

# Black Tiger at Le Mans



Patrick O'Connor



# **Black Tiger at Le Mans**

by Patrick O'Connor

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press

## Also by Leonard Wibberley

### Treegate Series

*John Treegate's Musket*

*Peter Treegate's War*

*Sea Captain from Salem*

*Treegate's Raiders*

*Leopard's Prey*

*Red Pawns*

*The Last Battle*

The King's Beard

The Secret of the Hawk

Deadman's Cave

Flint's Island

Little League Family

The Crime of Martin Coverly

As Patrick O'Connor

### The Black Tiger Series

*The Black Tiger*

*Mexican Road Race*

*Black Tiger at Le Mans*

*Black Tiger at Bonneville*

*Black Tiger at Indianapolis*

*A Car Called Camellia*

*The Lost Harpooner*

*Flight of the Peacock*

*The Watermelon Mystery*

*Gunpowder for Washington*

*The Five-Dollar Watch Mystery*

*Treasure at Twenty Fathoms*

*The Raising of the Dubhe (sequel to Treasure at Twenty Fathoms)*

*Seawind from Hawaii*

*South Swell*

*Beyond Hawaii*

As Christopher Webb

Matt Tyler's Chronicle  
Mark Toyman's Inheritance  
The River of Pee Dee Jack  
The Quest of the Otter

Print book originally published by  
Ives Washburn, Inc., 1958  
eBook formatting © 2015 Bethlehem Books

All Rights Reserved

152 pages in the print book edition

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press  
10194 Garfield Street South  
Bathgate, ND 58216  
[www.bethlehembooks.com](http://www.bethlehembooks.com)

## **Acknowledgments**

I am indebted once again to my friend Bill Dredge for technical advice in the writing of this book, and I would further like to thank Ken Miles, veteran both of Sebring and Le Mans, for the time he spent describing these events and their rules to me.

Neither of these excellent gentlemen is to be blamed for any errors that appear in this book. They should, on the other hand, be credited with great help in ensuring accuracy.

THE AUTHOR

# Contents

Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	7
Chapter Three	13
Chapter Four	19
Chapter Five	24
Chapter Six	30
Chapter Seven	39
Chapter Eight	45
Chapter Nine	53
Chapter Ten	60
Chapter Eleven	66
Chapter Twelve	73
Chapter Thirteen	79
Chapter Fourteen	84
Chapter Fifteen	93
Chapter Sixteen	98
Chapter Seventeen	104
Chapter Eighteen	112
About the Author	121

# Chapter One

WOODY HARTFORD sat in a comfortable chair in the living room of his modern house, two blocks from the ocean in Hermosa Beach, California, and considered all the remarkable things that had happened to him in the past four years.

Four years ago he had been seventeen, working as a part-time mechanic in the service station of his friend Worm McNess and figuring how, out of wages of thirty dollars a week, to buy a four-carburetor manifold for his hot rod, Cindy Lou.

Now he was married, the owner of his own house, a partner in the Black Tiger Car Sales Company, Incorporated, and with better than average earnings. He owned all his household furniture, as well as his own car—an Italian Black Tiger Mark II, handled by his company. He felt he could look forward to a life without financial worries. All this had come to him as a result of a short and brilliant career as a sports-car driver. He'd driven the original Black Tiger successfully on the California tracks, and, backed by an eccentric oilman, had driven the Black Tiger Mark II to victory in the Mexican Road Race. This had brought big prize money, a partnership in the Black Tiger Car Sales Company, and his present prosperity.

“I must be about the luckiest guy in the United States of America,” Woody said to himself. “From grease monkey to businessman in four not-so-easy lessons. Sure was a lot of fun.”

He looked idly at his hands and noted that his nails were clean and that the lines of his hands were not etched with black carbon as they had been in his days as a mechanic in Worm's old garage. He had on a pair of well-made shoes and was wearing expensive slacks which his wife, Mary Jane, had insisted on his buying.

“You're a businessman now, Woody,” Mary Jane said, “and you've got to look well to impress the customers.” Woody had never cared much about clothes and he didn't like the slacks. He felt as though they owned him; that he had to be careful how he moved so as not to offend them. The creases down the front were thin and severe and seemed to caution him constantly to be careful how he sat down. Woody thought of the old overalls he used to wear in Worm's service station. They'd been really comfortable.

He could sit on the floor of the garage or lie on his back in them. He could put pliers and wrenches in the pockets and he could fish a pencil out of the top pocket without hesitating because his fingers were covered with crankcase oil.

“If they’ve got me dressed up like this when I’m making this much a year,” said Woody, “they’ll put me in a tuxedo and stand me in a tailor’s window when I’m making a few thousand more.” He added, “Hope I never do make it.”

On the mantel over the fieldstone fireplace of the living room were some of the cups Woody had won driving. There was a tiny one for the under 1,500 cc event at Hansom Dam—that was the first cup Woody had won and it was his favorite. In the center stood a big cup and a plaque or shield from the Mexican Road Race. He recalled that race when he’d driven the last thousand miles or more with a broken rib, the result of spinning out with a flat tire after crossing the finish line in the Mexico City leg. He’d had a bruise on the palm of his right hand as big as a tennis ball from jamming the gearshift backward and forward. The sweat had worn the skin from between his fingers when he crossed the finish line at Juarez. But he’d won by three seconds. He’d taken a long, hard look at death, and defied it. And he’d come through by skill and courage.

