



Pit conditions were atrocious, as the rain collected three inches deep at its height.—Photo by Dave Gulick.

Sebring: THE INDEX STORY

—by Bob Morrison

While the rain that pelted Sebring for three hours during the race had little to do with determining the overall winner, it did play a big part in the Index of Performance competition.

Ever since 1952, when Sebring deserted its original six-hour format for the present 12-hour distance, the Index fight has boiled down to a three-way scrap among Porsche, OSCA and Deutsch-Bonnet.

The Phil Hill/Carroll Shelby 3-liter Ferrari which won on handicap in 1955 is the only car to resist successfully this three-marque squabble and the only Index winner to exceed 1,500 cc. piston displacement.

At least 22 of the 65 starters this year were considered to have at least a fighting chance to beat Joe Lane's Index formula and win the \$1,500 handicap prize as well as the Firestone

Trophy, second only to the massive Amoco cup as Sebring's most impressive mantle decoration.

But when the 12 hours were over, it was D-B, OSCA and Porsche once again, in that order.

Perhaps the most interesting Index contender never made it to the course. This was the rear-engined 750 cc of Alejandro de Tomaso, powered by the OSCA engine from the Le Mans winner he shared with Colin Davis last year. The car was not completed in time, so de Tomaso made do with a "regular" 750 OSCA, almost identical to his Sebring 1958 handicap winner.

Two other cars, the Los Amigos Cooper Monaco 1500 and Colin Chapman's team Lotus XI, were out of the competition before it began. Both arrived at the course the night before the race and were not quite healthy enough for the 12-hour test.

Of the remaining entries, two D-B Biplane 750s, three works Elva Mk. IVs, four Fiat-Abarth Monza coupes, three works OSCAs, six RSK Porsches and Sandy McArthur's 750 cc Stanguellini could be considered strong Index contenders.

The Index standings at the end of each three hours pretty much tell the story of how the "tiddlers" fared.

At 1 p.m., with the race a quarter gone, Don Sessler and Bob Holbert were holding down first place in their RSK, with de Tomaso's OSCA second and the Hill/Gendebien front-running Ferrari third.

Three hours later, Sessler/Holbert were still first, but the OSCA and Ferrari had been displaced by the Fitch/Barth and von Trips/Bonnier RSK Porsches in what was beginning to look like a Stuttgart parade.

Then the go-giness set in once again,

and while the Porsches retreated to have their tire pressures adjusted and the works OSCAs either pooped out or were retired, Paul Armagnac and Gerald Laureau found the leading D-B's front-wheel drive ideally suited to conditions and put their collective feet further into it.

By 7 p.m., their D-B was leading the Index parade, with the von Trips/Bonnier Porsche second and de Toma-

so's OSCA third. However, the rain had stopped by this time, so for the last three hours the third-place OSCA closed on the leading D-B with a rush, displacing the RSK from second place in the process. However, the lead which Armagnac and Laureau had built up during the rain proved to be enough as they scooted across the finish line 75 seconds ahead of the OSCA.

Sessler and Holbert, meanwhile, had

gotten their rear-engined machinery back into the fight and managed to edge out the von Trips/Bonnier car for third place.

The closeness of the finish is revealed by the Index figures. The D-B registered a 1.361, the de Tomaso OSCA scored 1.352, while the Holbert/Sessler car edged the fourth-place RSK by the scant margin of 1.338 to 1.333.



The Index winner, the DB (#59) of Paul Armagnac and Gerald Laureau, leads a sister car.—Photo by Dave Gulick.