

Sebring 1964: Back in the glory days of Sebring, the circuit was mostly a barren wasteland for close to 51 weeks a year. Because Alec Ulmann couldn't own the track due to it being on airport grounds, he wasn't willing to put a lot of money into permanent structures. He relied on sponsors to build different parts of the circuit, from the Martini-Rossi bridge to the four Triumph observation towers to the Jaguar control tower. When it came to the actual track, there were some improvements over the years, including repaving some of the asphalt sections, but not much in improving safety. Sebring had been lucky. Our 1st fatality happened in 1957 when Bob Goldich rolled his Arnolt Bristol Bolide in the Esses. Edwin Lawrence died in practice near the hairpin in 1959 and Jim Hughes died at the hairpin as well, running off course and hitting a photographer, George Thompson, killing both men in 1960. In comparison to the tragedy at LeMans in 1955, we had been extremely lucky! Fast forward to 1964 – we were still using haybales to cover the base of telephone poles, concrete markers, bridge abutments, etc. Our pits were separated from the hot track with haybales too! Up until 1964, we had been lucky. Coming up on the last hour of the race, the #55 Alfa Romeo 1600TZ, with Consalvo Sanesi driving, was in trouble. The Alfa had just finished its last lap averaging 23mph, about as slow as you could go in a race! The Alfa was having mechanical issues along with his lights barely working. Right behind him was the #11 Ford Cobra, being driven by Bob Johnson, and he was racing to win the GT category. He averaged almost 91mph on the previous lap. Johnson moved along the far-right hand side near the start/finish line, hoping to read his pit boards in the near darkness...Sebring had very little lighting even along the pits. He didn't see Sanesi barely moving and crashed into the back of the Alfa at full speed. The Alfa had pitted 1 lap prior and was fully loaded with fuel! The Alfa burst into flames and Sanesi was trapped. Jocko Maggiasco just happened to be in the pits that day...he had raced at Sebring the previous 2 years but didn't have a ride in 1964. He was a spectator who knew that Sanesi would be dead in seconds if someone didn't risk their life to save him. Maggiasco jumped over the pit wall and ran to the Alfa and pulled Sanesi out of the burning car! Both men were burned, Sanesi severely. Both drivers survived the fire and Maggiasco would earn honors for his heroics that day! Even with the crash 1 hour before the race ended, the #11 Cobra finished 10th overall. The #10 Cobra Daytona Coupe would win the GT category, and the rest is history. Sebring had lucked out again. Before the 1965 race, a small block wall would be built to separate the pits from the track. At least one part of the track would have a little bit of "safety" added but the haybales would still be used in other areas of the circuit. Sebring's "luck" would run out in 1966. I've attached a few photos showing the cars before the wreck and a few more blurry shots from the aftermath.

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