“Oh, well,” said Woody, “that’s all over. No more driving. Mary Jane doesn’t want me to drive and Mary Jane’s my wife. She’s right, too. Dead husbands are no good to wives. Married men have no right on road-race tracks. I’ve retired. I’m twenty-one, and I’ve retired. I got out while I still had a whole skin, and now I’ve got the right to walk around in fancy slacks, keep my hands clean, and leave racing to the single guys.”

But he didn’t feel very satisfied when he said this.

It was Saturday evening, and Mary Jane had been out shopping. She returned now and Woody went out to help her with her parcels. She had a quantity of them—groceries and some light boxes and one or two packages wrapped with thin, expensive paper. Every time Woody saw Mary Jane he felt as he had the first time he’d ever seen her. She had a kind of grace and freshness that made him wonder why she’d picked him for a husband. She could have had any one of a score of better-looking guys than he was and with better prospects at the time, but she’d stuck with

Woody all through the mechanic days and through the road-racing days. When Woody thought of this, he was ashamed that he had allowed himself to entertain such bitter thoughts while waiting for her to return home.

“I’ve got a surprise for you,” said Mary Jane, neatly getting out of the car. “Guess what?”

“Another pair of slacks?” said Woody before he could stop himself.

“No. I ordered some more slacks—you’re to go down Monday for a fitting. But that’s not it. You’ll never guess. This is something you’ll really like.”

“Can’t guess,” said Woody, and he took a load of parcels and carried them into the house. He put them on the dining-room table—limed oak, surrounded by heavy limed-oak chairs with seats upholstered in clean greens and reds and grays. Mary Jane took a square parcel and ripped off the expensive wrapping.

“Close your eyes,” she said, and Woody obeyed.

“Now you can open them,” said Mary Jane.

Woody opened his eyes and saw a set of expensive drinking glasses laid out on the table. Each had an excellent reproduction of a sports car enameled on the side. There was a Mercedes Benz SL, a D-Jaguar, a Ferrari-Mexico, an MGA, and a Lancia. With the enameled picture of the car were the engine specifications, brake, horsepower, and so on.

“Gee,” said Woody, picking up one of the glasses. “They’re swell.”

“There’s one with the Black Tiger Mark II,” said Mary Jane, picking it up. “I saw them in the window of that store on the corner of Pier Avenue and I knew I just had to get them for you.”

“They’re wonderful,” Woody said. “Just about everybody ought to have a set of these.”

“I knew you’d like them,” said Mary Jane. “And I got a nice new table lamp for the living room. It had been marked down, and some chintz curtain material for the spare bedroom. It’s the prettiest design. Wait until you see it.”

Woody tried to say something enthusiastic about the chintz curtain material although in this area of domestic life he was completely at sea. But Mary Jane didn’t seem to mind. She was completely happy.

“Dad and Mom have asked us over to dinner next Saturday,” she said. “So don’t go and forget about it and then say, at the last moment, that it’s the first you’ve heard of it.”

“We can’t go next weekend,” said Woody in dismay. “That’s the weekend of the Santa Barbara Race. Worm and I have got to be there to help Peters, who’s driving the Mark II . . .”

“But I thought it was agreed that Peters would take two men from the shop for his pit crew and you’d be free. You’ve attended every race in which the Mark II has been driven and that’s taken up nearly every weekend for the past three months.”

“You don’t understand, honey,” said Woody. “I can’t leave it to two men from the shop. They’re good mechanics and everything else, but the Mark II is just another car to them. And Peters needs a little advice. We haven’t been doing too well with the Mark II in the last couple of races. As a matter of fact, we placed second and then fourth. We’ve got to have a win, and there’s a new entry from England—the Jaguar Super-Super-Sport—that’s really going to give the Black Tiger some competition. We can’t live on our old triumphs with the Black Tiger. We’ve got to keep right up there in front. I get too many customers who come in and talk Mercedes and Jags to me when I’m trying to sell them Black Tigers, and I don’t like it.”

“Woody Hartford,” said Mary Jane, “you’re just making excuses. Mom and Dad will be hurt if we’re not there for dinner—we’ve put them off twice already. And I think you can miss this one race without any damage. Worm can go with Babs if he wants to. But I want you for one weekend to myself.”

“Okay,” Woody said. He looked at the drinking glasses with the pictures of the sports cars on them. He didn’t like them any more. They seemed to mock him. They brought him about as near as he was ever going to come to racing again—drinking out of a glass with the picture of a sports car on it. He started out of the room.

“Where are you going?” Mary Jane asked.

“Down to look at the Mark II,” said Woody. “Timing’s off.”

“Can’t you get it fixed at the shop?”

“Yes,” said Woody. “I could get it fixed at the shop. Peters could fix it wearing his nice white smock as if he were a doctor and listening to the engine with a stethoscope. But it so happens I can fix it myself and that’s what I want to do.”