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Leo Beebe

Leo Beebe got his start in the automobile business in the mid 1930s when he went to work at Ford, right out of high school, working on the assembly line. He was quickly convinced that the University of Michigan might provide the path to a more interesting career. By the time he graduated, in 1939, he had won six varsity letters and the Big Ten award for athletes who excelled scholastically.

After graduation, Beebe got a job teaching high school. He also served as coach for baseball, football, basketball and track. Soon after the United States entered World War II, he joined the Navy as a chief petty officer. He was soon assigned to a machinists, pipefitters and technicians training program in Dearborn. One of his responsibilities was second in command of the barracks he was living in. His immediate superior was an Ensign named Ford. Henry Ford. After the war, Ford hired Beebe to set up the company's employee recreation program. Beebe remained at Ford for the next twenty-eight years, handling a wide variety of diverse jobs and overseeing special programs that required a "troubleshooter." He was the last man on the Edsel payroll and played a key role in handling its termination. By the spring of 1962, he was car and truck marketing manager for Ford International, working out of an office in Brussels, Belgium.

In 1964, Beebe was offered the position of special vehicles manager at the Ford Division. Lee Iacocca described the position to him, saying it was primarily racing with a little public relations and promotional work thrown in. Beebe accepted and within ten days was sitting opposite Iacocca. His new supervisor outlined his responsibilities. They were, simply, to win Indianapolis with a Ford-powered championship car, to win Daytona with a Ford stock car and to win LeMans with a Ford designed and built prototype sports car. Also, he would have to win races leading up to these major events. Beebe had never seen an automobile race or a race car and did not know any of his assistants. After seeing the races for the first time, his thoughts were primarily how to get out of his new job.

One of the first things Beebe did was to attend LeMans in 1964. By 1964, Ford was rolling: it had a car of its own — a sleek, modern looking high-speed sports prototype that was the talk of the automotive world. Building the car turned out to be the easy part; more difficult was getting it into the winner's circle. Both were Beebe's responsibility. At LeMans in 1964, a team of three GT40s was entered and all three ultimately

retired with transmission failures — despite high top speeds, low practice times and the banner headlines they brought. Two weeks after LeMans, two cars were repaired and entered in the 12-hour race at Rheims, France. Both cars failed to finish due to mechanical problems. That race brought to a close the 1964 racing season and Beebe's work was cut out for him. Ford's reputation was on the line and all of the publicity that the cars had received didn't help.

It was decided that the 289 powered GT40s would be little more than interim vehicles. The 427 engine, in NASCAR form, would put out more than 500 horsepower all day long. But because it would take Ford more than the eight months remaining before the next LeMans race to complete a 427-powered GT40 model, the small block cars continued to be refined. It was decided to enter a pair of them at Nassau in December of 1964 to evaluate the progress that had been made in the past four months. Everyone, it seemed, was faster: Dan Gurney's Ford-powered Lotus 19B, McLaren's Olds-powered McLaren, two Chevy-powered Chaparrals and even Ken Miles in the experimental "Flip-Top" 427 Cobra. Both GT40s retired early with suspension failures — it was found that someone had forgotten to install large enough retaining washers when the front suspensions were reassembled.

Leo Levine describes what happened following Nassau in his book, "Ford: The Dust And The Glory."

"From the time Beebe took over the Special Vehicles Department in May, he had a habit of prefacing many of his remarks by saying 'I don't know anything about racing, but...' and then giving his opinion. Now he had seen enough, and late that afternoon, after the race had run itself out, he called a meeting in one of the local hotels.

"I don't know anything about racing," he started out, "but there is one thing that has become increasingly apparent to me in the past few months — you don't either!" A good deal of what he said after that was unprintable, but the gist of it was clear. Things were going to change."

And change they did. The Ford GT40 program was turned over to Carroll Shelby and just as quickly the cars started winning.

Today, Leo Beebe is the Dean of the Administrative Studies Division at Glassboro State College in Glassboro, New Jersey. SAAC member Fred Beall of Woodbury, New Jersey recently had the pleasure of sitting down with Mr. Beebe in the company of a tape recorder.



This interview is the result.

SAAC: Your job with the Ford Motor Company got especially interesting in 1964. Can you recall how you got to head the LeMans effort for Ford? What was your exact title and what did the job entail?

