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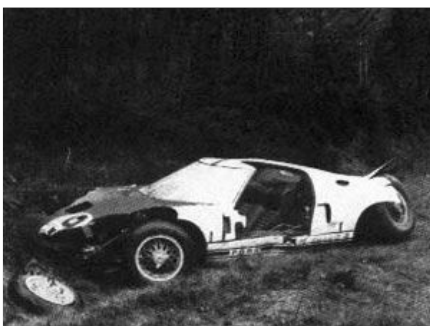
www.QV500.com - Ford GT40 Part 1: Prototypes



Chassis GT/101

In 1957, the Automobile Manufacturers Association ban on factory-sponsored racing made works involvement by US car builders a back door operation until 1962. However, when the ban was finally lifted, Henry Ford II quickly instigated his Total Performance programme. This saw Ford represented internationally with saloons for circuit and rally use as well as engines being supplied to Lotus for the Indy 500 and Carroll Shelby for the Cobra. Ford wanted to go even further, but as the Total Performance programme was conceptualised principally with the objective of improving Ford's production models, in this respect, Formula 1 was deemed unsuitable.

A sports racing project on the other hand would be perfect. The idea of buying Ferrari was seriously considered but eventually came to nothing so rather than starting from scratch, Ford went shopping for another suitable basis on which to start building a GT prototype. Despite failing to finish at the 1963 Le Mans 24 Hours, Eric Broadley's Lola GT was one of the most advanced cars around. Already powered by a Ford engine, it had shown great potential and soon after Le Mans, Ford bought the Lola, Broadley and his men. They established Ford Advanced Vehicles and built a brand new factory in Slough, England so as to be closer to the hoards of specialist suppliers in the UK and Europe. The design team would be headed by ex-Aston Martin designer, Roy Lunn, whilst Broadley was retained for 1964 and ex-Aston Martin team manager, John Wyer, was put in charge of managing the whole affair. Co-operating closely with Ford's Dearborn experimental department, the two Lola GT's were retained as mobile test beds until the end of 1963 when they were retired from active duty and all attention switched over to the new Ford. Appearing in public for the first time in April 1964, the GT40 featured a semi monocoque chassis fabricated by Abbey Panels of Coventry made up almost entirely of spot welded sheet steel supplemented at the front by two square tube stiffeners from the top of the scuttle down to the nose and at the back by a light detachable subframe supporting the rear bodywork.



Chassis GT/101, 1964 Le Mans Trials

Suspension was via double wishbones at the front, the back utilising double trailing links with a transverse top arm and an inverted A at the bottom. Helical springs with adjustable telescopic dampers were fitted all round. 11.5-inch outboard disc brakes were supplied by Girling and the 15-inch wire wheels by Borrani, these measuring 6.5-inches across at the front and eight at the back. The Borrani's featured light alloy rims and Rudge centre-locking hubs and were originally shod with Dunlop R6 Racing tyres. A dry shod 4.2-litre pushrod Ford V8 was installed, this having been a lightweight version of the Fairline engines developed originally for 1963's Lotus 29 Indy car.

Displacement was 4183cc thanks to a bore and stroke of 95.5 x 72.9mm respectively, compression being set at 12.5:1. Breathing through four twin choke Weber 48 IDA downdraught carburettors and a special bundle of snakes exhaust system, the GT40 developed 350bhp at 7200rpm and 299lb ft of torque at 5200rpm. Initially a Tipo 37 four-speed Colotti gearbox was used as an interim measure until a suitable five-speed unit could be found, this operating in conjunction with a Borg & Beck triple plate clutch. Glassfibre bodywork was fabricated by Specialised Mouldings of Upper Norwood and painted by Harold Radford in London, but the aerodynamics were highly suspect and the overall package took some time to refine. Standing barely 40-inches high (hence GT40), the hinged front and rear body sections were the subject of extensive development work right up until the production-ready MkI arrived in the summer of 1965. Inside, the side sills contained flexible bag type fuel tanks and a spare wheel was carried in the nose. The fixed seats were also made by Harold Radford and trimmed in lightweight plastic material liberally perforated with circular outlets to help keep the driver cool. Another interesting driver aid was a small inflatable bag in the lumbar region of the rear squab, this allowing the driver to inflate or deflate the seat to relieve muscle fatigue during long stints at the wheel. As the seats were fixed in place, the pedals could be adjusted, all GT40's (with the exception of four MkIII's) being completed in right-hand drive with the gearshift positioned to the drivers right.

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