One of the most successful teams in the American Le Mans Series history, Risi Competizione, finds itself in a familiar cycle—and may reach a key milepost here at Mid-Ohio.

Top international racing cars typically see a three-to seven-year lifecycle. It starts as the manufacturer designs and produces new cars. The cars are tested, developed and refined in competition, until a peak level of competitive performance is achieved. In later years, updates keep the car competitive.

The manufacturer then designs and produces a new car and repeats the cycle.

In 2011, Ferrari and its Risi Competizione and Extreme Speed Motorsports teams are in the early stages of the cycle with the exciting new Ferrari 458 Italia.

Top rivals Porsche, Corvette and BMW are racing fully developed cars, each introduced in the past three years and having worked through the new-car testing, development and teething issues that lead to consistent speed and reliability.

For the Houston-based Risi squad, the path is familiar ground.

When Risi introduced the Ferrari 430 GT in ALMS competition in March 2006 at the Twelve Hours of Sebring, it showed flashes of speed. Sure enough, Risi took the pole at two subsequent races.

At Salt Lake City, the fifth race of the 2006 season, the Risi’s 430 GT started from the rear of the field, took the lead midway through the first hour and claimed the victory.

They did it again at Portland, followed by wins at Mosport and Laguna Seca.

In 2007, the Risi team claimed nine poles and six race wins in 12 races to capture the ALMS team and manufacturer championships. It was the first major American series championship for Ferrari.

That set the stage for “The Red Streak,” in which Risi claimed victory at six straight major endurance races. It began with a victory at 2008 24 Hours of Le Mans and was followed by victories at 2008 Petit Le Mans; 2009 Sebring, Le Mans; and Petit Le Mans and another win at 2010 Sebring.

In 2011 the cycle has begun anew with the stunning 458 Italia against exceptionally strong competition. BMW reeled off victories at Sebring, Long Beach and Lime Rock to open the season.

Corvette Racing has wins at last season’s Petit Le Mans, the 2011 24 Hours of Le Mans and the recent Mosport ALMS.

Still, progress in the development of the new Ferrari is unmistakable. Drivers Jaime Melo and Toni Vilander have already scored the first major international win for the new 458 Italia, taking the Imola round of the Intercontinental Le Mans Cup.

They finished second in ALMS at Mosport after closing down a ten-second gap.

Historians may note that Mid-Ohio is the fifth race of the 2011 ALMS season.

A win here would match the Ferrari 430 GT cycle.
For Tommy Milner, the only American driver on the Corvette Racing factory squad, the 2011 running of the 24 Hours of Le Mans produced a career-defining, stand-and-deliver moment.

Sixteen hours in, the race was going well for Michigan-based Corvette Racing. The #74 car of Oliver Gavin, Jan Magnussen and Richard Westbrook was leading the GT class while the #73 car of Olivier Beretta, Milner and Antonio Garcia was placed third, one lap down.

A key part of the Corvette strategy was to gain time in the pits by triple-stinting its MICHELIN® tires, saving nearly 20 seconds on each tire change skipped. Triple-stinting GT tires was virtually unprecedented. The plan meant running nearly 350 miles on a single set of tires while delivering consistently aggressive lap times. Milner, three races into his first year with a Michelin technical partner team, had never driven a triple-stint.

First, Oliver Gavin in the #74 Corvette knocked off 41 laps of the 8.462-mile circuit, posting his fastest lap on the final circuit of his triple-stint to extend his race lead. Minutes later, disaster hit as co-driver Jan Magnussen clipped the kerbs and crashed, ending the race for the GT class-leading car.

The #73 Corvette was now in second place. There were, however, two serious problems; veteran lead driver Beretta was ill, and they were a full lap down to the GT class-leading Ferrari. Garcia and Milner needed to close the gap and pick up extra hours of seat time in Beretta’s absence.

As Milner prepared for his critical triple, Garcia headed into the final laps of his triple-stint by reeling off new fastest laps on each of his three final laps.

Veteran team leader Gary Pratt put a hand on his young driver’s shoulder and said, “You’ll be fine, Tommy. You are going to be just fine.”

Milner steadily gained ground and all seemed on schedule. Then it started to rain. Not just any rain, but spotty rain that makes every corner different on every lap. With the hours winding down and Milner closing on the lead Ferrari, he was going to need to deliver in the wet.

After putting the Corvette in the lead, Milner handed off to Garcia for the final 90 minutes. Milner looked around the team garage area, a bit overwhelmed by the scene.

Milner’s father, Tom, a veteran sports car team owner, manager and campaigner whose career included many wins, but none at Le Mans, was there. So was GM North America President Mark Reuss. The #74 crew and drivers joined the #73 crew as the anticipation grew.

At last, the checkered flag fell. The young driver was swept along to the GT podium as the celebration began. The American flag was raised and the Star Spangled Banner played for Corvette Racing. Tommy Milner stood a bit taller. In the biggest race of his life, he delivered.

Scan below to find out more about Corvette’s history at Le Mans.
They win major races and championships from Indianapolis to Le Mans. They work with top car manufacturers, sponsors, and premier drivers.

Their mobile phones carry the names and private numbers of billionaires, corporate heads, and owners of top restaurants.

Decked out in uniforms of fire-retardant armor reflecting current sponsors, not past campaigns, they perch atop their pit stands like so many tribal warlords.

The head-set fitted leaders of the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) teams oversee a multi-tiered battle at speed. In most sports, two teams compete head-to-head.

In the ALMS, you enter one of four classes but your cars race all at once. Keeping track of all that activity for each team, the cars, the track, the competition, and race officials, is the virtual field marshal, the chief, the master of all he or she surveys.

Their fiercest rivals take similar vantage points along the pit ribbon. Each is a thinker and a planner, with instincts honed at hundreds of races in scores of places.

