

Peugeot whitewash at Spa

The trio of 306s was invincible in the 24 Hours, once a host of early challengers faded. By Dick Suter

Peugeot scored a one-two-three clean sweep in the Spa 24 Hours with its trio of importer-supported 306s. Frenchmen Emmanuel Collard and Anthony Beltoise combined with Belgian Frederic Bouvy to pilot the winning car, which finished one lap ahead of the sister machine of Thierry Tassin. Thierry van Dalen and Kurt Mollekens.

Formula 3000 racers Bas Leinders and Jeffrey van Hooydonk drove the third-placed 306 with Pascal Witmeur. It was a weekend of domination for the Kronos Motorsport-run team, which added the Belgian Procar Championship's blue-riband race to its 1998 title.

Bouvy, van Hooydonk and van Dalen took the opening stints and set a frenetic pace, matched only by the Renault Megane of Franck Lagorce.

The French ex-F3000 star had moved into the lead by the end of the first hour, but 60 minutes later he was out with a blown engine, the legacy of a missed gearchange.

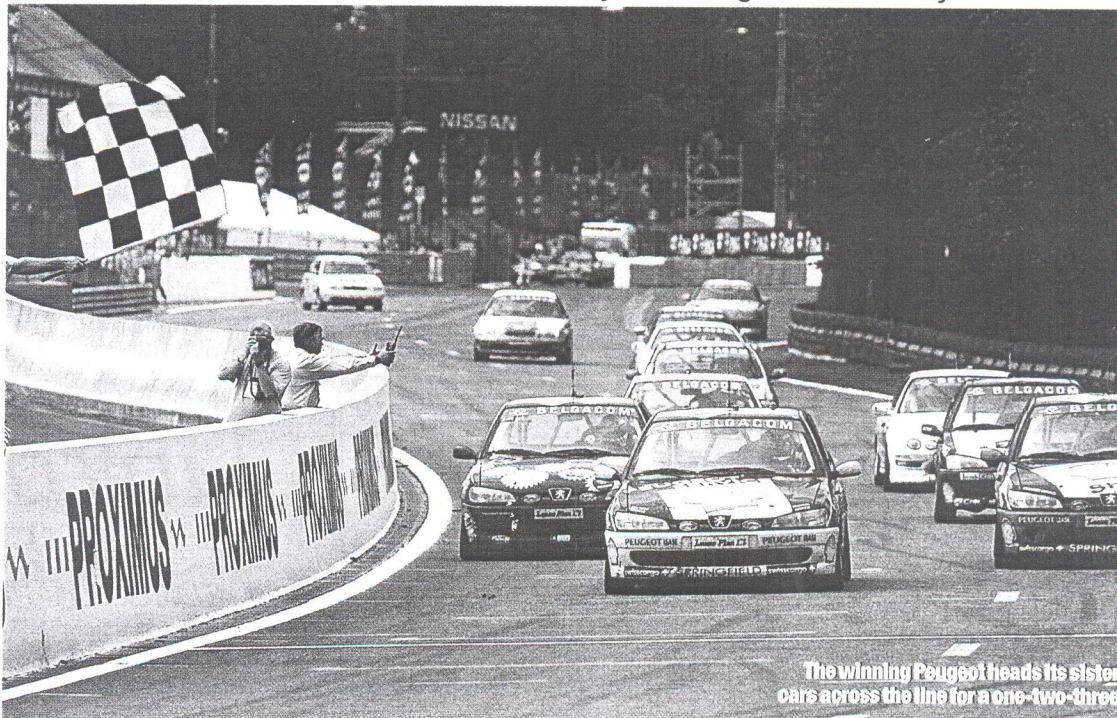
That wasn't the end of the Renault challenge. Vanina Ickx - daughter of Jacky - combined with Mathias Viaene and Martial Chouvel to maintain a constant presence in the top six, consistency rather than outright speed giving them fifth place in the final results.

They were beaten in the race for best non-Peugeot by the Nissan Primera of Dirk Schoysman, Guido Kenis and rally star Gregoire de Mevius, which took fourth.

The other Nissan was much faster, despite Didier Defourny only managing to drive one stint owing to heat exhaustion. Co-drivers Andersson and Alain Cudini never gave up the chase of the Peugeots, but they had to quit the battle at noon on Sunday when their gearbox failed with four hours to go.

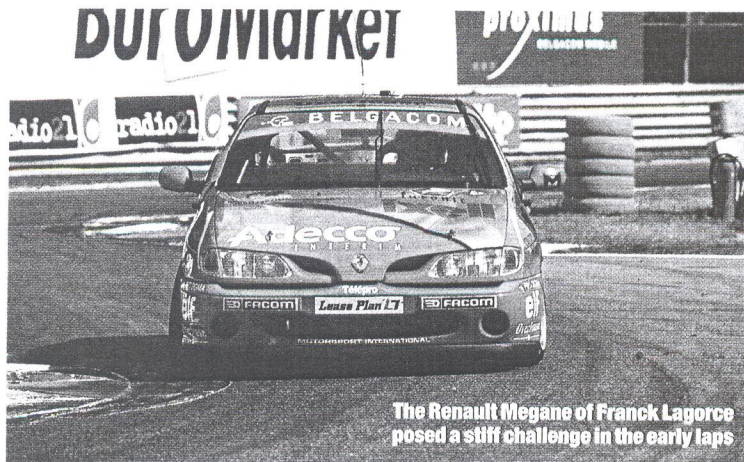
At least they got further than the leading challengers on Alfa Romeo and BMW. The LO Racing Alfa 156 only made it to the second lap before reigning Procar champion Sebastien Ugeux retired with a blown engine.

