

# LAP #10, RACE AT LeMONS

Everyone is familiar with the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the famous endurance races that occurred in the 60's where the Ford's GT-40 beat the Ferraris in the 1960's. To racing fans, Le Mans represents cars flying down the 3.5 Mile long Mulsanne straight, day and night, at over 200mph. It is a special place where dreams are realized and memories made. The good news is you too can drive a Mustang in a race with a similar name, the "24 hours of LeMons." That is provided you can purchase and build a safe, dependable car for under \$500. Last month I did just that and had an unbelievable amount of fun in the process, so much I'd like to share it with you in hopes of stimulating your interest in getting a Mustang on the track in a competitive environment.

The "The 24 Hours of LeMons" is a race series conceived in 2006 by Jay Lamm as a parody of the "24 Hours of Le Mans" race held each year in France. The LeMons race is a 24-hour endurance event like the prestigious Le Mans event except it better resembles a street fight where entrants can spend no more than \$500 on their vehicles before adding safety gear. A *New York Times* article recently described the event as "Part Halloween, part Indy 500 and part open-heart surgery performed with a plastic picnic knife." After all, the winner takes home \$1,500—paid in nickels! Sounds like real fun!

It all began with an email challenge I sent to some Mustang racing buddies that read, "Guys, we have a new race to enter, certainly with a collective effort we can beat these guys. The 24 Hours of LeMons is coming to Texas!" We agreed and began the quest to locate a suitable car which was soon accomplished when we found in a 1985 Mustang fastback with V8 engine and manual transmission. The car had been heavily damaged by a fire in the engine compartment. We bought the car unseen for only \$200. The first reports from a team member upon actually seeing the car described it this way, "I went to look at our rabid new steed. It is very sad, with dark grey paint, peeling clear coat and the engine compartment down to bare metal with rust everywhere because the paint was burnt off in the fire. The interior dash and instrument cluster are detached, hanging over the steering wheel. Most interior panels are missing or laying on the back seat." And so, a love affair began.

We had one goal—finish. After all, with the V8 engine and manual transmission we figured to be competitive so we focused on reliability and pulled the motor and transmission for "inspection." The fuel injection system was tossed and replaced with a used intake and trusty 4-barrel carburetor. After welding in the cage, installing restraints and a fire system we were ready to go racing. But one thing was missing, an appropriate name. We dubbed the car "La Cucaracha" or "The Cockroach" because with all the burned paint that's exactly what it looked like.

Working on "The Roach" wasn't easy. Just imagine trying to improve something without adding any cost. The LeMons technical inspectors and judges are very thor-

ough and knowledgeable. They know all the tricks and can easily discover if you've been naughty in car preparation. Don't go throwing on a new distributor cap, rotor, coil, and wires on the car without accounting for the cost. The same goes for shocks, belts, hoses, clamps, and batteries. Everything has a cost and your goal is to build a car that will finish and be competitive for under \$500. If you go over, the penalties can be quite severe. It's really quite a challenge.

Our strategy was to field six drivers spending maximum time on the track piling up laps and running our trusty Mustang. Driver changes were not scheduled, you just drove until needing fuel or the call of nature. It worked perfectly, the Mustang ran flawlessly and we placed 6th out of 78 cars. We were the first Ford and first Mustang to finish. The racing was excellent as this is not a destruction derby. Just like in a race, you can be black flagged for doing bad things and there are plenty of yellows (mostly due to breakdowns) that give you a chance to read flags and learn when the race is on. Driver skill levels varied from beginner to semi-pro giving everyone someone to race no matter the experience level. Imagine a road course with nearby 80 cars to pass! One of the craziest things was seeing a dozen transporters, many costing more than \$250,000 and normally employed with serious racing efforts being used to support a race car worth less than \$500. The racing is just so good many racers can't pass up building a LeMons car for fun and less cost than a new set of race tires!

So if you want to race a Mustang on the cheap and have a great time doing it, check out the 24 Hours of LeMons. Jay Lamm and his team are holding events all over the country and next year there may be a race near you. As for team, "Los Cucarachas" will be back at the Texas race next year in the Mustang.

Hopefully we'll see you there, after all, we already have a car!

Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

Roadracer

