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Kumho wins at 24 Hours of Le Mans

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, CA... Kumho Tires and Binnie Motorsports won the LMP2 class at the 75th running of the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the famous French endurance race that was held June 16 and 17. Binnie co-drivers Bill Binnie, Chris Buncombe and Allen Timpany combined to turn 317 laps, good for first in class and 18th overall in the 54-car field. The Binnie car covered 2681 miles during the race and did not experience any tire problems.

“Last year we achieved a podium finish in just our second trip to Le Mans,” said Rudy Consolacion, motorsports manager for Kumho Tire U.S.A. “We said then that we wanted to come back and be even more competitive and be at the front of the grid and at the top of the podium. We did just that, thanks to efforts by our people in Korea, the U.K. and the U.S.”

Consolacion pointed out that the tires used at Le Mans are the fruition of tires that were first developed for Kumho’s efforts in the American Le Mans Series in the U.S. “We’ve worked closely with R & D and race engineers in Korea developing our ALMS tires, and our motorsports engineers in the U.K. have further developed the tires by working with teams in the Le Mans Series in Europe. Less than three years ago we didn’t make tires for prototype sportscars, so we’ve come a long way in a short amount of time.

“Our guys in the U.K. started working this spring with Binnie Motorsports, who’ve had great success at Le Mans in recent years,” said Consolacion “The Binnie crew and drivers provided invaluable feedback during testing to help us further develop our tires, and they did a fantastic job during race week prepping the car and getting it to the front of the grid.”

This year Kumho brought four new tires to Le Mans, all developed with knowledge gained from competition in the U.S. and Europe and at Le Mans in 2005 and 2006. “We brought a new soft-compound qualifying tire, a medium compound tire, a hand-carved intermediate wet tire and a full wet tire,” noted Consolacion. “The weather conditions required us to use all four types of tires. This was our first extensive use of our wet weather tires, and they performed well considering how little we’ve tested them.

After starting the race third in the 11-car LMP2 class, Binnie’s Zytek-powered Lola moved up to second seven hours into the race, then took over the lead during the ninth hour. The team built a 22-lap lead as mechanical woes eliminated many of their rivals. Two hours of rain early in the race also played havoc with the field, causing spins and accidents.

The team maintained its lead throughout the race until heavy rain returned with two hours remaining. With a little over an hour to go, the team pitted for a driver change and pulled the car into the garage to dry out electrical components in the car’s open cockpit. Le Mans rules stipulate that a car must be running at the end of the race to be classified, so the Binnie team wanted to ensure that the torrential rain didn’t short circuit the chance for a win.

The car stayed in the garage for about 45 minutes before heading back out to take the checkered flag. Due to the time spent in the garage, the team dropped from 13th overall to 18th overall, but still finished with a 16-lap margin of victory in LMP2.

After the race, Consolacion said the enormity of Kumho’s accomplishment would make it difficult for him to sleep--even though he’d had little rest during the previous 36 hours. “This win is a huge, historic step for Kumho. We’re the first Korean tire company to win at Le Mans, and we beat Michelin and Dunlop in our class, which adds to the accomplishment. After last year’s race the other tire manufacturers knew we were coming. After this year’s race, they know we’re here.”

Notes: The victory was the second Le Mans class win for Binnie Motorsports. The team also won the LMP2 class in 2004, and finished second in 2006....Team owner Bill Binnie hails from New Hampshire, while his co-drivers are from the U.K. (Chris Buncombe) and France (Allen Timpany)...In spite of the wet weather conditions, more

than 250,000 people attended this year's 24 Hours of Le Mans...Speed TV broadcast over 17 hours of Le Mans coverage in the U.S.

Established in 1960, Kumho Tire Co., Inc., of Seoul, South Korea, had 2006 sales of \$1.9 billion. Kumho manufactures and distributes a complete line of tires for passenger cars, light trucks and heavy-duty trucks. Kumho has manufacturing facilities in Korea and China and operates technical centers in Birmingham, England, and Akron, Ohio. Founded in 1975 and headquartered in Rancho Cucamonga, CA, Kumho Tire U.S.A is the U.S. distribution arm of Kumho Tire Co. In addition to its 830,000 square foot headquarters and central distribution facility in Rancho Cucamonga, the company operates four additional distribution facilities in Atlanta, Chicago, Columbus and Dallas. For more information, visit the Kumho Web site at www.kumhotire.com.

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