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SRT Motorsports - 24 Hours of Le Mans - Tommy Kendall Diary - Entry 4

June 22, 2013, LE MANS, France -

Tommy Kendall piloted the No. 93 SRT Viper GTS-R this weekend in the 24 Hour of Le Mans. He teamed with Kuno Wittmer and Jonathan Bomarito to finish ninth in LM GTE Pro Class at the 81st running of the event.

This is the last of a four-part series as Kendall gives a behind-the-scenes look at Le Mans through the driver's eyes.

We had a lot to learn this year coming to Le Mans with a new car, new team and all that. And I think a lot of us were hoping we would shock 'em and have a trouble-free run to the podium with both cars (laughs). I guess that's the eternal optimist in me. It didn't quite work out like that but we're going back with an infinite amount of information much more than we arrived with. Every single person in every single role has learned a lot and knows how to do it better next year.

The race itself, there was no major-major problems but lots of little ones. While I was in the car, we had the one issue with the wets (tires) where we didn't have intermediates so we had to run in the wets or slicks which were treacherous. Then at the end of my stint, we had a tire fail at the end of the backstraight, a puncture I'm assuming, right when I went to the brakes at 170-something miles per hour. The car did a huge tank slapper. My eyes must have been as big as saucers. I got it slowed most of the way down but couldn't quite make the corner and ended up in the gravel trap. They got me out in a hurry. Almost as scary was limping the car, with a flat tire, along that straight to Indianapolis and through the Porsche curves at 10 miles an hour. It tore up the car a little bit but we were able to (make repairs) and go.

When Kuno (Wittmer) was in the car, some hood latches failed and they had to make a stop because the headlights weren't connected right. My first two stints were rife with issues and didn't leave a satisfying taste in my mouth in terms of stringing some laps together. But the last stint was different. You're on the right tires at the right temps. There was a little bit of rain but mostly dry conditions. I was able to string some laps together that I felt good about so that's a nice taste to leave with.

Then right at the very end of my stint the electric shifter malfunctioned. So Kuno drove it in override mode, which means you have to lift when you shift and you've got to use the clutch on the downshifts.

I've got to give Kuno and Jonathan (Bomarito) shouts out. Kuno has been an Iron Man. He's done triple (shifts) after triple and Jonathan has been running great laps as well. I'm proud to be part of the 93 team and proud to be part of the overall SRT Motorsports team and represent Viper.

There's a lot of wouldas and couldas but we'll go back, regroup and set our sights forward 364 days.

What is already one of the most difficult races in the world became impossibly more so when Allan Simonsen was killed in an accident on lap 4. Needless to say, it cast a pall over the entire race and added a layer of intensity to what would turn out to be some of the most challenging conditions some had ever seen. I did not know Allen, but racing is a close knit community in spite of the competitive environment, and this hit everyone very close to home. To be able to focus on the job at hand, required compartmentalizing it until after the race, but when the race ended, I was overcome with sadness thinking about him, his girlfriend and infant child he left behind.

It's was a tremendous experience to be a part of Viper's return to Le Mans. Thanks for joining me on this incredible ride.

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