, just 7 laps ahead of our Quorn rivals.

At 7:00pm however dusk was falling and soon we were into a long stint of night time driving. Whilst our lights were OK we again soon discovered what lengths some teams had gone to identify their car with an array of coloured LED's, some of which flashed when the car was off track or not under power. We had equipped our car with one single ident light, an ultra-bright red LED mounted in the cockpit. Unfortunately this did not last too long and probably due to various impacts this failed fairly early in the evening. Fortunately though one feature we employed was working brake lights, something other teams didn't. This proved a great tool for identifying your own car 60ft away in that dark! OK, or so we thought, until these also failed around midnight! Main front and rear lights were still however functioning perfectly. With other teams suffering problems, notably 'Sporting Carazing' we had worked our way up to 11th position.

Reliability was still good with just an odd braid change however that was all to change in the early hours. With two of the team resting Chris was making reasonable progress taking a 1½ hr. stint, or so he thought. When team captain James returned it was sadly discovered that our lap counting was not functioning correctly, us having slipped behind a couple of teams. A forced pit stop identified the problem, a loose or badly fitting hall-effect sensor. A few test laps seemed to confirm the problem was fixed but by our estimate the issue had cost us over a hundred laps seeing us fall back into 13th position 167 laps behind SP Carazing!

We were still faring better than 'Hopeful Six' who, due to car issues, had now slipped back into last place. With James back at the wheel we then set about looking to consolidate our position. A stripped rear crown wheel cost us a few more laps together with the obligatory braid and tyre changes however the car was still performing well.

Dawn rose and we were still going strong. Up at the front however things were getting close as 'Dutch Touch' racing were now closing on the 'No limits' German team. By Midday the gap was down to 9 laps and the next hour saw this slowly, but efficiently eroded and by 1:00pm the Dutch team eased the lead.

MDMC were now working hard to consolidate our class position with team members putting in good steady performances in order to maintain the differential to our nearest rivals 'Vienna Slot Devils'

With the race drawing to a close the teams formed up into the traditional victory parade with last year's winners 'Dutch Touch' easing out their lead for a commanding victory.



So where did our intrepid racers finish? For a first attempt the team as expected finished down the field but managing to retain our 13th place. There was a big but however. Our efforts had managed to secure an all-important and creditable, 3rd place in P2 class, meeting our target and more importantly ensuring qualification for the 2016 event. Hoorah a result with the final icing on the cake to be ahead of our Quorn club rivals who ended up propping up the table

So what did we learn for next year's event? Well firstly our decision to opt for simplicity in using a box standard shell had been a sound one. Whilst we were totally outclassed on speed, mechanically the car was sound, in fact the only physical damage being a couple of missing lens covers and a couple of scratches. This enabled us to gain valuable experience in driving the digital format.

Next year however our goal will be to build a more competitive car and plans are already being drawn up to construct our own racing chassis which will be able to house the more powerful 'Flat 6' motor.

Finally we must express our thanks to event organisers Gary Shout and Alec Jones for arranging such a fantastically well organised event, with great facilities and some really nice touches making it the premier slot car occasion of the year.

Roll on 2016!