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SRT Motorsports - 24 Hours of Le Mans - Tommy Kendall Diary - Entry 3

June 21, 2013, LE MANS, France - Tommy Kendall will pilot the No. 93 SRT Viper GTS-R this weekend in the 24 Hour of Le Mans. He is teamed with Kuno Wittmer and Jonathan Bomarito and will be making his second start in the event.

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

After two days of practice and qualifying Wednesday and Thursday, there was no on-track activity Friday but the day featured an event that's become a special part of race week – the driver's parade in downtown Le Mans. I did it once in 2000 but Ryan Dalziel (a teammate on the No. 53 SRT Viper GTS-R) reminded me that even if you've done it, you forget how insane it is. Estimates were that well over a hundred thousand fans lined the route for the parade which took probably two hours. We (Jonathan Bomarito, Kuno Wittmer and Kendall) were in a 1927 Renault convertible that had been in the same family for 84 years – the original-owner family.

There's nothing that prepares you for the parade, nothing. It's electric. The parade route is lined with barriers. It's just a cacophony of yelling, screaming and cheering. Fans have hero cards they want signed. They want goodies. We probably gave out two or three thousand SRT lanyards. We were popular! At one point, the guys from the Saudi Arabian Ferrari team were out of goodies and ask, 'Do you have anything we can use?' So the Ferrari guys were handing out SRT lanyards. People were hanging from light posts and balconies; it's really hard to process. It rained on us a little but we didn't mind. Neither did the fans.

After the parade, we met up with some of the SRT folks and the guests we have here at a restaurant on the route. We had a nice dinner and then worked our way back to the circuit. It was nice to get to bed reasonably early, get a good night's sleep in and then up early, earlier than we have been.

We went over many things in our pre-race briefing – eventualities and the rules. For example, if the car breaks down on the course, you can't go more than 10 meters from the car or the car is disqualified. If a marshal pushes your car, even if they're trying to help, you're disqualified.

We also went over changes on what they call logic – where you can basically program what the switches do. An example is our hot start. When the pit lane speed limit is activated, our flasher button becomes our starter button but it's not hot if there's pressure in the air jacks. You're not allowed to crank the car on the air jacks, per the rules. So, the starter is disabled until it senses the pressure going out of the air jacks. At that point, the button becomes active and can start the car. You're just trying to shave seconds during a pit stop.

There's a little tool kit in the car with a disposable cell phone. If the in-car radio is not working, we can use the phone to call back to the pits. The reality is it's unlike Daytona or Sebring where they can ferry parts to you or they can ferry gas to you and you could put it in. There's basically a circle drawn around the car and if you leave the circle or someone enters the circle, the car is DQ'd. You've got to figure out a way to get the car started yourself.

My good friend, the late Jeff Krosnoff, was the overall leader here late in a race several years ago but had a transmission issue. He got out of the car and was able to manually knock the car into gear. He got back to the pits and they finished on the podium.

I can't speak for all the drivers but anyone who's worked with me knows I'm not exactly a whiz on the wrench. I rely heavily on customer service, if you will, on the phone to walk through anything. But fingers crossed we won't need that.

There's lots of nervous energy – everyone's excited, everyone wants to do well. After Kuno and I warmed up the

cars Saturday morning, I made a quick visit to the physios (Luc and Jos) before going trackside and taking in all the pageantry.

We don't have the outright speed that we wanted but it's a 24-hour endurance race. The car is very comfortable and drivable in all conditions. We're focused on running our race. We'll try to stay out of the pit box – our first, second and third priority.

The preparation is complete. Now comes the test – a 24-hour test of endurance.

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