BEEBE: I was Special Vehicles Manager for the Ford Division of the Ford Motor Company. As Special Vehicles Manager, I had two basic responsibilities — one was to supervise the creation of specialized vehicles of a sporting or performance nature, such as the Shelby Mustang, Cobra and cars of that ilk. The second responsibility — and sort of the ultimate one — was to supervise, organize and manage the effort to take our products to the tracks to prove that they were superior performing vehicles. It was part of the Total Performance promotional program that Ford had launched back in the early 1960s. I went into it in the spring of 1964. The program had been going probably a year or two years before I got into it. My entry into it was interesting and maybe a little unusual. I was Director of Marketing for Ford in Europe at that time. I was calling on a dealer in Basel, Switzerland in late March or early April, 1964. And I got a telephone call from Lee Iacocca, who was then Vice President of the company and General Manager of the Ford Division and was pushing the Total Performance promotion, including the racing. He asked me how I would like to run the racing program for Ford. My response to that was that I had never seen a motor race and he said, "Well, that's alright, it's an organizational job." I, of course, accepted over the telephone and within a matter of ten days I liquidated my station in Brussels, where my office was, and came back to the States and went to work at the Ford Division as the manager of the Special Vehicles Division, in charge of the racing program.

SAAC: And, you no doubt began attending automobile races...

BEEBE: I remember the first one I went to — when I got on the job, in mid-April of 1964. It

was a stock car race in Charlotte, North Carolina, which, to be perfectly candid about it, scared the hell out of me. One time around the track and there was a big bang and a hell of an accident, a big spire of black smoke. That was the Fireball Roberts crash and he later died from that. And I was all upset about it. I'd been on the job for four days and I thought, "Is this what I've gotten into?" The next effort I recall was going, very shortly thereafter, to Indianapolis for my first exposure there. And, of course, that was a bit of a holocaust, too, because there was a crash at the end of the first lap. There was a big smash-up against the wall and against one another and I forget how many cars were involved in that — I think maybe as many as eleven. And three of our guys — the guys were sponsoring as far as providing power to — were killed. And that was a very shocking and a very sad thing. I still didn't know much about motor racing; I had just gotten there and had just gotten into the game. I went into Lee Iacocca's office on Monday morning following the race and said "Good morning, Lee" or something like that and he didn't even bother to say "Good morning." He just looked up at me and said, "Fix it, goddammit." That was probably the clearest, most effective management communication I've ever heard in my life. He took two words and made them into one — "Fixit." Not saying more than that, he knew I would understand, and of course I did. I did an about-face and went out of his office without any other exchange of words. I went off to London and got together with Colin Chapman and Jimmy Clark and put together a whole new arrangement for racing. I insisted that they run Firestone tires. It was stupid that they ran those Dunlop tires in a race where, for years back, Firestone tires had always been on the winners. So why take a chance on a new tire — which they were doing? It shredded and it was disastrous. Anyway, we made a deal there and I even got a portable typewriter from Colin Chapman's office and sat down and typed out a little agreement contract and had him and Jimmy sign it right there. And we started the program and in 1965 we did win the race [the Indianapolis 500] with Jimmy. We also had a good showing with Ford power in the other vehicles.

SAAC: LeMans was right after Indianapolis. No doubt you were there in 1964?

BEEBE: I went to LeMans for the first time in 1964 and I was a babe in the woods. It was June as I recall, and I hadn't had anything to do with the preparing of the cars. We had done well in the time trials and all that; we broke all the records and attracted a lot of headlines. You know — "our cars would fly" and all that sort of stuff. It turned out almost counter productive because we looked pretty bad once the race got going. I guess none of our cars — none of the ones we expected to do well — even finished in the prototype class.

SAAC: So, when you began as Special Vehicles Manager, the Ford GT program had al-

"Gentlemen, this is a victory meeting. We start this instant to plan our victory next year."

ready been in motion...

BEEBE: Oh yes. It was rolling. We went to London and John Wyer was putting cars together. A few. The powerplant, of course, was being built in Dearborn [the 255 cubic-inch "Indianapolis" engine, based on the 221-260-289 small block — ed.]. The assumption, then, was that the problem was a bad transmission [the Colotti]. They couldn't get the power to the ground. The race had been going three or four hours and everybody began to have trouble. Then, one after another, they just popped and they broke. The assumption was that the transmissions were the problem. I remember, I had no engineering background — I had a hell of a good staff; people who had



In the 1964 LeMans race, all three Ford GT40s were sidelined when their Colotti transaxles failed. Richie Ginther, pictured here, led for the first hour and ran second until he went out at dusk. Phil Hill, in another GT40, set the lap record during the race of 3 minutes 49.2 seconds, 131.375 MPH before his retirement.

lots of engineering — Roy Lunn was a good engineer, John Cowley was a good practical engineer, Jacques Passino was an excellent strategist — so my approach was always to ask a lot of questions. And, after the 1964 LeMans race, I asked how they knew that the problem was the gearbox? How do you know that the car would have performed had the gearbox not broken? Well, it turned out that the assumption that the gearbox was "a" problem obviously was easy to make. But it turned out that it wasn't "the" problem. We found that out in 1965.

