

MOTORING



HAT-TRICK

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LE MANS || The legend of Ferrari is further cemented by a third win at Le Mans in the last three years. And this time, it involved a beautiful redemption story.



I know this is a NEWSpaper and that something that happened last Sunday isn't exactly breaking news, but still ...

One year later, Antonio Fuoco, Miguel Molina and Nicklas Nielsen, in the #50, emulated their team-mates and took a second win for the 499P. 2023 had not been a one-hit wonder: Ferrari was back.

Ferrari have won the 24 Hours of Le Mans for the third year running. A small sentence to describe what is an enormous achievement. In fact, if there was a word bigger than 'enormous', I would use it. Gigantic, maybe?

As the 2025 season began and the 499P seemed more dominant than ever, winning the first three races of the World Endurance Championship season, a third win at Le Mans seemed difficult - Porsche, BMW, Cadillac, Alpine and Toyota were all very, very close - but not impossible.

Some context, then: new rules came into effect for the World Endurance Championship in 2022, establishing a new top-tier category called Hypercar. Toyota were first to the party and won that year without any real competition. It was their fifth straight win.

On the weeks prior to the race, the talk on the WEC paddock was that Ferrari had something extra in hand - and so it was. The 499P didn't qualify well - the #50 was the best Ferrari at only seventh on the grid - but as soon as the flag came down, it became clear the race pace of the 499P was the best of all Hypercars.

Ferrari, on the other hand, had not battled for overall victory at the great race for 50 years, and had not won for 58 years, when they showed up at Le Mans in 2023 with the all-new 499P. But something magical happened and the #51 of Alessandro Pier Guidi, James Calado and Antonio Giovinazzi made history on that June day, on what was the Centenary Edition of the 24 Hours.

The three entries from Maranello spent many hours running 1-2-3 and, at one point, it seemed a lock-out podium was a possibility.

However, as the race developed, it became clear the #6 Porsche was a real threat and not even the win was certain, let alone a Ferrari clean sweep.

If victory was going to go Ferrari's way, it would be with the #83 of Robert Kubica, Yifei Ye and Phil Hanson, a curious turn of events for the 'private' Ferrari. A little explanation is in order here, I think.

The works team is comprised of #50 and #51, with the whole operation run by AF Corse, the racing arm of the Scuderia in endurance racing for decades in the GT category and at the Hypercar level since its inception. AF Corse themselves then have a 'private' entry in the #83. What's the real difference between the two official cars and the AF Corse car? Hum ... none really. Well, the #83 is painted yellow and the other two are red, but that's about it.

Victory for the #83 car brought many firsts with it. It was the first time a car that started 13th on the grid won the race; it was the highest number car to ever win and not a Poland national, nor a China one had ever won before.

A special mention must go to Robert Kubica. The Polish drove 166/387 laps of the race (that's 43% of the total) and did an amazing final stint to see the chequered flag and enjoy the highest point of a career that could and should have been even more glorious.

Kubica was tipped as a future F1 world-champion and had an agreement to partner Fernando Alonso at Ferrari in 2012 when he had a big accident in the Ronde il Andora Rally 2011. He suffered 42 fractures, lost three-quarters of his blood and parts of his right arm and hand. The first surgery he underwent lasted for 12 hours. There were 16 more.

At the time, a return to racing seemed all but impossible and Kubica himself says he does not remember how he used to drive prior to his crash. But, somehow, he learned how to drive a car 70% left-handed and, in

2019, triumphally rejoined Williams F1, finally leaving the sport for good in 2021.

To win at Le Mans with Ferrari 14 years after that fateful day is one of the most beautiful stories in the history of motorsport. Kubica has now also become a main character in the show that is the greatest race in the world and, maybe most of all, as a Ferrari winner, joins a list of names that tell the tale of the greatest outfit in motor racing: Ascari, Fangio, Taruffi, Villeneuve, Lauda and Schumacher now sit together with the Polish at the pantheon of the Prancing Horse.

They say nobody chooses to win Le Mans. It's Le Mans who chooses its winners. Well, Le Mans chose well in 2025. Kudos for Kubica, Ye and Hanson. And thank you to AF Corse for helping to keep the legend alive as it has ever been. Wherever he is, Mr. Ferrari must be smiling.

"Three consecutive wins mean getting to keep the trophy forever. The museum at Maranello needs yet more cabinet space"



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