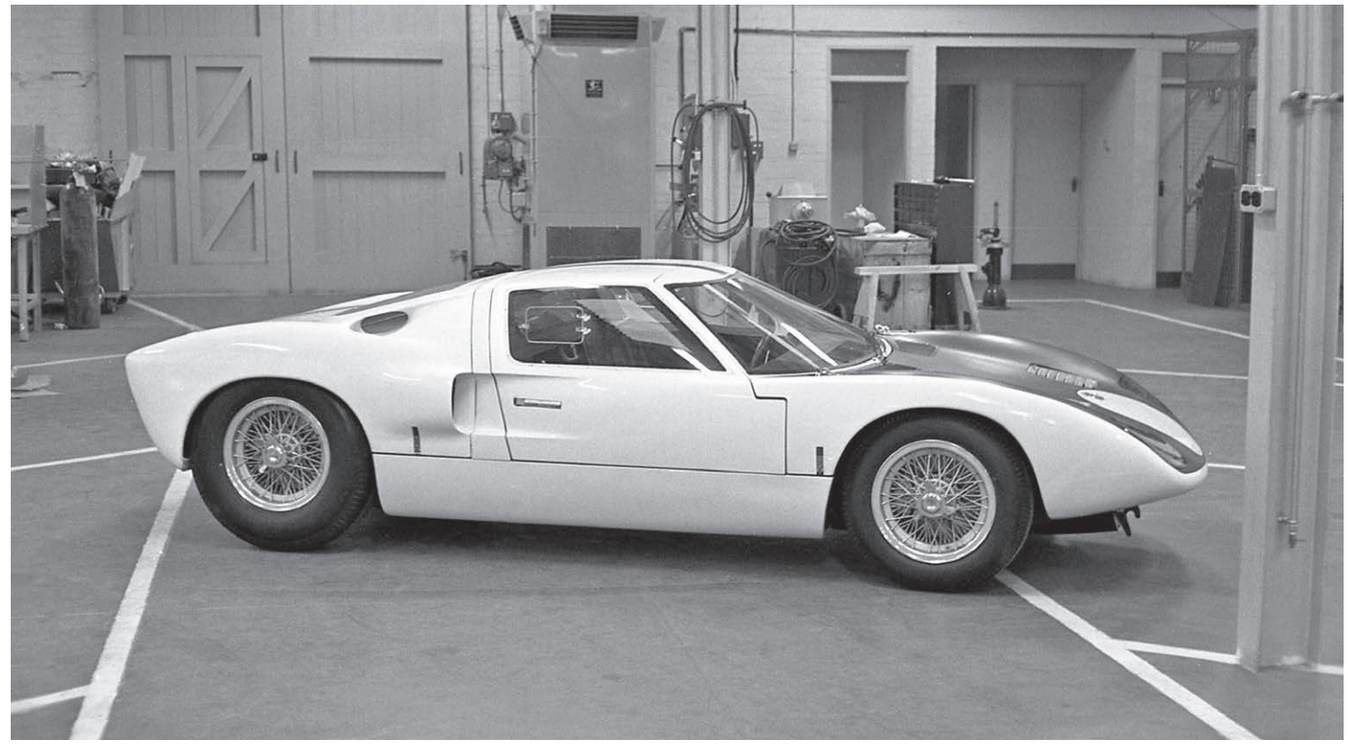
2 THE PROTOTYPE

In late 1963, Abbey Panels Ltd of Coventry was awarded the contract to build the chassis for the Ford GT. Documentation seen by Ronnie Spain gave the delivery date of the first chassis as Monday 16 March 1964. From the photographs and documents that are available, we know that the first car was completed on Wednesday 1 April, a mere 16 days later. If the March delivery date is accurate then that was a remarkable achievement. However, a document recently discovered in the Ford Archive suggests that the first chassis was delivered on Friday 14 February, indicating that the build time for the first car was 47 days (1964 was a leap year) which, whilst still an achievement, isn't quite as remarkable as 16 days.



The almost complete Ford GT prototype at Yeovil Road, Slough. Upon first seeing the full-size clay model of the Ford GT, John Wyer thought that it was the most beautiful and functional car that he had ever seen. It's hard to disagree with that sentiment. (Courtesy Ford Motor Company)


FORD

This photograph shows quite clearly how the 1967 MkIV, in the foreground, has a much narrower windscreen – and, indeed, cockpit – than that of the 1966 MkII in the background. This resulted in the MkIV having greatly reduced frontal area and less drag. (JSA)

The important things about those dimensions are that (1) the minimum width (90cm) of the windscreen is measured at just half the screen's vertical height, and (2) at the very top of the screen the width can be down to just 45cm. This allows for both sides of the screen to be tapered sharply inwards from bottom to top. To see just what an impact this made on the design of sports-racing cars one has to look at the minimum screen dimensions laid down in the previous version (1965) of Appendix J, its Article 270 stipulating the following:

"The windshield is compulsory. It shall be placed symetrically in relation to the axis of the car and be equipped with at least one automatic wiper placed before the driver and wiping a sufficient surface to enable the driver to see distinctly the road from his seat.

