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Prototype



My Favorite Race
Wayne Taylor
1996 Rolex 24 at Daytona



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WAYNE TAYLOR

1996 Rolex 24 at Daytona

BY GARY WITZENBURG | PHOTOGRAPHY DAYTONA AND ISC ARCHIVES

WAYNE TAYLOR STARTED THE 1996 Rolex 24 at Daytona on intermediate tires in a tricky mix of wet and dry conditions and finished it toggling between troublesome fuel pumps with Max Papis hunting him down in a very fast Ferrari. At one point, co-driver Scott Sharp went off in the wet at the “bus stop” chicane and crunched their Riley and Scott Olds Aurora prototype’s front end. But he drove it back to the pits, the crew changed the nose, and they were back on their way.

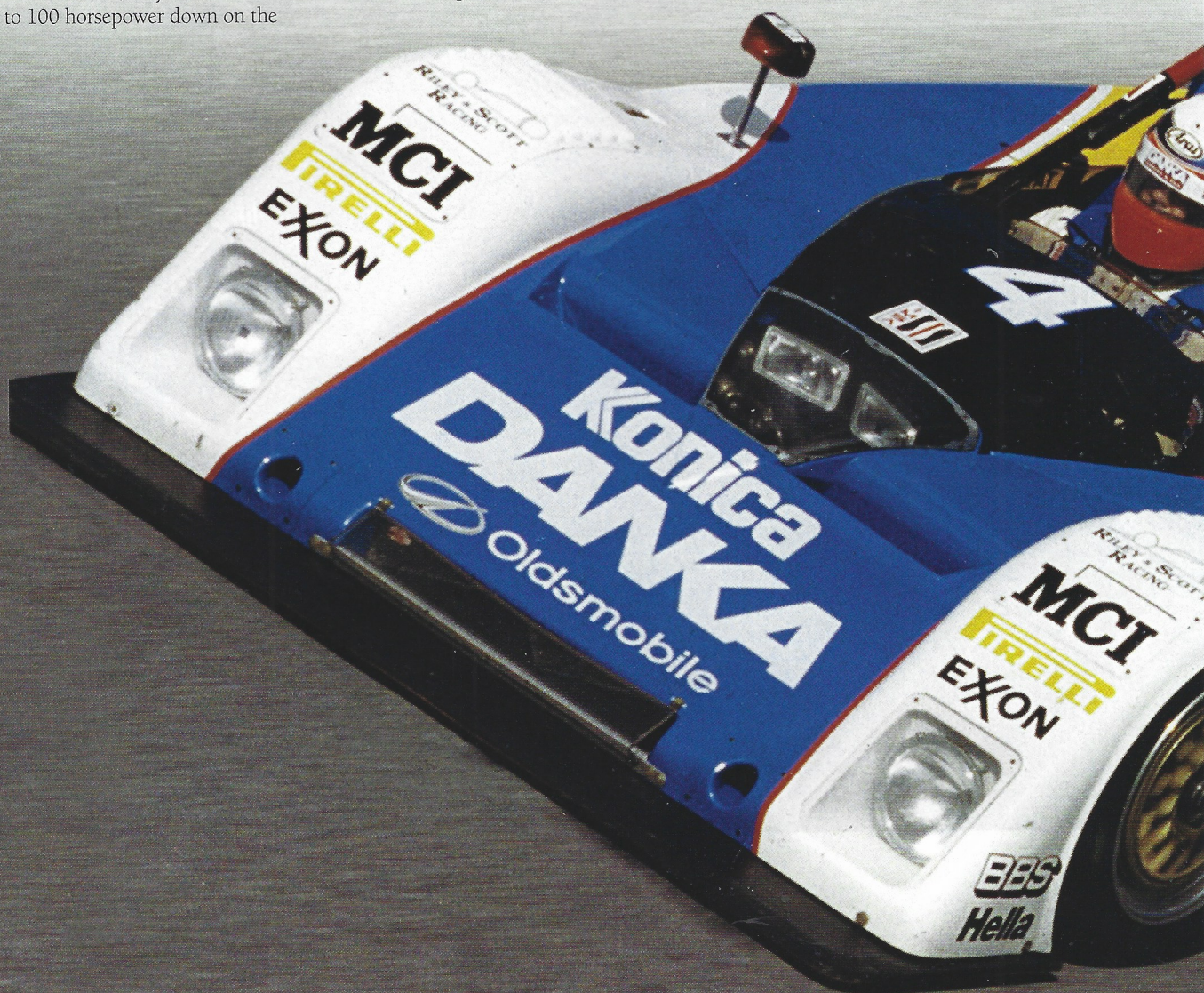
“We raced that Ferrari (also co-piloted by Gianpiero Moretti, Bob Wollek and Didier Theys) the whole 24 hours,” Taylor relates. “We were 75 to 100 horsepower down on the

