



SHORT SHIFT

JB TACKLES THE BATHURST 12-HOUR IN ONE OF **FERRARI'S FINEST**. BUT TO FINISH FIRST, FIRST YOU HAVE TO FINISH...

WORDS CRAIG PARKER PHOTOS ROB LANG

“G’day mate,” John Bowe smiles, “welcome to Bathurst.” Then he shuffles me aside and confides, “We’re not really contenders here – she’s a 2008 car and the Porsches and Audis are the latest and greatest. But this is Bathurst, everyone wants to race here, and we’re all brimming with excitement.”

The ‘she’ in question is No.17, the Il Bello Rosso/Maranello Motorsport-sponsored Ferrari 430 GT3. Peter Edwards – Mr Il Bello Rosso – purchased the race-bred stallion for track days but, with the inaugural inclusion of the supercar GT category in this year’s Bathurst 12-hour, Edwards thought, “Why don’t we race it?”

Good friend and Maranello Motorsport MD, Mark Coffey, set about assembling a team, and sharing steering

duties with JB and Edwards is Tim Leahy, who has raced everything from F3 to V8 Supercars and, like Bowe, is a regular 12-Hour racer.

The 18-strong team includes Gary Woodward, an ex-Williams F1 engineer who’s worked with F1 World Champions Nigel Mansell, Nelson Piquet and Ayrton Senna. Maranello also recruited ex-Brad Jones Racing V8 Supercar tactician/engineer, Matt Boniface, to formulate a competitive strategy.

“Our goal is to stay on the lead lap,” Boniface explains. “If we’re on the lead lap with an hour to go, who knows?”

The ace in the Ferrari’s pocket is the number of mandatory pit stops required. To even things out, the current-gen Audi R8 LMS GT3 and Porsche GT3R and Cup S have to make 12 stops versus nine for the older Ferrari 430 GT3, and managing those three fewer stops will be the key to staying on the lead lap.



ABOVE The more powerful Porsches didn’t need to slipstream to drive past the Ferrari

LEFT Experienced racer Tim Leahy throws the Ferrari into The Dipper at Mt Panorama – the steepest corner in Australian motorsport





The first of Saturday's two qualifying sessions kicks off at 7.15am and to everyone's surprise, the Koundouris/Koundouris/Owen Porsche tops the timing on its second lap with a blistering 2:09.1sec time that would not be bettered.

As much as JB tries, the best he can wring out of the Ferrari is a 2:14.7. Maranello Motorsport expected to be off the front-running pace, but not five seconds slower! They are stunned. A team member murmurs "at that rate, we'll be lucky not to go a lap down in the first hour!" Fortunately, the second qualifying session brings some relief.

Higher ambient temperatures mean all times are slower, however the Il Bello Rosso 430 is slowed less than other front-runners. "They probably can't run that pace all day, they need to slow down to last the distance" says Coffey. "We've done plenty of testing – it can run those times all day."

My alarm goes off at 4am on race day, yet I'm still last to arrive in the pits and am easily the most bleary-eyed. The crew didn't leave the track until after nine the previous evening, but they're already busily checking and re-checking that everything is 'good-to-go' when I turn up.

Everybody runs on pure adrenalin. At 6am, the pit exit opens and the field blasts out on the formation lap while a bevy of luscious Audi grid girls saunter down pit lane and brighten up my morning.

Starting positions are derived by averaging the best qualifying time of each car's three drivers, plonking the Ferrari on P8. The anthem is sung, start-line photos taken, Brollie Dollies cleared from the grid, and the 26 starters scamper off on the warm-up lap for the 6.15am rolling start.

JB is strapped in for the first stint and, not wanting to fight too hard too early, lets himself get shuffled back a few places initially, but he soon begins picking his way through a pack that includes everything from the mega-dollar Audis to an HSV Astra VXR.

On lap 12, everyone gasps as the live TV feed shows the Procon Developments Mosler shredding a tyre then destroying itself along Conrod Straight at 260km/h. The windshield even flies out, coming to rest in adjacent power lines. It's a huge crash and leads to the race's first safety car period while damage is cleared. "We're coming in," is the call over team radio.

With thousands of pit stops under his belt, Bowe stops the Ferrari right on the marks, a tank of Elf 102 octane goes in, and he roars out again. "You beauty!" Leahy exclaims, as the slick stop elevates Bowe to third at the restart.

Shortly after, we witness a graphic demonstration of what happens when a 540hp 2011 Porsche catches a 500hp 2008 Ferrari on Conrod Straight. The Quinn/Quinn/Baird GT3R (the only car to challenge the eventually triumphant Audis) doesn't even need to slipstream the Ferrari to pass Bowe – it simply drives past him. "Boy, those Porsches have got some grunt," JB later shrugs.

On lap 45, Bowe pits again, flings the carbonfibre door open, and gracefully extracts himself. Leahy jumps in, four new boots are bolted on, and a tank of fuel slurped before the scarlet lady screams back into the fray. "As she gets lighter, she gets better," JB says to the engineers. More importantly, he's able to match the Audis' times. Things are looking good.

JB SAYS...

