

Porsche Penske Motorsport experiences difficult 24 Hours of Le Mans

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11/06/2023 The best Porsche 963 concluded the 2023 Le Mans 24 Hours in ninth place. In a very close and intense battle over long stretches at the 100th anniversary of the long-distance classic, the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team was struck with misfortune. In the GTE-Am category, the Porsche 911 RSR fielded by the customer team GR Racing claimed the third podium spot.

Witnessed by 325,000 spectators, the four Porsche 963 racers stepped into the limelight in the starting phase. In changing conditions with sunshine and occasional heavy rain showers, the No. 5 and No. 75 entries from Porsche Penske Motorsport spent time in the lead, as did the “Mighty 38” campaigned by Hertz Team Jota. However, tyre damage, technical defects and accidents threw all

Porsche racing cars down the field in the top Hypercar class. The three works drivers Dane Cameron from the USA, Frédéric Makowiecki from France and Michael Christensen from Denmark secured ninth place overall at the wheel of the No. 5 car and were ultimately the best-placed Porsche crew. The trio's vehicle spent more than 20 minutes in the pits during the night for repairs on the cooling system, which threw them out of contention for overall laurels. On the last lap, Christensen virtually had to carry his car over the finish line due to a defective drive train.

As darkness fell on Saturday evening, it was Porsche Penske Motorsport's third 963 that turned heads in the fierce battle between the 16 hypercar vehicles. Shared by works drivers Nick Tandy (United Kingdom), Felipe Nasr (Brazil) and Mathieu Jaminet (France), the hybrid racer led the field for many laps. To honour the anniversary of Porsche sports cars, the car flew the starting number 75. However, bad luck hit late in the evening at 10:44 pm: Jaminet rolled to a stop on the track without power. A lack of fuel pressure made it impossible to continue – heralding an early end for this team.

In the early morning, it was the No. 6 car that finally flew the banner for Porsche in the fight for the podium. However, André Lotterer (Germany), Kévin Estre (France) and Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium ended up off the track several times with their Porsche 963 and even crashed into the barriers twice. Repairs in the pits took over 40 minutes. Subsequently, the crew lost another half an hour when the hybrid battery had to be changed. The No. 6 entry crossed the finish line in eleventh place, 22 laps behind the winners.

"Le Mans this year was disappointing. We had hoped for more," concludes Thomas Laudenbach, Director Factory Motorsport. "There is a massive amount of work involved in this project. Despite the unsatisfactory result, I'd like to thank all of the people in Weissach, at Porsche Penske Motorsport and our partners. There were various reasons why we weren't successful today. We'll now taking a good look at these issues and make further improvements. I feel positive about the future. Congratulations to the Ferrari winners – great job."

"Unfortunately, once the incidents started, it felt like they didn't stop," says Urs Kuratle, describing his impression. The Director Factory Motorsport LMDh adds: "Our pace was excellent early on, which makes it all the more painful. Without the damages, we would have been much further ahead. Next year we'll return stronger. Congratulations to Ferrari."

"That was a piece of hard work for the team," says Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. "We may have suffered blows, but we also take positives with us. We faced all the challenges and, whenever possible, put our cars back on the racetrack with a mammoth effort. That was an important indicator and a strong performance by our crew."

Hertz Team Jota impresses with stints in the lead and strong lap times

The Porsche 963 fielded by Hertz Team Jota gave a stunning performance in the opening phase of the race. Factory driver António Félix da Costa catapulted the British customer team's No. 38 car from 60th overall to the top 10 in a short space of time, followed by Chinese Yifei Ye with his blistering charge. Around 9:00 pm on Saturday, the young driver sponsored by Porsche Motorsport Asia-Pacific even took the lead. A short time later, however, the first setback came with an accident in the fast Porsche corners. The repairs took over 40 minutes, and the replacement of a defective FIA sensor used to measure the torque on the rear axle also cost precious time. Another accident on Sunday morning kept the team busy with even more work and increased the deficit.

After 24 hours, the first customer Porsche 963 in the FIA WEC, shared by Félix da Costa and Ye with UK driver Will Stevens, crossed the finish line 13th in the hypercar class. “After a difficult start due to missing out on qualifying, we delivered a strong performance,” concluded team principal Dieter Gass. “It was thrilling to be at the front of the field in the first four and a half hours and be in contention for overall victory at Le Mans. The incidents set us back, but we're still taking a lot of positives home with us. Our performance on the track gives us confidence and huge motivation for the remaining races of the season."

Le Mans swansong for the GTE-Am class: GR Racing secures podium spot

There was a fine line between luck and misfortune in the GTE-Am class, too. After cautious qualifying performances, the eight Porsche 911 RSR campaigned by five customer teams made their mark in the early stages of the race. At times, five of the 911 racers flew in formation at the front of the category. Subsequently, accidents knocked all three cars from Proton Competition out of the race – including the No. 911 entry driven by Hollywood star Michael Fassbender from Ireland. The sister car fielded by Dempsey-Proton Racing and the 911 RSR from Iron Lynx also retired early due to incidents.

