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Through The Esses - James Weaver Retires From A Racing Life - Part 1: Andy Wallace

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At the season ending Laguna Seca round of the 2006 American Le Mans Series last weekend, veteran sportscar racing standout James Weaver announced he was retiring as a driver. The sport will surely skip a beat now, for Weaver was very much a vital valve in the heart of the series, having campaigned in sportscar racing as a member of the Dyson Racing organization for 20 years.

The following paragraph was taken from the official team release.

He has 100 career victories - achieving that milestone at Mosport in 2005. He is one of the world's finest sports car racers: he has claimed sixty seven poles, seventy fastest laps, thirty six lap records, and over 200 podium finishes. "James is phenomenal," said team owner Rob Dyson. "He has been one of the primary factors in our success these past twenty years. James was always willing to put in more hours than any other driver to get the car right and that is what separated him from everyone else." James won thirty-three races and three championships for Dyson Racing.

There are precious few who could successfully argue against the fact that Weaver is among the top drivers ever to wring every last reluctant drop of speed out of a race car. And when he wasn't driving the car, he was driven to improve his performance the next time out. We are especially proud to say we had the opportunity to interview James a few times along the way and he never disappointed us, not once. Always ready to 'flip a quip' and give us that naughty boy look, he was always engaging, friendly and professional. And he never made you feel unimportant. There were no pretensions.



Andy Wallace, himself an incredibly talented and genuinely friendly Englishman, has been a racing partner of Weavers for the last 11 years, racing in tandem for Rob Dyson, and alongside Chris Dyson in Riley and Scott MKIIIs and two different chassis from Lola. Who would know better the real James Weaver than his long time teammate and close friend?

We talked with Andy recently and he had nothing but praise and admiration for his good friend.

“James is a fairly special guy. He is the last of a dying breed. We were together 11 years with Rob Dyson, which is really so unusual. And James is a really good friend of mine. You couldn’t ask for a better one. He has been very helpful to me, career wise. But more than just that – you know, everyone says that sportscar racing is a team effort but to actually find a teammate who is as unselfish as James is very unusual. He is always looking out for his teammates. “

At Dyson, those teammates have included John Paul Jr., Elliott Forbes-Robinson, Dorsey Schroeder, Guy Smith, and of course, Butch Leitzinger. Wallace feels that when a young Butch Leitzinger joined the Dyson squad, James was always there to lend a hand and provide some guidance.

“James and I often joke that if it wasn’t for James and I, Butch would have gone a lot further in his career. The reason we say that is because more than anything we have taught Butch all of the bad habits. He has probably learned more of the bad habits than he has the good ones!

“I think Butch is like James in that he is the kind of person who can jump in a new car and without doing too many laps can get the best out of that car. Whatever the lap time that needs to get done, Butch can do it in only a few laps.”

Outside of his success on the track during a race, Weaver is noted for having an incredible talent for setting up a car. Wallace explains.

“I have to say he is probably one of the best set-up enabled drivers in the world. I don’t know anybody who is as good with a car as he is. From the seat of the pants he can get the very best out of a car. He can feel things that other people can’t. With the amount of time I have driven with him I have done my best to learn from him. He has got a way with cars from the old school where they didn’t have any data and you learned and made changes from the seat of your pants. And he wasn’t somebody who, when the data came along would say ‘shove that’, no he was very much into the data. And he was one of those people who would leave the track last because he was poring through it all. He also works very well with Peter Weston (Dyson Racing engineer) who is an incredibly good engineer.”

Outside the car, James is one of the greatest assets any sport can have, a personable, intelligent, likeable spokesperson who is a serious competitor with a knack for making everyone around him laugh and feel at ease. And even someone who had never seen James could easily pick him out in a crowd. Just look for the man with the pink socks.

“With all the great things you can say about James, what a great driver he is, how good he is at set up and what a great teammate he is, at the end of the day he is an extremely good friend and always good for a laugh – from his pink socks upwards!

“James is always wearing those pink socks, and he says he can’t understand why they were on such a good discount in the store. But we all know why the hell they are on discount. Who would want to wear pink socks?”

Wallace feels he has learned much from the master, and he remains amazed at how much talent and commitment Weaver has invested into going faster.

“You can get worn out just watching James drive. Case in point, at Sears Point (Infineon Raceway) last year, when I was in the #20 car and he was in the #16, I followed him around for about an hour. Then he went in front and I followed him around, both of us doing double stints. And it was so interesting to watch how he gets the best out of the car. He is quite a physical driver. He was almost like a rally driver. As he would approach a left hand corner, and just before he got there, he would turn right and then he would turn left. But that is not the sort of thing you could do with an LMP1 car you would think. But he was always very thoughtful with the car and he was a late braker.

“When he was following me for an hour, he would comment on how smooth I was. When I’m driving I don’t feel very smooth, I feel like I’m doing what he was doing. But he said ‘No, no. When I follow you, you are extremely smooth.’

“We both like to drive a car set up exactly the same way. Butch does too. So despite having a different driving style, we do like the car set up the same.”

Going forward, Wallace and Leitzinger will have to rely on each other for finding the best set up. Wallace, like the rest of us, will truly miss his partner in speed.

“James is one of the very best people you could drive with. Not only is he excellent with setting up the car but he is also very fast. He just set fastest lap again at Road Atlanta a few weeks ago. He always gives his all. It’s always a hundred percent. He will never give you less. And that is what he has done for Rob Dyson over the years.

“Really and truly he is a great friend and someone who would do anything to help me out. There simply aren’t too many people like that. Unfortunately, there are people out there always trying to stab you in the back. James is a very honest person and I tell you, I am going to miss having him as a teammate.

“I’m really going to miss James. Part of me hopes that one day we could both be in the same car again. Who knows?”

Who knows indeed? Perhaps the vintage scene will soon have a new member. If so, we can say with a high degree of certainty that the team that has James Weaver on it is a team that can win.