THE F430 IS very aero-dependant – small aerodynamic adjustments make a lot of difference to its balance. I've been involved in GT racing a long time and the cars are all very similar in their behaviour. It's quite different to a V8 Supercar or a Touring Car Masters car, which are principally about mechanical grip. In comparison to a V8 Supercar, the F430 doesn't feel very powerful, but lap times aren't that different. I like driving them and it's good Peter has started racing his car because that's what it is – a race car!



THE PORSCHE DOESN'T NEED TO SLIPSTREAM THE FERRARI – IT SIMPLY DRIVES PAST



ABOVE Huge steel Brembo rotors stop the F430; the three quick 'amici'; pre-down start had our yawning reporter bleary-eyed
RIGHT JB started and drove cautiously early on before going hunting for Audis



RIGHT Huge rear wing and underbody aerodynamics glue the F430 to the track across the top of the mountain



THE WONDERFUL-SOUNDING FERRARI V8 ISN'T SOUNDING SO WONDERFUL

might not be out of the question. Then disaster strikes the luckless Leahy again. That wonderful-sounding Ferrari V8 isn't sounding so wonderful. Initially, it is thought to be a spark issue. Again the parts car is rattled for a replacement spark plug, coil and coil driver, and a frantic 15 minutes later, the engine is fired up. But there is no change. It soon becomes obvious the problem is internal. Having run for seven hours and 14 minutes and 161 laps (the length of the Bathurst 1000), a dead number eight cylinder is diagnosed, bringing the day to a premature end. And it's a bitter blow considering the team has successfully completed 24-hour events in the past.

Coffey reckons that the 12-hour is equivalent to four track days and the Ferrari had regularly run many more track days than this between engine rebuilds, which are undertaken every 7000km. Reliability had never been a major concern, so being sidelined by a mechanical gremlin is extremely disheartening. Nevertheless, Bowe remains upbeat: "Motor racing is a cruel mistress, however motorsport people are very resilient," he says. "We're all good friends. I'd love to come back with them in a competitive car." Coffey wants to return in a works Ferrari 458 Italia, so we'll have to wait until 2012 to see if JB and Maranello Motorsport can break Audi's stranglehold. 🏎️

TOP The Maranello Motorsports crew, car owner Peter Edwards front and centre
ABOVE (L-R) Interior is all business, no BS; striking red and black F430 rounds Murray's Corner ready to attack another lap

But as Edwards suits up for his first stint, clouds roll in and dampen proceedings. Edwards is particularly nervous – it's his first time racing at The Mountain. While his times improve with every lap, he still struggles to match the experienced Leahy and Bowe and the greasy track exacerbates his apprehension. It's the classic pro-am scenario: the pros get the car up to a good position, then the amateur struggles to keep it there. Like the gulf in the performance between various car classes, it's part of the unpredictability of the 12-Hour. The sporadic drizzle morphs into a brief

deluge that leaves standing water on the track and Leahy, now in the car, is sliding around on slick tyres. With no intermediate tyres available, pitting for full wets on a drying track could put them down a lap, which would be disastrous. There's no option but to leave Tim out to tip-toe around in the diabolical conditions. For several laps the entire team stares nervously at the monitor and you could cut the tension with a knife. I glance at the half-suited Edwards and he looks worried. A dry line begins to form and with just a few laps before the next scheduled stop, the Ferrari's steering goes heavy and the alternator light comes on. Leahy puts two 'n' two together. "It's thrown a fan belt, I'm coming in," he barks over the radio. Maranello Motorsports has brought along another 430 for spare parts. It's controlled mayhem as the belt is stripped from the 'parts' car and fitted to the racecar.

The TV crew pokes a microphone in front of JB, who smiles, "It will be hard to win from here – it's a bit of a set-back." That's an understatement. Car repaired, they are 10 laps down in P11 when Edwards exits the pits and boots it up Mountain Straight. After a stellar 27-lap stint, a much happier Edwards hands the Ferrari back to JB and tries to cool down. With cabin temperatures hovering around 60 degrees, Edwards peels off the top half of his sweat-drenched racesuit with a huge grin on his face. He's raced at Bathurst, kept up a respectable pace, and stayed out of trouble – including swerving around a dead Corvette in the middle of the track where Dick Johnson found a large rock in the 1980 Bathurst 1000. A relieved Edwards receives a heartening round of applause from the crew for a job well done. By hour six, they've worked their way back up to eighth and a top-five finish

ABOVE GT3 regulations dictate that the 'standard' engine must be used
RIGHT Slick pitwork allowed Maranello Motorsport to run near the front of the pack until mechanical troubles struck

FAST FACTS
FERRARI F430 GT3

- ENGINE** 4307cc V8, DOHC, 32v
- POWER** 373kW @ 8500rpm
- TORQUE** 465Nm @ 5250rpm
- GEARBOX** 6-speed sequential
- WEIGHT** 1200kg
- WHEELS** 18 x 10.5-inch (f), 18 x 11.0-inch (r)
- TYRES** 27/65 18 (f), 28/71 18 (r)
- 0-100KM/H** 3.5sec (estimated)
- TOP SPEED** 280km/h (estimated)