The drivers of the Porsche 911 RSR from GR Racing put in a flawless drive. The Italian Riccardo Pera and the two Brits Michael Wainwright and Ben Barker miraculously stayed out of trouble for 24 long hours and secured a podium finish with third place. Just behind them: the Iron Dames. Rahel Frey from Switzerland, Sarah Bovy from Belgium and Michelle Gatting from Denmark matched a 91-year-old record. Back then, France's Odette Siko had also finished fourth at Le Mans. The 911 RSR from Project 1 - AO, dubbed “Rexy,” dropped from first to seventh place in the final two hours of the race. GT cars under GTE regulations will be replaced by GT3 cars from 2024 onwards. The successful 911 RSR will then no longer be eligible to compete. The new Porsche 911 GT3 R is already on the starting blocks.

Racing for Charity: Porsche works cars reap 549,750 euros in donations

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Porsche sports cars, the manufacturer initiated a major fundraising campaign. As part of “Racing for Charity”, a total of 549,750 euros was raised during the 24-hour race – for each of the 733 laps turned by the three Porsche 963 fielded by the works team, 750 euros went into the donation basket. In the coming weeks, the total amount will be handed over to the three non-profit organisations Kinderherzen Retten e.V., Interplast Germany e.V. and the Ferry Porsche Foundation. The money is used, among other things, to fund urgent operations for children from crisis and developing regions. The Automobile Club de l'Ouest, the organiser of the 24 Hours of Le Mans, presented the “Racing for Charity” initiative with the “Sustainable Endurance Award” on the Friday before the start.

Drivers' comments after the race

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 963 #5):“It was a very difficult event for us, we're proud nonetheless. We knew that we wouldn't quite be at the top in terms of performance. Nevertheless, we were able to rattle the competition at times. It's quite clear where we still need to improve to have a real chance of winning at Le Mans in 2024. We no longer want to be the challenger but the hunted.”

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6):“Over the 24 hours we were repeatedly struck by bad luck. After three hours we suffered a puncture that cost us a whole lap. We then went on the attack to catch up – but I slid into the gravel and the barriers in the process. The repair took quite a long time, so the race was over for us. We learned a lot. Our car was fast, that's the good news. I'm proud of our team.”

Michael Wainwright (Porsche 911 RSR #86):“I'm delighted for me personally, of course, but even more so for our team. We've been working towards a result like this for eight years – and it worked out at the centenary celebrations of the 24 Hours of Le Mans, of all places. It was great fun, even though it was pretty wild due to all the incidents. Now, it's time for some celebrating.”

Rahel Frey (Porsche 911 RSR #85):“The race went brilliantly; we made very few mistakes. Everyone in the team did a perfect job both on and off the track. The crew was really strong and supported us one hundred percent. Unfortunately, we didn't quite maintain the necessary pace at the end to hold on to a podium position. My brakes were struggling at the end. Maybe we did too much braking and not enough accelerating. We deserved more.”

Result 24 Hours of Le Mans 2023

Hypercar class:
1. Pier Guidi/Calado/Giovinazzi (I/UK/I), Ferrari #51, 342 laps

2. Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa (CH/NZ/J), Toyota #8, 342 laps
3. Bamber/Lynn/Westbrook (NZ/UK/UK), Cadillac #2, 341 laps
9. Cameron/Christensen/Makowiecki (USA/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 329 laps
11. Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6, 320 laps
13. Félix da Costa/Stevens/Ye (P/UK/CHN), Porsche 963 #38 laps
DNF. Jaminet/Nasr/Tandy (F/BR/UK), Porsche 963 #75, 84 laps

GTE-Am class:
1. Catsburg/Keating/Varrone (NL/USA/ARG), Corvette #33, 313 laps
2. Al Harthy/Dinan/Eastwood (OMN/USA/IRL), Aston Martin #25, 312 laps
3. Barker/Pera/Wainwright (UK/I/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 312 laps
4. Bovy/Frey/Gatting (B/CH/DK), Porsche 911 RSR #85, 312 laps
7. Cairoli/Hyett/Jeannette (I/USA/USA), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 309 laps
DNF. Fassbender/Rump/Lietz (IRL/EST/A), Porsche 911 RSR #911, 246 laps
DNF. J. Ried/Tincknell/Yount (D/UK/USA), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 170 laps
DNF. Andlauer/Pedersen/C. Ried (F/DK/D), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 118 laps
DNF. Hardwick/Heylen/Robichon (USA/B/CDN), Porsche 911 RSR #16, 28 laps
DNF. Cressoni/Picariello/Schiavoni (I/B/I), Porsche 911 RSR #60, 28 laps

Full results: fiawec.alkamelsystems.com

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Path: media/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: GR Racing (#86), Ben Barker (UK), Riccardo Pera (I), Michael Wainwright (UK), l-r, Le Mans 24 Hours, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: The GR Racing drivers celebrate their third place in GTE-Am

Path: media/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Porsche 911 RSR, Iron Dames (#80), Sarah Bovy (B), Rahel Frey (CH), Michelle Gatting (DK), Le Mans 24 Hours, Race, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: The Iron Dames 911 RSR

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