

Classic 911 cars take centre stage at Goodwood

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19/04/2023 To mark 75 years of motor racing at Goodwood, 75 years of Porsche sports cars and 60 years of the 911, a unique collection of historic racing cars hit the track at the 2023 Goodwood Members' Meeting.

The 80th staging of the Goodwood Members' Meeting once again had Porsche at its heart. In the brand's 75thyear, and with a nod to both the centenary of Le Mans and the 60th anniversary of the 911, last weekend's annual motorsport event saw another spectacular line-up of historic Porsche sports cars lapping the famous racetrack in southeast England.

A sunny spring Saturday

Some welcome spring sunshine over West Sussex on Saturday morning had dried the circuit just in time for the first of two days of nose-to-tail racing and high-speed demonstration runs, the highlight of which for many visitors would be a unique celebration of racing 911 cars from across the decades. Thanks to the efforts of Porsche Cars Great Britain, the team at Porsche Heritage and Museum and the team at Goodwood itself, some 19 cars spanning three decades of racing had assembled for this unprecedented parade, creating a colourful chronology of works and customer cars that revealed the diverse history of the 911 in its many competitive guises.

Large crowds were drawn to the paddock all weekend, enjoying such rare sights as the Martini-liveried 911 Carrera 2.8 RSR that, due to its experimental 'Mary Stuart' rear wing, was obliged to compete in the prototype class during the 1973 season of the World Sportscar Championship. 50 years ago, with Gijs van Lennep and Herbert Müller at the helm, this car was driven to an historic win at the Targa Florio and an equally remarkable fourth overall at Le Mans, on the coattails of the V12 Matra and Ferrari prototypes.

The following year, Porsche increased capacity in its race-honed flat-six and three examples of the imposing 1974 911 RSR 3.0 were present at Goodwood, sharing the limelight with the Museum's unmistakable 911 RSR Turbo, which Van Lennep and Müller drove to second overall at Le Mans that year.

Many iterations of the Porsche 911

Rule changes in sports car racing would, by 1976, allow for dramatic modifications to the 911 and for the remainder of the decade sports car racing would be synonymous with the Porsche 935. This highly evolved, be-winged and turbocharged evolution of the Porsche's evergreen air-cooled GT would bring countless victories to the factory and its customers. The four privateer examples at Goodwood, each an important part of Porsche's rich racing legacy, flanked another of the Museum's most reliable crowd pleasers, the fearsomely powerful longtail 935/78 better known as Moby Dick.

Further veterans of Porsche's long history at Le Mans were visible in the 993-generation of 911 that was campaigned by customers throughout the second half of the 1990s. Four 911 (993) GT2 R versions were again the perfect support act for the last of the Museum's exhibits for Goodwood in 2023: the 911 GT1 '98. This technological tour de force gave Porsche its record-breaking 16th win at Le Mans in 1998, 25 years ago. Danish Le Mans legend Tom Kristensen, who won the first of his nine victories with the Joest Porsche WSC-95 in 1997, led the field in the GT1 '98.

No stranger to the 911, nor to taking the chequered flag for Porsche at Le Mans, former factory driver Neel Jani was one of the guest drivers invited to take part in the Porsche parade. Behind the wheel of Moby Dick, the Swiss driver who hustled the 919 Hybrid to its second overall victory at the 24 Hours in

2016, was delighted to have been a part of such a special occasion and overawed by his first experience of the 935/78's 845 PS.

“This is still the 911 with most horsepower ever built,” says the 2016 WEC Drivers' Champion, “and you really feel it when that turbo kicks in. You have to make sure it's in the correct gear and keep the revs up, and when the power arrives it's surprisingly smooth. But it's also never-ending! Hats off to the guys who drove that flat-out at Le Mans.”

Some 35 years older than the 919 Hybrid in which Jani took pole position and the overall win at Le Mans, the 935/78 was an eye-opening experience for the former works driver. “It's a different physical effort to the 919. You're muscling this car around and having to make sure you get the gears right and don't over-rev it, which is easy to do. When the boost comes in you have to shift so quick. But it was a fantastic experience,” he adds. “Goodwood is the perfect environment to drive older cars and see what racing drivers had to cope with in the past. You really get to grab the car by the scruff of the neck and drive it!”

Thanks to more than half a century of continuous competition, allied with peerless performance and reliability, the 911 in all its forms can lay claim to being the single most successful GT car to have turned a wheel in anger. And moments like the 80th Goodwood Members' Meeting serve as an invaluable reminder, to drivers and spectators alike, of the sheer breadth of that racing lineage and the passion and enthusiasm that continues for a car that has been winning races for well over half a century.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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