

Waving the flags and so much more – The marshals

Little is known to many visitors about the marshals at Le Mans and their work, although there wouldn't be any race at all without them. Marshalling is a hobby done by volunteers with a passion for motor sport. These men and women spend their free time and their own money to train in the many aspects of marshalling. They act as flag marshals, chief track marshals, pit lane marshals and there are many other roles. Their skills are crucial for the success of a race, because an exciting race can be destroyed by bad marshalling but it can also be made better and safer by good work from the marshals, even saving a driver's life. The set of skills which is required is large and the willingness to attend trainings on a regular basis is an important prerequisite. Training covers fire fighting, flagging, observing, radio communication and many other topics.



There are many types of jobs to be done at any race meeting, and Le Mans is no different. The one thing which is noticeable is that, obviously, officials can't be working for the whole 24 hours race plus the support event on the Saturday morning etc, so there would be enough for a minimum of 2 shifts, and the number is amazing, when you consider that the British Grand Prix at it's height required approximately 1500 people for the weekend (that's ALL jobs) so imagine how many for a circuit 3 times the size and a race meeting 4 times the length.

Some of the roles performed by the officials are:

Course/Flag/Observer, these are effectively the Race Directors 'ground troops'. These three will work together on a post, the Course Marshal is the

one you'll see going out to an incident and working trackside, and reporting back to the Observer, who will report to Race Control what has happened. This is rather basic, as the Flaggie will be there waving the Blue, and reacting to what is required at that moment.

Pits, these Marshals will observe and report on all pit lane behavior and stops. To do that requires a knowledge of the rules and regulations, no mean feat when you consider that they need eyes everywhere and will need to react quickly, nimble feet are needed in the lane to see all, but avoid being in the way.

From the information flowing into Race Control from all the Marshal's post's it is then up to the Control room people to filter out any important information that the Race Director may need to know and act upon, for example the release of the Safety Car (there are 2 or 3 around the track) who will be informed where the Race leader is and will try to pick him up (sometimes easier said) and if the leader is mired in the SC pack, when to 'release' the cars between the SC and leader. To do that, the SC that has the Race Leader behind will 'wave by' any cars between him and the Leader, these cars will then proceed to the tail of the next queue. Once the cars are ordered, everyone is happy, the SC's will pull off, Green Flag will be shown to the Race Lead at the start line, and racing will re-commence

Following are the flags you'll see over the race weekend and their meaning.



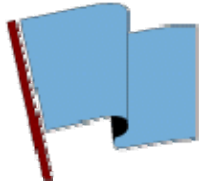
Red flags can only be waived upon instruction of the race director. When a race or a practice session is "red flagged" it is stopped due to some condition that has made the track unraceable. Typical conditions are accidents, weather problems or surface problems like too much oil or debris on the track. As soon as a red flag is shown, drivers must slow down and either stop or come back to the pits, overtaking is not permitted.



The green flag is quite similar to green traffic light and simply means "Go!". It can be waved by the starter to indicate the beginning of a race or practice session. Most typically it will be waived after a caution to tell the drivers that the race has been restarted and to indicate that the racetrack is clear of any obstacles or debris.



The yellow / red flag is commonly known as the "oil flag", this flag indicates that there is a problem with, or change in, the surface ahead, like oil or water on the track.



The blue flag indicates to the driver that there is a quicker car following and about to pass him:

- When held motionless, this is an indication to a driver that there is a faster car following closely behind, but not yet close enough for a pass.
- A waved blue flag indicates that the driver is about to be overtaken and should take care to permit the following vehicle a safe pass.



The black flag generally means that there has been an infraction of the rules and the driver, to whom that flag is shown must bring the car to the pits. It is usually displayed along with a pit board listing the driver's car number



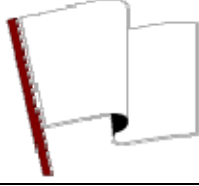
Without doubt the best know race flag, it is waved for all cars to indicate the finish of the race or a practice session.



Last warning to a driver before a black flag is shown to him, similar to the yellow card in football. It is usually displayed along with a pit board listing the driver's car number.



Black with an orange circle: information to a driver that his/her vehicle has a problem and that a pit stop must be made, is usually displayed along with a pit board listing the driver's car number.



Slow Vehicle on the track ahead, be it a car limping back to the pits, or during a caution period it could mean there is a breakdown truck on the track



Not a flag, it's a board which will be shown together with the yellow flag to inform the drivers that a safety car is on the track