SAAC: So the GT40 program really didn't begin to reflect your presence until 1965?

BEEBE: I guess you could say I was responsible for 1965. I was not really responsible for

1964, although I was there as the head of it. But in 1965, I couldn't have any alibis. In 1965, we again repeated all of the glories, the pre-race glories, of 1964. We went like a bat out of hell in the time trials and got all of the headlines and everybody was saying "It looks like Ford's going to do it this time." Well, we went out there and ran like gangbusters for four or five hours but the little Ferraris — they ran like little red taxi cabs. Again as nightfall came — by ten o'clock — we began to have trouble. Our engines started to heat up and our heads started to pop. And it wasn't the gearboxes this time, it was the engines.

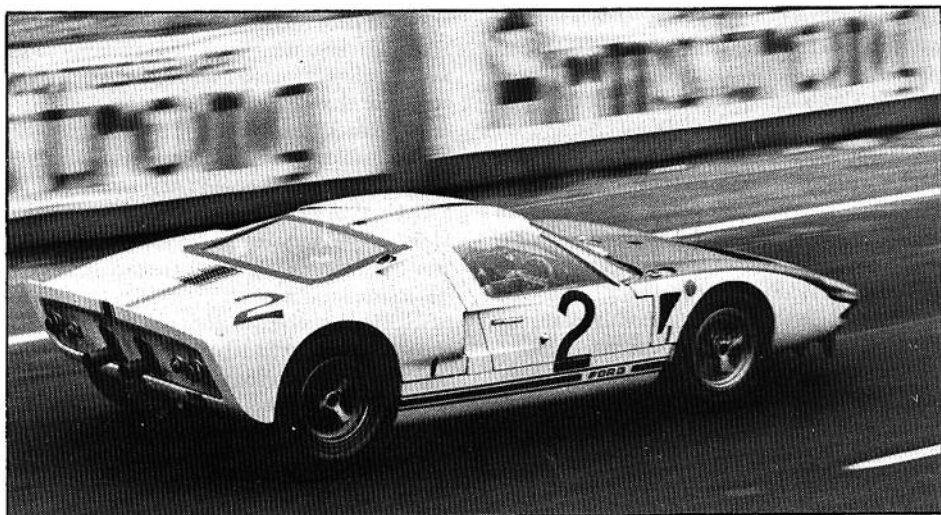
SAAC: But prior to LeMans, the GT40s had been successful at Daytona and Sebring...

BEEBE: Yes, there had been successes in the United States which led us to believe that maybe we had it this time. But there were problems and the cars dropped out. We got together — I remember a classic incident, a memorable incident. Everybody was beaten and tired and had been up all night — some of them for several nights, which is usually the case in preparing for a race. I got the key people together, including Shelby, John Cowley, Jacques Passino — sort of our chief strategist, Phil Remington...we all got together. I said "Let's all meet right after the race at the hotel" — a little hotel in LeMans. We all got together in the room — here these guys are sitting around, all of us dragging, work clothes on and some of them greasy-faced, and pretty dispirited because we had put a lot into that thing. And we were losers. And I've always remembered the thing I said to that group. I said, "Gentlemen, this is a victory meeting. We start this instant to plan our victory next year." And we really did. In that room, still in our dirty clothes, tired, bedraggled and dispirited, we concluded saying that we'd gone in with the wrong purpose; thinking that it was a speed race when in fact it was an endurance race. If you don't know what kind of a game you're playing, you may play the wrong game — and that's exactly what we did. The emphasis on our earlier LeMans efforts were on speed instead of endurance. So we started with the simplest question: "What average speed for 24 hours would it take to win this race?" Then we went back up from there and everything we would do from that moment forward would be aimed at achieving the average speed we figured we would need to go to win that race.

SAAC: Was that a job for the computers back in Dearborn?