When F3000 ace David Saelens pitted one of the Rafanelli BMW 320is after one hour and 20

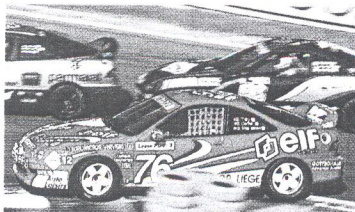


The winning Peugeot heads its sister cars across the line for a one-two-three

All photos: Simey/LAT



The Renault Megane of Franck Lagorce posed a stiff challenge in the early laps



Rally star Bruno Thiry was 19th home

minutes, he had to be pulled from the car because of a leaking fuel tank. Saelens spent some hours in the circuit medical centre receiving oxygen. The problem meant that team mates Tomas Enge and Jenson Button would not get to race.

The other Rafanelli car lasted little longer. Didier de Radigues completed his stint, but the normally-buoyant Belgian was afterwards feeling groggy from carbon monoxide inhalation. Vincent Vosse brought the entry in to retire half an hour later.

There was little luck for the Hondas, either, although at least the British-entered Fostech Integra squad got one car to the finish. Will Hoy, Jeff Allam and Simon Graves retired shortly before midnight with engine failure, but Tim Sugden, Mark Lemmer and Stephen Day made it home in 12th, despite losing oil earlier in the event.

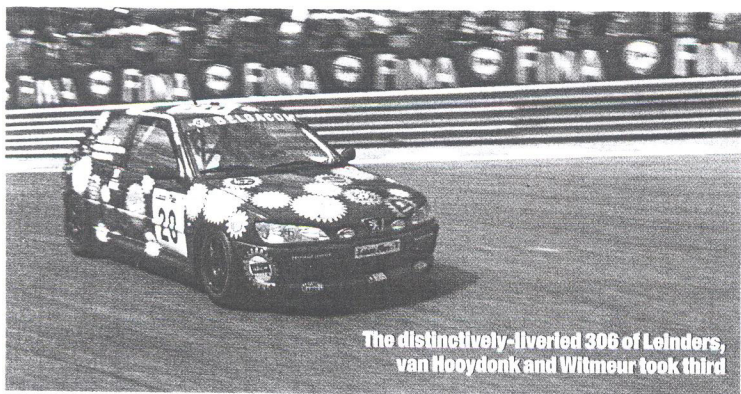
Top locals Stephane de Groodt and Frederic Moreau had their

Integra up with the leaders early on before overheating and fuel pump problems set in. They later retired with a damaged chassis. The ELR Honda Accord of Philippe Tollenare, Briton James Kaye and Philippe Favre succumbed to a broken cylinder head gasket on Saturday night.

The Peugeots, however, had only minor problems. The second-placed car twice suffered puncture early in the long four-mile lap, and was nearly pushed off once by Leinders in the third car when his brakes faded in Eau Rouge.

For Collard the result went some way to making up for his disappointment at Le Mans, where the Toyota he shared with Martin Brundle and Vincenzo Sospiri went out after a few hours. "The 306 can be compared to the Toyota," said the Frenchman, "because there's so little power, but the car was quite challenging to drive and the Spa circuit is the best."

Kronos boss Marc van Dalen, meanwhile, was just ecstatic: "This has to be one of the greatest days of my life," he beamed. ■



The distinctively-liveried 306 of Leinders, van Hooydonk and Witmeur took third

1 Frederic Bouvy/Emmanuel Collard/Anthony Beltoise (Peugeot 306), 24h02m35.032s, 88.55mph; 2 Thierry Tassin/Thierry van Dalen/Kurt Mollekens (Peugeot), 491 laps; 3 Bas Leinders/Jeffrey van Hooydonk/Pascal Witmeur (Peugeot), 488; 4 Dirk Schoysman/Guido Kenis/Gregoire de Mevius (Nissan Primera), 484; 5 Mathias Viaene/Martial Chouvel/Vanina Ickx (Renault Megane), 479; 6 Gianmaria Zenere/Beppe Gabbiani/Andy Bovensiepen (BMW 320i), 470; 7 Etienne Baugnee/Sylvie Delcours/D Chabaille (BMW), 462; 8 Marco Brand/G Matteuzzi/Luca Canni Ferrari (Honda Integra), 457; 9 A di Duca/W Haugg/D Coens (Honda), 455; 10 C d'Ansembourg/Ferdinand de Lesseps/Jay Cochran (BMW), 454. **Fastest lap** Tassin/van Dalen/Mollekens, 2m46.909s, 93.33mph.