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By 1929, Renault had thirty subsidiaries and was selling in 49 countries. However, this was the year of the stock exchange crashes which sent a shock wave around the world, putting millions out of work and, in part, fostering the political climate that allowed Hitler to come to power in Germany four years later.

By 1935, France had 500,000 unemployed, causing a drop in demand for cars. As his other markets were suffering from worldwide recession, Renault was forced to reduce his workforce and the number of hours it worked. Many strikes followed and, by the end of 1938, Renault's employees were even occupying his factories, leading to violent interventions, mass arrests, and many dismissals.

World War 2 was not a good time for the Renault company, and nearly brought about its end. For Louis personally it was a disaster also, as he was charged with collaboration, leading to incarceration in the notorious former Nazi-controlled Fresnes prison close to Paris. It was there, under suspicious circumstances, that he became ill and was taken to the St-Jean-de-Dieu Hospital in the rue Oudinot (Paris). He died on 24 October 1944.

His factory was nationalized after the war, and Pierre Lefaucheux, an engineer and member of the French Resistance, was placed in control of the new company, La Régie Nationale des Usines Renault. A born leader, Lefaucheux was ordered by the new government to make trucks, but also managed to obtain permission to manufacture a few private cars. Lefaucheux introduced the famous 4CV, which was displayed at the first post-war Salon.

By 1954, Renault employed more than 50,000 people and sold in over 1000 outlets worldwide. Unfortunately, Lefaucheux died in a car accident in 1955 and his place was taken by Pierre Dreyfus, who set about improving social cohesion within Renault, signing the first company agreement with the trade unions, and introducing more paid leave and a pension scheme.

“In 1956, Jean Hébert was to break the world land speed record for turbine-powered cars at 192mph (307kph) with the Renault prototype ‘Étoile Filante’ and a Turbomeca turbine.”

Motor sport, too, had begun to lift its head after the class victories in the Mille Miglia with the 4CV in the early fifties. In 1956, Jean Hébert was to break the world land speed record
Renault immediately enforced an embargo on its use in anything other than the Alpine sports cars, as it was also becoming more involved with Jean Rédélé’s Alpine company in Dieppe.

Renault also decided it did not want to get involved in the R8 1300 Gordini that Amédée had created, as it had done with support for the R8 1100 and the Dauphine prior to that. However, in spite of their differences of opinion, Gordini needed Renault, and his team continued its work for Renault, though, given the pleasurable experience of the early years, he was, perhaps, a little less enthusiastic than before.

Gordini’s staff had continued to grow, and by 1969 some forty people were employed in various capacities. ‘Pépère’ ('Grandpa,' the employees’ affectionate nickname for Amédée) and Marc Bande, one of his technicians, had astutely employed a number of young engineers who went on to great careers. François Castaing, who was to come to the fore a few years later, first appeared to work in boulevard Victor, prior to his military service. The young Jean-Pierre Boudy also started at Gordini after meeting Marc Bande, and, in the design office, the two enriched the group of engineers working alongside Giuseppe Albarea.

It is interesting to hear from future director, François Castaing, at this point: “In my last year at the Paris Industrial University, after having begun in Aix-en-Provence, I was
Note the huge airbox; it was directly in front of the rear wing!

A change of engine for comparative tests (the 2-litre).

Fine adjustments.

The 1500.
they would cause an understeer which would become greater as the race progressed. With softer tyres, I could control the wear of my front left tyre by saving it in the early stages of the race. If I could do that, it should be in perfect condition for the second half." Renault and Michelin technicians knew better than to contradict him ... “

The cars still had some turbo lag, even with twin turbos, so it couldn’t be taken for granted that they would get off to a good start. For the Ferraris it was the opposite: they could be virtually guaranteed to start fast. At the green light Villeneuve slipped his Ferrari between the Renals, towing along in his slipstream his team-mate Scheckter. Arnoux found himself surrounded on all sides, but Jabouille managed to limit his initial setback by getting between Villeneuve and Scheckter at the first corner. He and

“Arnoux caught up with the Ferrari on the 75th lap. So began a stunning duel during which both took considerable risks in their battle for 2nd place, attacking each other from all possible positions ...”
Nearly, but not quite! What came after

Tambay leads Warwick, who just got in the points.

Spa race statistics.

Brands Hatch race statistics.

Derek gives it his best shot, but fuel problems let him down. (© Bernard Asset)