BEEBE: To some extent. First of all, it was a job of simple research. What were the speeds at which the race had been won in prior years? History. That's the first thing we looked at. We talked about that at the table. The key

figure in that part of it was Roy Lunn. He was an engineering guy and he had a lot to do with the design of the product. And he also had done some research and study, and I think that he had said — and I'm not sure because this is from memory; he either said it or we arrived at a consensus there — and Shelby knew a lot about it, too; he was a big contributor in this part of it. He was a big contributor in the whole effort; there's no question about that. But we concluded that an average speed of 134 miles an hour for 24 hours would win. But we said "We better not settle for that; we better tack a little something on there so we'll be sure." So, I think we came out with something like 137, give or take a mile or two. And it was that simple. The next thing we said was "If we don't have the powerplant now to do the job we probably don't have time to create a new one between now and the following year's race." That's a new, original engine from the drawing board up. "What's the best, most durable powerplant (and we used the word "durable" because we now recognized we were in an endurance race — not a speed race)?" After all, 137 miles per hour is not all that fast. We got so we could go up to 250 down that back stretch. So 137 wasn't that fast. Only if you had to do it all day. Average it. So I remember asking the question, "What's the most reliable powerplant in the Ford Motor Company today?" And I wouldn't have known because that's not my background. And I remember that the consensus — and again, I don't remember who responded; maybe John Cowley or somebody who knew the inside of Ford Engineering — said "It's the 427." The big, iron 427 Ford engine. And they said this engine will stroke along, you know, hell — at 6500 RPM it just chugs along, stays cool and will never break. I said "Why don't we use that engine?" and we talked about that. The objection to using the 427, of course, was that it was as heavy as hell. Traditionally the race had been won by these high-rev little European jobs that would go around there like a sewing machine and take you through the turns fast because they were light cars and so on. So we were facing the prospect that if we were using a big, heavy engine, we'd have to have a big, heavy car with all of the accoutrements that go with it. And we'd be lumbering out there. And we said, "Well, why not? There's a long back stretch — what is it, three and a half miles long? — and it would go like a bat out of hell down there. We may lose a little time in the turns but we can pick it up every time on the straight." And so we developed our program in that way and we discovered very quickly that we would have to create a whole new car. The GT40 the way it was wasn't going to work because with its suspension, wheels and tires and all of that, it would never sustain the heavier engine which would, in turn, require a heavier gearbox and the whole bit. So we went back to the wind tunnel and almost back to the drawing board to create a whole new car with heavier suspension, a whole new gearbox and the works.



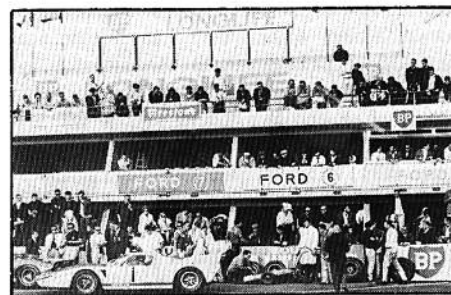
During practice for the 1965 LeMans 24-Hour, Phil Hill, driving a 427-powered GT40, turned a lap of 3 minutes 33 seconds, 142.25 MPH — more than 5 seconds faster than the quickest Ferrari. His time unleashed panic in the Ferrari pits. Before his car went out with clutch failure Hill set a lap record during the race of 3 minutes 37.5 seconds, 139.25 MPH.

SAAC: So the result of this meeting in the hotel room at LeMans right after the 1965 race was, essentially, the birth of the Mk II.

BEEBE: That's right. We went ahead on that basis and we came out with a big car. I almost said "clunker" but you know, it wasn't a clunker.

SAAC: After the 1965 race, you couldn't have been looking forward to going back to Dearborn to face Henry Ford and the rest of your superiors.

BEEBE: I made a presentation to the Ford, kind of a policy committee — Henry Ford and the top officials. There was, of course, great disappointment. We went back and took our medicine. We admitted our problems and there were really no big reprimands or anything. Our management kept cool heads. What they were interested in was "How do we turn this around and do it right, since we have so much invested and our reputation is at stake?" Nobody cowered either on the team or in management. I must say that the management reaction was very positive and very realistic. Obviously, nobody was cheery. We stepped up and took our blame and put our knuckles out to be rapped and we really didn't get them rapped. The key thing was, "Ok — what's your program? How are you going to fix it?" Well, we did have a program. We had it before we took a shower; we didn't have the details but we had a broad outline and the basic strategy before we took a shower from the loss. Then we began to pull our program together, built around the Mk II, the big 427



Ken Miles, teamed with Bruce McLaren, drove the other 427-powered GT40. Miles ran first for the opening two hours of the race but later retired with a blown transmission.

engine, the big transmission to go with it and so on. We went and taped the track — literally duplicated the track at our dynamometer at our engineering center in Dearborn. You could go down there and you could put engines and gears in there and if you stood with your back to it and didn't look, you'd think you were at LeMans. And we'd run those things and run them and break them...and fix them and run them and break them...and fix them and run them.