Ferrari, and the conditions were difficult. But we managed to keep it on the track most of the time, and it came down to the wire. Papis had a gearbox problem and fell a lap down, and I had a fuel pump issue. I drove the last hour switching the pumps on and off to make it to the end. Max had to pass me to get his lap back, which he did, then the countdown came, and I ended up winning by 65 seconds after 24 hours.” The team’s third driver was the late Jim Pace.

“I remember standing in the garage with our sponsors and everyone before the race, and it was raining and really miserable, and

I said to them, ‘We’ve done everything we can, and we have a good chance of winning. I really believed we were going to win.’ I had never experienced that feeling before. Then we went on to Sebring and won that, and we won the championship. That was a really big change in my life and my racing career.”

But it was a close call between that dramatic triumph and his 1998 Le Mans LMP1 class win co-driving the Doyle-Risi Racing Ferrari 333 SP with Eric van de Poele and Fermin Velez. “We went over to Ferrari and tested at Fiorano,” he recalls, “so I got

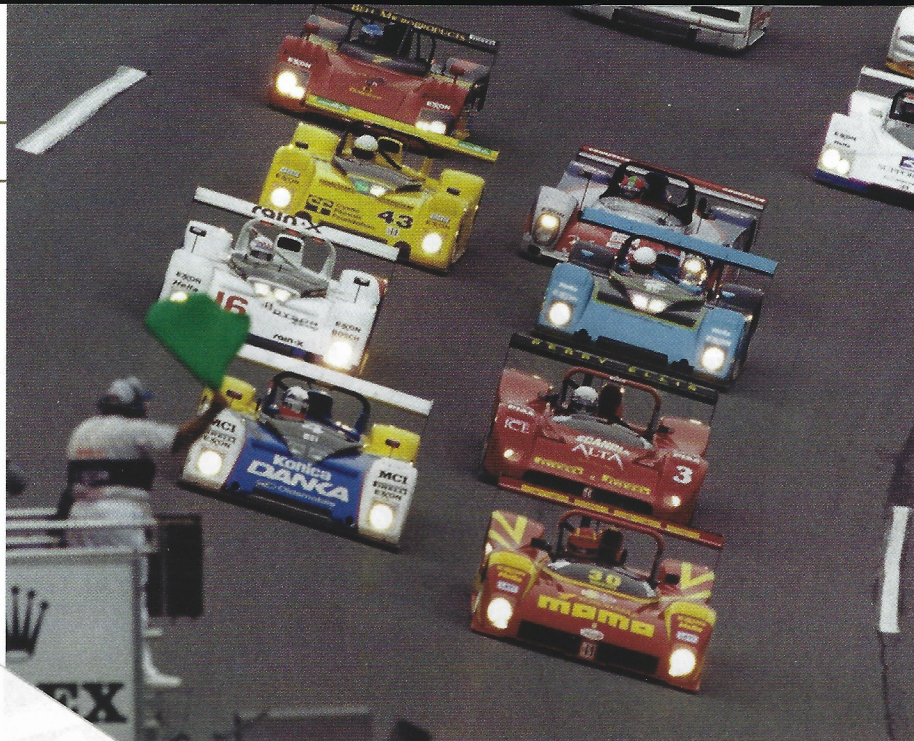


The green waves at the 1996 Rolex 24 at Daytona. The two front row cars—Taylor's Riley & Scott Olds and the Momo Ferrari 333 SP—would battle right to the wire.

a real taste of the Ferrari world, which was pretty spectacular. We were learning the car at Daytona and Sebring (both DNFs) on our way to Le Mans, where they had a massive prototype class. But it was one of those races where we thought we had a good shot at winning.

Rain on One Side, Dry on The Other

"Fermin got sick during the night, so Eric and I drove the entire night, and it was raining on half the track and dry on the other



I had a fuel pump issue. I drove the last hour switching the pumps on and off to make it to the end.



With only a 65-second lead after 24 hours of racing, the Riley & Scott Oldsmobile Aurora Prototype barely held together long enough for Wayne Taylor's favorite race victory.



