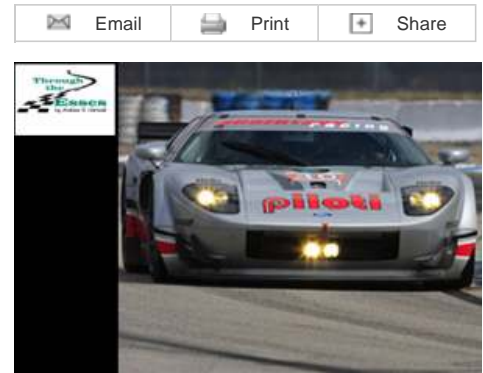


By: Andrew S. Hartwell

15 Apr 2010

It takes a significant level of commitment and desire, along with a hearty helping of optimism, to attempt to do battle as an independent team against the likes of factory efforts from Porsche, Ferrari, BMW, Chevrolet and Jaguar in the American Le Mans Series GT2 class. If you intend to enter the battleground, you best have some veteran warriors on your side.

In the case David and Andrea Robertson, who are alone in the fight campaigning a one-of-a-kind Kevin Doran-built Ford GT in the GT2 class, they recruited one of the best racing warriors in the business, David Murry.



David Murry, ready to do battle.

Murry has a lengthy 'war record' in sportscar racing, having taken wins in many different race cars and at many different race tracks. He runs the David Murry Track Days organization and has been teaching and coaching others on driving as an instructor for the Skip Barber Racing Schools, Porsche Sport Driving School, Road Atlanta Driving School and now "the" PCA pro-coach for over 25 years.

We talked with David about the apparent uphill battle the Robertson's face every time they enter an ALMS race field filled with factory or semi-factory teams. What we learned is that the David and Andrea Robertson didn't come to fight, they came to win.

"Dave and Andrea were driving in the Panoz GT series and they decided they wanted to go racing in the ALMS." Murry told us. "They asked Don Panoz what car to buy and he said the Panoz ALMS-ready race car. They bought that and Don also recommended they get Dick Barbour to help them with running the car. Dick called me right away to come to the team to coach Dave and Andrea."

The new trio ran the Panoz GT car at Sebring while they awaited the arrival of the ALMS car. For the 12 hours race, the plan was to have David and Andrea race with Arie Luyendyk Jr as their co-driver. Arie drove with them at Sebring but then became unavailable so Murry was asked to move from his role as coach to that of co-driver.

"I ran with them for the first time in the Panoz ALMS car at the Petit Le Mans but then they ordered the Ford GT from Kevin Doran to run in the 2009 season."

Given that the Panoz brand had a heritage in the ALMS, and that other marques such as BMW, Porsche and Ferrari probably meant a safer bet for a team just learning the ropes, we wondered why a small, independent team would want to try a car with no real experience or development behind it.

“At first I thought it would be easier for them as we would spend less time and money developing say, a Porsche or Ferrari and we would be there a lot quicker. But I knew we would never ever get to the front in one of those cars and they thought, ‘well, if we can’t get to the front with those other makes then lets go with a car that might be better and one we can make better’.”

And together the Robertsons and Murry have made the Ford GT a better car.

“Last year I had the pole at the Petit Le Mans. I can’t imagine we would have ever gotten the pole at Road Atlanta if we had gone with a Porsche or Ferrari. That never would have happened.”



David Murry and Andrea Robertson, one very fast lady driver.

The team continued to make gains with the Ford GT leading a good portion of a GT race in Japan.

Murry: “I led the Japan race during my entire stint. We were very competitive there. Coming into Sebring this year we found we qualified a second faster than we did a year before, but last year we started in fourth and ran in third right away. This year we ran three seconds off the pole setting time. That is a huge difference. The other cars had been able to do so much development over the winter and now we have to catch up.”

Murry feels he is with a team that not only accepts the challenge of battling at speed against the factory teams; they embrace it and look for all the positive rewards the experience provides. He is convinced that this team and this car will continue to improve as the season progresses.