SAAC: Didn't Henry Ford take a great deal in interest in the GT40 LeMans program?

BEEBE: Yes. One day I got a call from Charlie Patterson who was Executive Vice President of the company and the number two man — we used to call him "Engine Charlie" because he was an engine and powertrain man. He came over to lunch with us one day and cornered me and said "Mr. Ford wants to

"Mr. Ford wants to win LeMans so bad he can taste it. You tell us what needs to be done with those powertrains. If necessary, we'll gold-plate every one of them!"

win LeMans so bad he can taste it. You tell us what needs to be done with those powertrains. If necessary, we'll gold-plate every one of them!" That's the kind of cooperation we got out of the management of Ford.

SAAC: Wasn't anyone worried about the cost of the program?

BEEBE: I remember going to meet with Henry Ford. Ed Lundy was in charge of Finance and I think Iacocca was there. Lee had gotten promoted to Vice President. And Don Frey came into the picture. Don became my direct boss. He was a great racing/performance guy and a good boss. A very good one. He had an engineering background and understood the product side and he also understood strategy when he was out at the track. He was a key character, as was Bill Innes. Bill was Vice President for a major part of our manufacturing. I've forgotten the details — engine and power group, probably — but Bill was a big factor. He spent a lot of time at the track, involved in the time trials and testing and product development and engine development — the whole thing. There were a lot of company resources, human effort and management effort put behind things. It was almost like a college football team and there was a lot of spirit. We had everything but the pep rally — and we damn near had that! I remember sitting in a meeting with the top guys and Ed Lundy said "Can't you stop spending money on this program?" And I told him that I didn't know how. Nobody's invented the way to win LeMans that I know of. There's no book on it and there's nobody in America that ever won it and I have to test this stuff. And of course we'd test it and break it and then we'd have to replace it and that cost a lot of money. We were doing that at Daytona and we were doing it on our own dynamometers. But we did get the stuff run in so it would work. The only problem was that we created such a heavy car that when it would go down the back stretch and come to the end it had to stop, virtually, to make the corner. And the brakes would get hot and the metal would crumble. So we had brakes crumbling. We scrambled around trying to find alloys and we went to people like Bendix and Kelsey Hayes and various suppliers that were in the brake business to see if they could come up with a compound or some kind of metal that would withstand the heat. They didn't in 1965 and at Daytona, when we were testing cars, I was standing with John Cowley in the wee hours of the morning, getting ready for the 1966 race. It looked to me as though those disc brakes could almost be screwed on and off. So I asked John if we could come up with a nut and bolt arrangement where we could just screw them on and off and then, frankly, just take a hell of a lot of discs to the race and let them break. But work out the timing so you knew about when they were going to start crumbling and replace them frequently. You'd lose some time on pit stops but we tried it. We did it that way and the race that we won, in 1966, we really used a kind of a blacksmith approach on the brakes; we

changed them like hotcakes. It was expensive and time consuming but we were otherwise so well prepared that we could spare the time to bring the cars in to change the brakes. Ultimately, after I left the program, we solved the brake problem. We got a brake that would operate despite the heat.

SAAC: We recall that before the 1966 LeMans race, Henry Ford gave you some kind of a note instructing you to win the race. Can you tell us about that?

BEEBE: I received a copy of a letter from Henry Ford. He had been invited to be an honorary judge or something at the track by the French officials. He wrote a letter back accepting their invitation and sent me a copy of it. And he wrote a note, in longhand, at the bottom which I've always carried. I took the note off of the letter and had it reproduced on the back of a 1966 LeMans race poster and I gave every member of the team a copy. It became our motto. All it said was "You better win," and it was signed "HFII." I've carried it all these years. And when we did win, I had a picture taken with Henry Ford and I was holding this note up.



Beebe holds the "You better win - HFII" note before the start of the 1966 LeMans race. His boss, Don Frey, is on the left; HFII on his right.

SAAC: Didn't you threaten to pull the entire Ford team out of the race the day before after an argument with the officials?

