

„Porsche is part of Le Mans"

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04/06/2014 As Member of the Executive Board, Research and Development, Wolfgang Hatz is responsible for the Porsche factory involvement in Le Mans. An interview.

Mr Hatz, when and why did Porsche decide to return to the top class of the sports car World Endurance Championship (WEC) and Le Mans?

Wolfgang Hatz: "This was in 2011. We were and still are well positioned in the GT category, but it is time for the brand to re-enter at the elite level. The options for this are easily understandable. There is Formula 1, and there is the WEC with Le Mans. An essential criteria for the decision was the desire to establish the project at Porsche itself, so the expertise would be developed and remain in-house. The World Endurance Championship including Le Mans suits us best, it is a real team sport. This is especially true of the team of drivers. But we also needed to create the infrastructure for this first: new buildings, a team of 230 people, every other one of which is an engineer."

Did the historical connection to Le Mans also play a role?

"Porsche is part of Le Mans, and Le Mans is part of Porsche. They fit together. Nevertheless, no one makes these kind of investments due to nostalgia; they have to pay off in the future. As far as I can remember, there was never a regulation that gave the engineers so much freedom and required so much innovation. The obligation towards producing a hybrid and the efficiency formula represent revolutionary challenges. I am proud that our engineers ventured the furthest of any. Ultimately, Porsche customers will benefit from this."

Can you explain this in laymen's terms?

"Our combustion engine is the finest and most efficient engine ever developed by Porsche. This compact two litre, four cylinder, turbo engine with direct fuel injection and a performance of over 500 PS drives the rear axle. It is the smallest engine with the least number of cylinders in the top category of the race. Our engineers also combined a fundamentally new exhaust gas energy recovery system with this engine. No one else has that. We store the energy recovered from the otherwise unproductive flow of escaping exhaust gasses in a battery. We store energy, which we generate during braking on the front axle in the same battery. When the driver retrieves energy from this reservoir comprised of the latest type of battery cells, several hundred horsepower drive the front axle. During this phase, the driver has a powerful all-wheel drive at his disposal. Our car is the only one in the field which converts energy that would otherwise simply be wasted and makes it useable, not only when braking, but also when accelerating. This represents an immense potential for future road sports cars."

Are the efficiency regulations not to the detriment of racing itself?

"Not at all; the races at Silverstone and Spa-Francorchamps have demonstrated this. The prototypes have plenty of power available; whether this is from the internal combustion engine or electrical does not matter. They must use all of the energy on each lap, otherwise it is a waste. Nothing can be saved here. These endurance races are sprints over incredible distances."

The World Championships comprises eight races, but the focus is on Le Mans. When would the factory involvement be considered a success?

"It would be terrific, if the GT team could build on the success of the previous year. However, that is literally more difficult because we had to add weight in accordance with the regulations. Porsche Team Manthey headed by Hartmut Kristen has extensive experience, which may make the decisive difference at Le Mans. The situation is completely different in the case of the Porsche team headed by Fritz Enzinger in the LMP1 class: We have no experience there at all. 2014 is a year of learning. Not admitting that would mean miscalculating Le Mans. At Spa-Francorchamps, the Porsche 919 Hybrid impressively demonstrated that the necessary speed is there with pole position and the fastest race lap. Our competitors know we are a force to be reckoned with. However, the 919 Hybrid has not yet covered the complete Le Mans distance in racing conditions. In this respect, it would be a success if one LMP1 finishes the event. Succeeding with both would be fabulous."

At Silverstone, we saw you emotionally applauding the podium place in the overall standings in the pouring rain. Isn't that the high demand Porsche imposes on itself?

"That was a great moment of joy. But I am not losing sight of reality over this. We were not top-notch at Silverstone. We also benefited from the competition's problems. But we did complete the first six-hour race with this extremely complex car and a team that has never competed before at a circuit. All the processes, especially under chaotic weather conditions, worked very well for the debut. And everyone worked extremely hard for this. The drivers showed their enormous skills but also a lot of discipline. The podium was a great experience for all of us. And we had a one-two in the GT class. The picture we saw on Sunday in England was terrific."

Where will you be watching the 24 hour race from?

"I will be on duty and will not be a spectator. Of course, I spend most of the time in the pit. I attend every race and was at the tracks for almost all the tests. Mostly, by the way, by the side of Matthias Müller, Chairman of the Executive Board, and that will also be the case on June 14/15. Come, what may."

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