“In the past there was only one or two factory teams, Murry said, “but now it is ultra competitive with the BMW, Porsche, Ferrari and Corvette factory teams in the GT class. And now the Jaguar is coming along as well.”

“What I think we need to think about is that those teams have probably found all the speed they can but, as the season progresses, we will be able to make significant amounts of improvement. Generally the factories pick up a huge gain over the winter that they carry into Le Mans. They will have some development continue during the year but not to the extent it did over the winter.



David Robertson in the Ford G.T.

"We simply don't have all the resources they do. While we are finding our way at the track they have engineers back at their facilities working on aerodynamics and other areas of the car looking to find another half second a lap. The Robertson's team simply doesn't have those same resources available to them and there is also the issue of time to test and develop the car. And where they use a wind tunnel, we use our eyeballs. But, again, I think we will find the speed to be competitive, we just aren't able to find the improvements as fast as they can."

Being an instructor and competitor for so many years, Murry is a keen judge of people and talent. He told us he feels very fortunate to have become an integral part of a team made up of talented and committed individuals.

Murry: "You could not ask for better people to be with than the Robertsons and the people that make up their team. David and Andrea are two of the most dedicated, loyal, nice and considerate people on the planet. That just makes the whole team want to work that much harder for them. It has been a key to our success. We had a few incidents where the car got hurt and yet we did not hear one word of frustration or anger from either of them or anyone on the team. Everyone just got to work on fixing the car."

Murry also appreciates the spirit of cooperation that exists in this private race team.

"When you drive for a factory you drive the car, you get out of the car and tell them if it is great or not. The dialogue is really all one way. Here everyone on the team has input and we all put our ideas in. It doesn't matter who had an idea that works best, it is just so much more rewarding to know that we all work together to try and find what works for the team. That is a big difference between a private team like ours and a factory team.



The Robertson Racing Ford G.T. at speed.

“Lee Penn (our engineer) is such an asset to the team bringing all the knowledge he does in so many different areas from suspension geometry, and aerodynamics, and generally running the car.

“It brought tears to H’s eyes (Andrew H. Smith, Team Manager) when we got the pole at Road Atlanta. That wasn’t supposed to happen. I remember when James Weaver with Dyson won the prototype class over the Audis. James was just ecstatic because he beat the factory. He was David to their Goliath. That is what it was like for us that day at Road Atlanta.”

“Having dreams of being the best driver in the best car is something you soon come to realize isn’t very easy. For us having the heart that this team does, and working hard coming up with ideas to make the car go faster, was something we knew that we could do and we continue to do.”

Murry told us that one of the key elements of the team’s progress to date has been their willingness to learn. He singles out Andrea Robertson as an example of just how much this team wants to compete for a win.

“Andrea Robertson has got more dedication than anybody I have ever seen in a race car. We went to St. Pete the first year and she had never been there before so I got some in-car footage from another GT2 car and sent it to her. It included three clean laps of the track so she could watch how that driver did it. She watched the loop of the three laps 50 times and she watched the entire three hour race 20 times! She not only learned where to shift and turn, she learned where the passing is done.

“In terms of performance on the track,” David continued, “they are two completely different people from where they were as drivers two years ago. It actually astounds me how much they have come along. They are doing everything correctly in the car and now we are at the point where they can begin to start dropping lap times a bit more through a better understanding of the physics of racing. That is something we can practice time and again.”



The Robertson Racing effort is first class all the way.

Fans of the ALMS surely welcome witnessing the small versus tall challenge the Robertson Team presents at every race. Murry is convinced the fans will not only see the Robertson's try to win every time out, they will also see them on the podium very soon.

"Two years ago we were struggling just to make sure they could qualify under the 115% rule. Now, that is so far from our minds. Now we think about what we can do to get a podium finish. It is rewarding to me to see them improve as drivers.

"And don't tell David I said this, but it's a good thing Andrea is his co-driver and not a competitor!"



The Robertson Ford G.T. is in a constant process of tweaking, improving, emerging faster each time.