BEEBE: The incident was with Dick Thompson, the dentist. In the trials the day before, the test running and so on, he did something that the committee deemed was wrong. To this day I don't know what he did — he ran off the track or something — but they thought it was serious. [During an evening practice, Thompson, in a GT40, came up behind another GT40 — a reserve car driven by Dick Holquist. Holquist, with almost no experience in cars like the GT40 or on tracks like LeMans, suddenly cut from one side of a corner entrance to the other right in Thompson's path. He was moving about 20

MPH slower than Thompson and all Thompson could do was ram him in the rear, sending him flying. The car was destroyed and Holquist was injured. By the time Thompson had his car back under control, he was about 400 yards from the pit entrance so he pulled in, reported the accident to a pit marshall and had the mechanics check his car. It received only fiberglass damage to the right front corner. A few minutes later, Thompson was informed that he had acted in an unsportsmanlike manner in not stopping at the accident scene and again for not reporting the accident when he came into the pits. Both he and the car were disqualified.] I got the word that he was disqualified. Well, that upset me and I said I wanted to go and talk with that committee [that runs the event]. So, a bunch of us went trailing down there — I had an interpreter — and we met with them in the official office. Somebody explained to me what Thompson had done wrong and I said "Well, that doesn't sound very wrong to me." I said that if they took him and the car out of the race, I would pull the whole Ford team out of the race tomorrow. It was quite a gamble and I didn't even know whether I had the authority to be honest about it. I hadn't consulted with anybody — I was using my own judgement and frankly, it was a ploy to get that car reinstated. As I recall the incident, they offered a compromise. They would leave the car in but pull the driver. And I wouldn't give in on that, either. I was being stubborn. It was my posture, so to speak. I didn't have an opportunity to consult; I didn't think there was enough time to engage in consulting about it. If I had said, for example, to the committee, "Well, I'm going to have to go and talk to our people about this" — and I could have gone to Don Frey who might have decided the way I did or who might have said "You better talk to Henry Ford" or whatever. I felt that if we took even that much time, it would have been taken as an indicator of weakness — relatively speaking — whereas, if I responded promptly, rigorously and positively it would be read as strength and determination and it apparently turned out that that's the way it was read. They did reinstate the car and the driver.

SAAC: Ford was able to gather a lot of headlines at LeMans. Did you find the French people receptive to the Americans?

BEEBE: On the whole, they were. I think everybody likes a winner when you get right down to it. People respect power and we had power — I think we demonstrated that. Ferrari had won the race previously and they were the traditional winners, so I don't think

"I said that if they took him and the car [Dick Thompson and his GT40] out of the [1966 LeMans] race, I would pull the whole Ford team out of the race tomorrow. It was quite a gamble..."

anyone felt terribly sorry for them. Had we been going there on even terms — we had won some and they had won some — I could imagine that there would be a lot of sympathy for Ferrari, being a small outfit. But since they dominated it, I suppose the prospect of somebody else coming in there and doing something could be refreshing.

SAAC: Did the team drivers like the GT40? Did they participate in making suggestions to improve the cars?

BEEBE: Oh yes — they would drive the cars and we would make adjustments and do things to the cars based on suggestions they would make.

SAAC: Do you remember any drivers as being the most outstanding as development drivers?

BEEBE: I thought Ken Miles was a good development driver. I thought Dan Gurney was also excellent. Dan is a very thoughtful guy and not just gung ho. He was a good driver and I think that A.J. Foyt had some good ideas, although I don't think that endurance racing was really his specialty — although he managed to win. That was in 1967, after I had left the program.

SAAC: Who took over for you after you left?

BEEBE: Jacques Passino. He was a very important person in that project when I was there and before I was there. He was a great strategist, very intelligent; a sharp thinking individual. I didn't do very much myself without checking with Jacques. I was a bit of a pusher, of course, taking chances and all that but I was pretty careful to filter all the movements that had anything to do with racing strategy or cars or anything of that kind through Jacques because I respected his judgement very much. He was a key figure.

SAAC: How do you recall the 1966 LeMans race?

BEEBE: We entered nine cars in 1966. We had very thoroughly tested them and we felt that if we didn't have any accidents we had a good chance to win. And we did win. The major concern that we had left was accidents because that can happen to anyone with the rain and so on. And then the drivers sometimes get a little, well, like anyone they're competitive; they want to win. And we were concerned as the race went along, it was evident that we would win if we didn't break. We could just run away from them in the back stretch. We'd lose a little time in the turns that came just before the approach to the front of the track but we'd gain it back and then some. And we were in good shape. The pit operation was very good. We had good managers — John Holman, Alan Mann and, of course, Carroll Shelby and his group. Shelby was kind of helping with the whole operation. We had excellent drivers — there was no question about that; we had the world's greatest drivers. So, it was a matter of being careful and not knocking one another off. And we did have some concern about that as it came up toward the climax. We thought Ken Miles was a little "spirited." He was running pretty fast. He wanted to win. And so far as I was

