

The Spice Girls at the Le Mans 24 hours

From the original piece written by Thierry Chargé

1991 40 Spice Ford



Le Mans 24 hours 1991. The Japanese driver, Tomiko Yoshikawa, is at the centre of a plan to prepare a Japanese Spice specifically to be driven by three women drivers; this will be a first. With her are the South African, Desiré Wilson; a winner of the 100k at both Monza and Silverstone in 1980 she was one of the very few women to have driven in a Formula One Grand Prix (Kyalami in 1981). The all female team is to be completed by the American Lyn St James, victorious in a GTO at the Daytona 24 hours in 1987 and 1990 (she later went on to compete a number of times in the Indianapolis 500).

After some fallow years in endurance racing in both Europe and America, Gordon Spice had bowed out, but helped by the consortium which bought the Japanese company Onno, Euro Racing was taking up the challenge of Le Mans with the Dutch company continuing to develop his SE90.

At Le Mans FISA judged that the Japanese driver Tomiko Yoshikawa was insufficiently experienced to be granted the super-licence required to compete in the 24 hour race so the team urgently set about finding another driver of sufficient standing.

Monday 17 June 1991

That evening the good news reaches Cathy Muller via a phone call to her home in Alsace. On the line is Desiré Wilson, a driver Cathy Muller knows well from the American ARS championship. Desiré is looking for a teammate to join her and Lyn St James to drive the Spice Ford No. 40 at the Le Mans 24 hours.

“You want me to drive Le Mans with you?” Cathy Muller didn’t hesitate for a second.

Tuesday 18 June 1991

The matter is swiftly settled. Her super-licence granted Cathy Muller hits fourth gear to get to the Sarthe circuit on the Monday to be there for signing on and scrutineering.



Left to right, Desiré Wilson, Tomiko Yoshikawa, Lyn St James and Cathy Muller



Cathy Muller, Lyn St James and Desiré Wilson

Wednesday 19 June 1991

On the first lap the car has an electrical problem. It is only much later (after 7pm) that Lyn St James finally gets out again but she hits the safety barrier after only four more laps. The car is severely damaged.

Cathy Muller and Desiré Wilson will not have time to get behind the wheel.

A chassis is bought from GP Motorsport who are selling a Spice in the paddock. It is now a race against the clock to complete the rebuild.

Thursday 20 June 1991

The car is rebuilt. Desiré Wilson's best time is 4.11.781.

Lyn St James is on 4.29.995 and Cathy Muller 4.40.756 which means neither has achieved the minimum required to qualify. Thankfully Lyn and Cathy are given dispensation by the ACO.

Saturday 22 June

16h00 Desiré Wilson starts from the back of the grid.

16h53 Pitstop.

16h55 Lyn St James joins the race.

17h00 The car is running 38th

17h01 Lyn St James takes the escape route at the Nissan corner

17h03 Stops for bodywork repairs

17h16 Back on the track

18h00 The car is in 32nd place

18h07 Tyre change

18h10 Cathy Muller takes over

19h00 The car is in 32nd place

19h03 Pitstop for fuel and tyres – there is a problem with the jack and the underbody

19h45 Desiré Wilson finally gets away

20h17 Pitstop. Tyres changed and more work on the underbody

20h36 Desiré Wilson rejoins the race

20h38 Desiré comes off at the esses before the Dunlop curves

20h43 The car is pushed behind the safety barrier

21h10 Cathy Muller and her teammates give up

Cathy Muller remained completely positive. “I lived through heady times during the hour I raced. I expected to breakdown from one minute to the next but at 340 kilometres an hour in the Hunaudières it was a complete pleasure. It makes me want to come back.”

Unfortunately they never were to return.