

Introduction: Motorsport in France

France holds a founding place in the history of world motorsport. From the very first motorised competitions of the late 19th century - notably the Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race of 1895 - it established itself as the cradle of the discipline. The country gave birth to legendary manufacturers (Peugeot, Renault, Bugatti, Alpine) and forged exceptional drivers like Alain Prost, four-time F1 World Champion, and Sebastien Loeb, Rally record-holder with nine titles. But it is on the roads of the Sarthe that the heart of French automotive culture has always beaten.

The 24 Hours of Le Mans: the greatest race in the world

13.626 km	1923	+250,000	60+
Circuit length	Year of creation	Spectators per year	Countries represented



The Le Mans start - The pit straight in full fever with the chequered flag imminent

1. A century of history (1923 - today)

The 24 Hours of Le Mans was born in 1923 on the initiative of the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO). The first edition, won by Lagache and Leonard in a Chenard & Walcker, laid the foundations of a race that became an open-air technological laboratory. Over the decades it became the theatre of epic industrial rivalries: Jaguar versus Ferrari in the 1950s, Ford versus Ferrari in the 1960s - culminating in Ford's historic four-car sweep in 1966 - then Audi's domination throughout the 2000s. Since 2023, Ferrari, Porsche, Cadillac and Toyota in the Hypercar class have reignited the rivalry with unprecedented intensity.

2. Anatomy of a unique circuit

The Circuit de la Sarthe is partly composed of departmental roads closed for the race. At 13.626 km per lap, it is one of the longest circuits in the world. A leading car covers nearly 5,500 km in 24 hours at an average over 230 km/h. The Hunaudieres straight, where cars reached 405 km/h before chicanes were added in 1990, the Porsche Curves, and the Dunlop Bridge are among the most mythical sections in world motorsport. The circuit holds FIA Grade 1 homologation across its entire layout.

Le Mans is the only race where you can be leading on Saturday evening and no longer be so on Sunday morning.



The pit lane at dusk - One of the most striking spectacles in motorsport

3. Classes in competition

Category	Description	Examples
Hypercar	Max 500 hp, mandatory hybrid, speed electronically limited to 340 km/h. The premier WEC class	Ferrari 499P, Toyota GR010, Porsche 963, Cadillac V-Series.R
LMP2	Single-manufacturer Oreca prototypes, accessible to both amateur and professional crews	Oreca 07 - sole ACO-homologated chassis for all entrants
LMGT3	Evolved production GTs based on GT3 spec, popular pro-am class among premium manufacturers	Ferrari 296 GT3, Porsche 992 GT3, BMW M4 GT3, Corvette Z06 GT3

4. Records and legends

The distance record is held by the Audi R18 e-tron quattro (2010): 5,410.713 km at an average 225.447 km/h. The lap record belongs to Ferrari 499P with 3'22"982 set in 2023. Jacky Ickx holds the most victories with 6 wins. Among French drivers, Henri Pescarolo triumphed four times (1972-74, 1984).

Wins by manufacturer (Top 5)

Porsche	19 wins	1970-2023
Audi	13 wins	2000-2014
Ferrari	9 wins	1949-2023
Jaguar	7 wins	1951-1990
Ford	4 wins	1966-1969

5. A laboratory of innovation

More than a race, the 24 Hours has always been a catalyst for innovations that later migrate to production cars: disc brakes perfected by Jaguar in the 1950s, hybrid technology pioneered by Audi in 2012, and today the 100% sustainable synthetic fuels ACO intends to mandate by 2030. The 2023 Hypercar regulations anticipate tomorrow's powertrains, positioning Le Mans as the vanguard of a more responsible sporting mobility.



The Dunlop Bridge at night - Iconic symbol of the Circuit de la Sarthe

6. A global event

Every June, more than 250,000 spectators descend on the circuit - making it the third-largest multi-day sporting gathering in the world. TV coverage reaches 190 countries. Since 2012, the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) structures the calendar, with Le Mans as its undisputed crown jewel and highlight of the season.

The ACO has modernised the event while preserving its unique DNA: popular family atmosphere, campsites surrounding the circuit, the historic Le Mans Village and an unrivalled ambiance. The nights at Le Mans - illuminated pit stops and headlights cutting through the darkness - represent the most mesmerising sporting experience in the world.

Timeline: six great Le Mans eras

1923-1939	1950-1969	1970-1989	1990-2009	2010-2022	2023+
Birth of the race	The golden age	Porsche era	Tech revolution	Audi/Toyota era	Hypercar era

A hundred years after its creation, the 24 Hours of Le Mans remains irreducible. Part race, part human saga, it embodies what is noblest in motorsport: patience, technical mastery, courage and vision. A century of victories, tragedies and human achievement that continues to write, corner by corner, one of the greatest stories in world sport.