concerned, it didn't make any difference to me who won. I wanted Ford to win. This wasn't a case of personal aggrandizement. But we did discipline Ken a little bit. We called him in and held him back a little and, in effect, we did manage the race so that Bruce McLaren and Ken could finish even. Not because we had any preference for them [McLaren and co-driver Chris Amon] at all, but they were being more careful. Then, of course, we were out ahead so far, in addition to wanting to be careful — a little bit of showmanship at the end; "Let's line them up as they come over the finish together." And we managed that.

SAAC: Was that your decision alone, or did you consult with someone else?

BEEBE: The way I operated, I'm sure — I don't recall clearly but I'm sure I would have consulted with the others. Don Frey and I were very close. He was the boss, running the race program but he didn't crowd me. In the nature of the things I would always ask their advice because I respected their intelligence and judgement and their knowledge of the game. And of course, Jacques Passino would make the decisions and implement them. I'm sure it was probably a team consensus although I probably got either the blame or the credit for managing the result. Well, it didn't concern me that I managed it so a foreigner would win versus an American and all that kind of stuff. Ken was an American, although of English background. I loved Ken Miles dearly. I thought he was a great character and of course, he was a great racer. There never was a better one. So there wasn't much of that in it at all. It was purely pragmatic. Ken wanted to play a little and we felt he was endangering our chances of winning — including his own. So, we pulled him in and slowed him down. We had to.

SAAC: Who actually selected the drivers for each team?

BEEBE: The team managers — John Holman, Alan Mann and Carroll Shelby — all certainly had a voice in the selection. The way we did it was that they would recommend and we would recommend and we'd talk back and forth and match up people and so forth. It wasn't as simple as each of them having an independent operation where they would get their team and run it all by themselves. It wasn't that way. There was cooperation at the top all the way. We would talk with Carroll about who the best drivers were. I think Carroll was our principal advisor on that and he was our principal outside advisor on race strategy and on things of that kind. But, operationally, once those decisions were made, each team would run its own show. But we did have an overall racing strategy. We didn't want a Shelby/Remington team competing with a Holman team competing with an Alan Mann team. That would make no sense — we would just be knocking ourselves out. We had a fairly substantial expenditure involved as well as our reputation.

SAAC: Has anybody ever calculated exactly what that total expenditure was?

BEEBE: I don't know that there was ever any bookkeeping done to indicate exactly what would have been spent, race by race or even sector by sector. I think it probably could have been done; we knew, of course, what our racing budget, overall, was. I guess we never chose to reveal what it was by account category.

SAAC: The figure of twenty million dollars is often used. Was that close?

BEEBE: That would be high. As a matter of fact, I have the budget right here. This is it — "Ford Division Program of Racing and Related Activities for the Model Year 1967," presentation to the Ford Motor Company Operating Policy Committee, July 26, 1966. That was after we won. It says here (I'm kind of proud of this presentation because I wrote it myself), "The purpose of this presentation is to review Ford Division racing and related activities and to recommend a program for the model year 1967 to begin in September. Winning LeMans and both World Championships for Endurance Racing, Ford this year has come full circle on an unprecedented four-year program to demonstrate superior engineering and vehicle performance capabilities. Conceived in 1963 as the proof-positive part of a broad-gauged Total Performance advertising and promotional product campaign, the Ford Racing Program has been costly but has delivered handsomely on its promises. The sagging youth and performance image of the early 1960s has been polished to high luster and sales have seldom been better. Competition in the automotive market is more than a sales race and the fact that Ford stands first today in motor racing and second in sales, closing rapidly on the leader, is no mere coincidence. Performance on the track contributes immeasurably to pre-eminence in the public mind and on the public highway. And the benefits from racing in terms of company and customer morale are a big bonus." That was a little of our philosophy. Then we went into the results of the four-year program because we were in all kinds of racing. And I had slides on a screen to illustrate what we were into — because we were into everything: drags, stocks, road races. "In June of this year, the last and the loftiest of the original Total Performance Ford objectives was attained. Sweeping Daytona, Sebring and LeMans, demolishing the perennial favorite, Ferrari, and the Chevrolet-backed Chaparral, Ford won the World Championship for both production and prototype sports cars." [In 1965, Shelby American had won the World Manufacturer's Championship for Grand Touring cars; in 1966 Ford won the production championship with the 289 powered GT40s, of which at least 50 had to have been made, and the prototype sports car championship with the Mk IIs.] I have the budgets here but I won't give out the exact figures because that would be inappropriate. But I have 1963, 1964, 1965 and 1966 and there is no 20 million dollars. Nowhere near 20 million dollars. Now, how much in the way of expenses were incurred indirectly that could