After nearly scoring a one-off F1 ride with Brabham in 1985, he decided to focus on sports cars.

half...really tense with a lot of emotional stress. Fermin was better on Sunday, so he did a lot of the driving. I took the car to the flag, and when I got the white flag, our engineer called and said there was smoke coming out of the back of the car. It was the gearbox. I was leading with one lap to go, looking in the mirror and seeing smoke pouring out everywhere, putting it in neutral, then back in gear, trying to preserve the gearbox. But we got it across the finish line, won the race, went to Parc Ferme, and turned it off. And we were unable to move the car. The gearbox had jammed solid."

How He Got There

Taylor was born in 1956 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa and raised in the coastal town of East London, where the first round of the Formula 1 world championship was held. Because his father worked as a Marshall, young Wayne went to all the Grand Prix's there from five years old until they moved the race to Johannesburg in 1966. He went to Selborne college but didn't finish. "The headmaster called my mother in and said, 'there's not much we can do. No matter what we do, he always turns it into some form of motorsports. He will be better served learning to do something mechanical.' My parents couldn't afford for me to go racing, but we did do a little karting."

He went to work for a company called

Engine Rite and in three years qualified as an automotive machinist and fitter. "I wanted to learn about the mechanics of everything on a race car, and by the time I qualified, I was able to build engines and gearboxes and pretty much do anything." Meanwhile, he jumped from karts to Formula Ford. "A friend was racing an old Lotus Formula Ford and wanted to sell it. He wanted 800 Rand, about \$8,000, which we could not afford. But my uncle bought it, and I later paid him back. With my dad and I doing the preparation, we raced it in Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, East London, Kyalami and Johannesburg and won just about all the races."

In 1980, Taylor moved to Johannesburg, where a guy paid him to race his car while Wayne wrenched it for about seven months until he couldn't take that anymore. But he got to know Formula Atlantic (two rungs below F1) racer Tony Martin, who he convinced to sell him his car on the promise to pay for it over time. But when he got in the taller Martin's car, he couldn't reach the pedals. "I screwed wooden blocks on the pedals and went racing. I started getting confident and doing pretty well with those stupid blocks on the pedals, until I came out of one corner and spun backwards into the Armco barrier. I was okay but in big financial trouble because the car was broken. Then I got a call from a company called Rack Rite that was running Atlantics. They said, 'We know you owe Martin money, and we're happy to pay him if you will come work for us preparing our cars, and you can race your car.'"

Celebrating their win in the 1996 Rolex 24 with the Rolex trophy holder were Scott Sharp (L), the late Jim Pace (far right) and Wayne Taylor.

For the next few years, Taylor was preparing three cars plus his own for menial money but doing very well even on used tires because he couldn't afford new ones. "I got a lot of pole positions, and there was a lot of interest in me in the racing community. I wanted to get to Formula 1 and needed to win that championship. In 1981, in his first race at Kyalami in a new Pretoria Brick-sponsored Ralt, he won the pole, set new lap records and won the race. But he went off in practice for the next race in someone's oil and straight through some catch fencing into the Armco, and he broke his neck. "They said I might not race again. But six weeks later, I got a saloon-car drive in a nine-hour endurance race, and we won everything."

Taylor left Rack Rite in 1985 to run the service shop of the Johannesburg Lamborghini and Maserati importer, who also had a car, and after the shop closed at night, he prepared both cars. Then he wrangled sponsorship from BP Oil and Mazda South Africa (because South African Formula Atlantics were Mazda rotary powered) and hired some guys willing to help, mostly for meals and transport to the races. And he won the 1986 South African championship.

The Rest of the Story

We haven't space to document the rest of Taylor's impressive driving career before turning team owner in 2007. After nearly scoring a one-off F1 ride with Brabham in 1985, he decided to focus on sports cars. He finished 4th in his Le Mans debut in 1987, moved to England to drive for Spice in '89, then moved to the U.S. in 1990 with wife Shelley and baby son Ricky. In 1994, he finished 2nd at Daytona and Sebring and was IMSA champion, then champion again in '96 and Grand Am champion in 2005 when he (with Max Angelelli and Emmanuel Collard) scored his second Daytona 24-Hour win.

Leading the Grand Am (2013) and IMSA (2017) champion Wayne Taylor Racing, he now campaigns the WTR Acura with son Ricky back on his team after a stint with Penske. Taylor's Konica Minolta team has won the iconic Daytona endurance event four out of the past five years and, this year, garnered the first overall win for Acura and the ARX-05. Younger son Jordan (who has also driven prototypes for him) is a factory Corvette driver. Both appear to be as talented as their proud pop. 🏆