It is their responsibility to provide the steadying hand, word of encouragement or timely kick in the seat to drivers, engineers, crew members, and support staff.

Corvette Racing’s Doug Fehan, Risi Competizione Ferrari’s Giuseppe Risi (pictured together), Falken Porsche’s Derrick Walker (pictured far left), and BMW Team RLL’s Bobby Rahal are well known to race fans.

Extreme Speed Motorsports Ferrari’s Derek Granison (pictured far right) and
Jaguar RSR’s Paul Gentilozzi (pictured above) are perhaps better known by their team’s cars and the drivers they seek to place atop the podium.

Some are team principals, while others are the hired guns entrusted with the multimillion-dollar investments of their manufacturer or team owner.

And they are no longer all men. Leena Gade, a 35-year-old British woman, was the technical and tactical leader for the winning Audi at the 2011 24 Hours of Le Mans. Each is armed with whatever bits of the latest firepower that the rules permit - everything from computer simulations to air conditioning and lights that draw less energy, longer wearing tires or zero viscosity oil developed and assessed in competition.

Racing is a team sport with crews and engineers playing a vital role. However, on the team radio there is a single voice calling the strategy, and woe unto the driver or crew chief who ignores that voice.

They celebrate victories great and small, share success, and use it as a springboard to encourage, teach, and raise the bar ever higher. Mistakes, defeat or challenges are used to rally and strengthen a team, to double its resolve and to prepare for the next step. No fingers are pointed. Voices are rarely raised.

Still, racing is a tough business and teams must constantly make difficult decisions.

Reprimands take place in private, and low-performers simply disappear. Racing is about winning.

Yet amidst the fury of the race, winning is not the only goal. Asked his top objective during the race, Extreme Speed Motorsports’ Derek Granison says simply, “I’m trying to keep our guys safe and out of harm’s way.”
I was hoping one day that our team would finish 1-2 but for it to happen in only our fourth race is really spectacular.

Jon Bennett, Owner/Driver, CORE autosport reflects on the team’s first 1-2 American Le Mans Series finish at Mosport in the LMPC class.

The Alley Quiz
Muscle Milk Aston Martin Racing’s Lucas Luhr is:
a. Preparing to hold-up a bank?
b. Ready for Halloween?c. Suiting up to win the Mosport race with co-driver Klaus Graf?

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Farewell to the Space Shuttle
When space shuttle Atlantis touched down for the last time, it again returned to earth safely on MICHELIN® tires.
The tires for the space shuttle undergo extreme conditions — from landing at speeds up to 288 mph to carrying loads as much as three times that of a Boeing 747 tire.
The tires weigh approximately 230 pounds and each tire takes approximately six hours to build.
The space shuttle takes six tires — four main-landing gear and two nose-landing gear tires — to land.
The shuttle tires are inflated up to 373 psi and use nitrogen, which best maintains pressure in varying altitudes and extreme temperatures.

The Home Field
Current GT class point’s leaders, BMW Team RLL, have a ‘Home Field’ advantage this weekend at Mid-Ohio. The team is headquartered in Hilliard, OH - approximately 60 miles away. Dirk Mueller and Joey Hand have delivered three victories this year and currently lead the driver’s championship.

Mid-Ohio Girl Power!
The first all-female driver pairing will take the ALMS starting grid this weekend at Mid-Ohio. Melanie Snow will join regular driver and team co-owner Andrea Robertson in Robertson Racing’s #40 Ford GT. Snow last competed in the ALMS in 2009 in the GT Challenge Class.

Five different manufacturers (Acura, Audi, Lola, Panoz, Porsche) have claimed overall victories in the nine ALMS races held at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course. With two ALMS victories under their belt this year, could Muscle Milk Aston Martin Racing up that total to six?

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The American Le Mans Series and ESPN have partnered together for a multi-year broadcast and digital package for ALMS events which involves televising the world’s premier sports car series over several ESPN programming and media platforms, including ABC, ESPN2 and ESPN3.com.

Live streamed coverage of the Mid-Ohio race can be viewed on ESPN3.com with a tape-delayed television coverage on ESPN2, Sunday, August 7 from 10:00 pm – 12:00 am (ET).

The full broadcast will be available on demand on ESPN3.com for three weeks and on AmericanLeMans.com after that.
Fan Favorites

A. Robertson/Snow
Murry/Lazzaro
Michelin
Robertson Racing, LLC
Ford GT MK 7

View below to view the Robertson Racing Ford in action at Le Mans

ASTON MARTIN

Graf/Luhr
Michelin
Muscle Milk Aston Martin Racing • AMR/ Lola
Coupe B08 62

MAZDA

Dyson/Smith
Dunlop
Al Masaood/Kane
Dyson Racing • Lola B09 86 Mazda

ORECA

Bennett/Montecalvo
Michelin
Jeannette/Gonzalez
CORE autosport • ORECA FLM09

CORVETTE

Beretta/Milner
Michelin
Gavin/Magnussen
Corvette Racing • Chevrolet Corvette C6 ZR1

ORECA

Jon Field/Clint Field
Michelin
Marcelli/Ducote
Genoa Racing • Oreca FLM09

PORSCHE

Holzer/Neiman
Michelin
Bergmeister/Long
Flying Lizard Motorsports • Porsche 911 GT3 RSR

FERRARI

Melo/Vilander
Michelin
Risi Competizione Ferrari F458 Italia

FERRARI

Sharp/van Overbeek
Michelin
Brown/Cozmo
Extreme Speed Motorsports • Ferrari F458 Italia

BMW

Auberlen/Werner
Dunlop
D. Müller/Hand
BMW Team RLL • BMW E92 M3

FORD

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MID-OHIO 2011

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