For cars with open or convertible coachwork the windscreen shall have the following minimum dimensions:

Width (chord measurement):

90cm for cars with an engine capacity inferior or equal to 1000cc.

100cm for cars with an engine capacity exceeding 1000cc.

In this photograph, the 1966 FIA Appendix J-mandated windscreen size requirements are shown quite clearly to have resulted in the MkIV having a significantly narrower windscreen than that of its 1966 predecessor, the MkII. Another feature of the MkIV is that alongside the main opening for the engine water-radiator, there are no small openings to direct air towards the brakes; cooling air for the brakes was taken from behind the radiator: the relatively warm air so gathered being less likely to cause the brake discs to crack. (JSA)

Owned for many years by Steven Smith, 1013 is seen here at Harewood in early May 1979, wearing a curious mix of early and late style Borrani wire wheels. To Steven, the GT40 was just another car, which he used it in all weathers, generally for commuting between his home and office, although in later years it was only used occasionally. 1013 always appeared as if it as in mid-restoration, which in some cases it was. (JSA)

The (makeshift) podium, with winners Bruce McLaren and Chris Amon flanking Henry Ford II. (Courtesy Ford Motor Company)

about 300 metres after Arnage corner), so I can go along with that. However, by qualifying more slowly than their team mates, car number two had started 20 metres further down the grid, and thus had covered a greater distance.

My calculations, based on a lap speed of 148.558kph on the penultimate (359th) lap, suggest that by 4pm both cars had covered just 10.370km of the 360th lap. As each lap was of 13.461km, that meant that the final distance for both cars must have been 4842.87km. The ACO's official figure for car number 1 is 4843.07km, so my calculation differs by just 0.2km. Whilst I would have liked to have got closer still, I am fairly happy with that. Incidentally, something that very much proves the point is that whilst the ACO always quotes 360 laps as the distance covered, if true it would result in a total distance of 4845.96km – nearly 3km more than was actually travelled by the cars. Ergo, the race did NOT end at either the finish line or the timing line. *Quod erat demonstrandum*, as my maths teacher used to enjoy saying.

As for the original decision to go for a dead heat, the position is fairly clear. Quoting one of the people who was there, no less a personage than Leo Beebe, then head of Ford's GT racing programme:

"… I stand by my decision … I had great respect for him (Miles) but in that race he was devilish, not only for himself, but for others. The decision regarding the outcome of that race was mine as the manager of the Ford racing effort at Le Mans ..."

Those words make it quite clear who decided on the dead heat, and, just as importantly, why. Incidentally, in 2000 I met Leo Beebe

Ken Miles at the wheel of a Cobra, the car with which he made his racing name. (Dave Friedman, courtesy Alice Ramsey Akins)

for certain that it was a lie; he just might have been telling the truth.

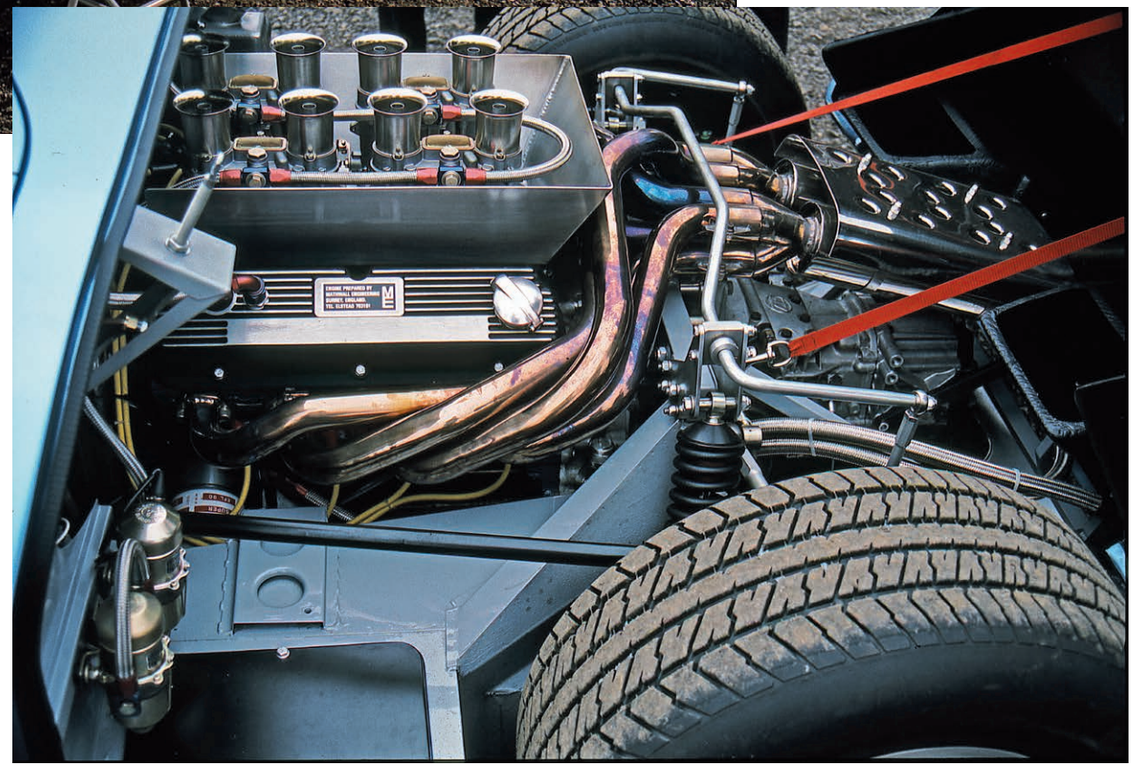
There was a louder than usual rustling in the bushes, and somebody else literally burst upon the scene. It was like something from a cowboy movie. There stood a youth, aged about 14 or 15, shirtless, well-bronzed by the sun, and carrying a bow, with an arrow nocked in place and ready to be shot – if necessary. He looked for all the world like a native-American brave from the 1870s. Miles greeted him, and introduced him to us. He was Miles' son, and was called Kyle. There was a special reason for that name, Miles said. At one time when he was working in California he had lodged in the