Beebe attended the official opening of Shelby American's airport facility on June 3, 1965. He is pictured here with Shelby and Ray Geddes. Those are Shelby American press kits in his hand.

not be or were never drawn together and counted as "racing money," I have no idea and I don't think that anyone could even guess at that. The average for four years, 1963 through 1966, is below 10 million per year. That includes stock cars, drag, Indianapolis championship racing, rallies, economy runs, sports cars (including LeMans) and anything associated with the whole racing program — including administration. And when you think of the kind of value you got for that money, it's cheap advertising and promotion. How could you buy that kind of stuff? You can't.

SAAC: There are stories about Henry Ford's extravagance and entertaining at LeMans — inviting large numbers of people to attend the race at his expense, entertaining them at the race and providing them with accommodations. Did that take place?

BEEBE: I didn't see any particular evidence of that. Of course, don't get me wrong — I wasn't in the habit of buddying around with Henry Ford. I reported to him through several other people. I knew him — and know him — and I don't know of any big celebration attending LeMans. We did have a get-together at the track. We were in a second floor room and we had some cocktails and hors d'oeuvres — I don't even think we had dinner. I don't even know who paid for it. I don't think Henry Ford did; it might have been the company. He was there, but if he did anything like that, entertaining and all, it was highly personal.

SAAC: If you could go back and do it all again, what would you do differently?

"There's no way you could not like Carroll Shelby. He's a winner."

BEEBE: I'd try to get smarter, faster. [laughs] You go to a race to win. I could not have made, really, any difference in the early, 1964 races because I was too new. I had just gotten there. I couldn't affect the personnel; obviously couldn't affect the machinery; knew nothing about the strategies to speak of. But, you know, maybe if I had been smart enough I could have gotten hold of a 1965 LeMans win and won in 1965, 1966 and 1967.

SAAC: What was your fondest memory of those days? Does any one thing stand out?

BEEBE: I think LeMans. LeMans was a hell of a mountain for us to climb, even though we did have resources. It was quite a job to get that all together. It was an organizational job; there were an awful lot of people involved. A lot of dynamics and strategies; working with lots and lots of people, worldwide. I think it did an awful lot of good for the company. It was very satisfying.

SAAC: Do you recall your most memorable individual?

BEEBE: That's hard to say. I don't know that there was a "most" memorable; there are memorable individuals for different reasons. In Championship racing, Jimmy Clark. For sheer, out and out competence. He was like an extension of the car. If the car stood up,



Shelby and Beebe confer at LeMans, 1966. The third time was a charm.

Jimmy would be there — cool, competent and collected. He was a terribly fine human being. I loved him and couldn't believe he was killed. I'm awfully glad that, well, I'd have felt pretty bad if that would have happened at a race that I talked him into. [After running in four LeMans events in the late '50s-early '60's, Clark refused to race there, citing the dangers of wide speed differentials between cars and wide skill differentials between drivers.]

SAAC: What was your impression of Carroll Shelby?

BEEBE: Shelby is a very memorable character in all of this, for all kinds of reasons. He's an excellent strategist; lots of savvy; very personable — there's no way you could not

like Carroll Shelby. He's a winner. I frankly, don't even know what kind of a race driver he was. I never saw him race. All the time we were involved, he just kind of put things together. I liked him. He had a nice, easy way, a winning way. You put Carroll Shelby together with Jacques Passino and you had the best of all worlds. Between them they had enough brains to figure anything out. I felt that Carroll was a "people man." I didn't think he was a machinery guy or a product guy at all. Not saying that he didn't know product. But my instincts and observations were that he was not the detailist. Carroll was more of a "people guy;" get the right guy, put him in the right place at the right time and let him go. And that's quite a talent. He had some good people. He must have picked Phil Remington — and Phil was a real pillar in that operation. I had a high respect for Carroll. I enjoyed working with him. I guess I would say that I enjoyed the experience with Carroll as much as anything in the whole activity.

SAAC: Do you still communicate with Lee Iacocca?

BEEBE: No, not on a regular basis. I know him, of course. The last time I wrote him a letter it involved the "Fix it" speech. And he wrote back that he was still trying to "fix it." He was working like hell trying to "fix it."