

24 Hours of Le Mans

Grades 5-6

“Hey!” yelled Mitch. “Good luck nut job!” he shouted with a grin from the back of the pit. Mitch is my boss and coach.

“Tom Kristen to the starting line please,” said the intercom. I followed instructions and bolted to my car. I was driving a TWR Porsche WSC. The car had a roar like a brave lion. I got to the starting line and I could hear the murmur of the crowd. “How you feeling?” asked Mitch on my com. “The first race can beat you up in France.”

“Yeah, the terrain beats you up even more.” I replied.

He laughed and said, “*Voor de overwinning.*” *Voor de overwinning* means ‘for the win’ in Dutch. Finally, the light turned red... 3...2... 1.... and blinked to green. “*VRAAA*,” roared the engine. The Porsche took off.

“Remember, newbie is in last place, you’ve got to make your way up *fast*.” said Mitch in my ear. I swerved around a McLaren and made my way to 4th gear. All I wanted to do was make it to first in my class. There are classes for different cars, and I’m in the LMP class. I am racing for Joest Racing GmbH with two other drivers. If you win in your class you get honor, but if you beat all classes... you go down in history.

Hour seven was rough. One of the other drivers from my team took over, lost six places in total, and ended up last for our class. When I took over, I tried to get ahead, but a BMW was killing me. I hit 3rd gear and tried to go around him but I just *couldn't*. Finally, we hit a turn. The adrenaline in my body shot to my foot and I stomped on the pedal, went into 5th gear and passed him. I was second in my class at this point.

“Hey, Marc is coming up on you,” Mitch urged. Marc was a driver for Courage and was good at what he did. I was going 150mph and was still coming. Luckily, he got behind someone and was trapped. I hit the pits and let Stephan take over for a while.

Hour fourteen: I was driving and felt pretty good, other than being tired and achy. It was 10:00pm, and I was holding myself in first place for my class. “Hey Mitch,” I said. “We have a big problem.”

“Oh lord, what?” he asked.

“It involves number two.”

“What do you mean? You’re in fir...oh dear,” he said. “YOU JUST PASSED THE PITS!”

“You gotta go when you gotta go.”

“Okay, whatever... just speed through,” he said. I finally got to the pit, ate some pizza and waited for my next shift. 10 hours left, power through.

Hour seventeen was *hard*. The other cars were gone, all DNF’s (did not finish). By 1:00 in the morning we were all tired; drivers were crashing from exhaustion. I was incredibly sore, but only seven hours left.

“TOM, WATCH OUT!” screamed Mitch on the coms. A Nissan swerved in front of me and crashed, smoke billowing out of the engine. I swerved left and skimmed the wall. I signaled to see if he was okay, but he was fine so I got moving quick. I kept driving and realized something was wrong...the shifter was weird. I stopped by the pits and let the mechanics see it. It wasn’t that bad but was certainly not good.

“Come on, guys,” I tried to rush them. Fifth place went shooting by. “COME ON!” I yelled. I saw sixth place’s headlights and the mechanics weren’t done. They finally finished and

Michele (a French driver) hopped in and took off to sixth place in total, second in our class. “I’m gonna catch some Z’s,” I said. I thought long and hard about the race, then fell asleep.

The last hour was 7:00am. I was taking my shift when Mitch said on the coms: “Hey Tom...”

“Yeah?” I replied.

“You’re gonna have to finish this,” he said. “Michele and Stephan are all worn out,”

“Okay, *laten we dit doen*.” I said. That means ‘let’s do this’ in Dutch.

Last minute, I was tied in laps with Anders. He was right behind me and the whole world was in slow motion. We went around the corner to the final stretch; it was a drag race. I hit sixth gear, put the pedal to the floor and hit the finish line a second earlier! I stepped out of the car and could hear the announcer. “And our 1997 Le Mans winner is Tom Kristen for his first Le Mans race.” The whole world was a blur. When I got out of the car my team was at the top of the podium.