The latest restoration of 1033 has seen it returned to its Zitro livery. The small rectangular hole in the roof has been restored, and the car is now presented just as it appeared at Le Mans in 1969. (Courtesy Vincent Laplaud)

And here we are back at the beginning, M3/1101 returns as XP130/1, looking as good as, if not better than, the day it emerged from the factory fifty years earlier. The doors and front bodywork are a mix of the prototype and production shapes, but it still looks nigh on perfect.
(Courtesy JD Classics via Ronnie Spain)

John Wyer (alias 'Death Ray') seen in 1965, checking that the rear deck of a GT40 is properly closed. (Courtesy Ford Motor Company)

The sign on the front of the chassis reads: "GT40P 1133 special lightweight spyder chassis using aircraft spec bonded aluminium panels." 1133 was the first of two lightweight chassis, and the car which was built around it was said to weigh only 857kg (1889 pounds). It became Peter Thorp's personal GT40, and carried the UK registration mark 'GTL 86.' Following on from GT40P/1100, it was the second of his cars to carry that registration mark. (JSA)



Photographed at Silverstone in 1991, this is the Mathwall 325 cubic inch (5.3-litre) engine, No ME462, fitted with four Weber IDA 48 carburettors, installed in GT40P-1135. The sign on the engine reads "Engine prepared by Mathwall Engineering, Surrey, England. Tel Elstead 703191." 1135 is a standard small-block MkV delivered in March 1991 to a Swiss owner. The transmission is a ZF 5DS-25/2 5speed gearbox with a limited-slip 3.77 final drive. In common with most other MkVs, 1135 has its fabricated steel monocoque, Zintec-coated, painted light grey (British Leyland Cumulus Grey). Final assembly of the car was undertaken by former FAV mechanic John Etheridge, and this GT40 has seen use in European vintage racing. (JSA)

John Sadler's GT40P-1124 at California Speedway, in July 2005, on the occasion of SAAC-30. (JSA)

installation of previous GT40s, was brought in. Also, Jim Rose was employed for his experience with working at both Alan Mann and Shelby. After chassis 1120, John Etheridge, ex-Ford Advanced Vehicles, was contracted to manage the GT40 build.

Base chassis were supplied from Adams McCall Engineering, and roof structures were supplied by Tennant Panels. For the most part, the Mark V resembled very closely the Mark I GT40, although there were a few changes, and, as with the 1960s production, very few cars were identical. For example, one customer had damaged a foot from motorcycle racing, and required vacuum-assisted braking. A few customers wished to have more control in the build, so received the cars less engine. The first car, GT40P-1090, had an open top in place of roofed doors. Most motors were Ford small block, with four Webers or a single four-barrel carburettor, but Safir produced five big-block GT40s, serial numbers GT40P-1128 to GT40P-1132. These aluminium-engined big-block cars all had easily removable door roof sections. Most GT40s were high-performance street cars; however, some of the Mark V production can be described as being in full race specification.

Two road cars, GT40P-1133 (roadster) and GT40P-1142 (roofed doors), were built as lightweights, which included aluminium honeycomb chassis and very light carbon-fibre bodywork. Complete files on each of these 40 cars have been forwarded to authors and journalists known for maintaining accurate records on the GT40 automobile.

John Wyer kept in touch, visiting the shop and attending a 1985 Mark V test session at Goodwood. We were happy to hear Mr Wyer comment that the Mark V was exactly as he would have done it.

I have stated that there will be no more GT40 Mark Vs constructed, and I have assurance from the three partners of Safir GT40 Spares, Ltd that no new Mark Vs will be constructed.

THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY AND THE GT40 MARK V

With the completion of GT40P-1090, the Mark V caught Ford's attention. After its careful inspection of the Mark V we received a communication from the Ford Motor Company. There would be no financial support; however, Ford was in favour of the Mark V and would be of assistance in some areas.