

Porsche sets sights on securing the WEC crown at the season finale

28/10/2024 Preview: FIA World Endurance Championship WEC, Round 8, Sakhir (Bahrain).

After securing all titles in the North American IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, Porsche now sets its sights on winning the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) with the 963 hybrid prototype race car. The factory – or "works" – team tackles the eight-hour race in Bahrain this coming weekend, Saturday November 2, as the leaders of the manufacturers' championship points. Frenchman Kévin Estre, André Lotterer from Germany and Belgium's Laurens Vanthoor rank first in the drivers' championship. Their Porsche colleagues Matt Campbell from Australia, Michael Christensen from Denmark and Frenchman Frédéric Makowiecki currently occupy position five. In the LMGT3 class, Manthey PureRxcing took home the championship crown early at the previous round in Fuji, Japan, with the Porsche 911 GT3 R racer. Hertz Team Jota has already secured the FIA World Cup for private Hypercar teams in Japan.

Atlanta. Porsche pocketed nine titles at the season finale of the North American IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship series in early October across both the GTP and GTD Pro classes. The German

sports car manufacturer now aims to further expand these impressive results with the Porsche Penske Motorsport "works" team. At the final round of the year in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), two world championship titles are still up for grabs in the top Hypercar class. Winning the manufacturers' and drivers' championships would crown an extremely successful year for Porsche.

"Our team has converted the penalty kick in the IMSA title fight. Now, we also want to win the FIA WEC championship," declares Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. "We've improved considerably in the second year of our global program and unfailingly made the most of our opportunities. I expect nothing less at the upcoming race weekend in Bahrain. If we approach our mission with the same concentration and consistency as in the previous rounds, then we'll achieve our goal: 2024 World Champions in the manufacturer and driver categories."

"We celebrated briefly after our triumphs in the USA and then immediately turned our attention to preparing for the upcoming final race," explains Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. "Our team prepared the two Porsche 963 in Mannheim [Germany, where Porsche Penske Motorsport bases its WEC program] for the final event of the year, followed by a rollout on the track at the Porsche Development Center in Weissach [Germany]. It's obvious that everyone in the team is excited about the race in Bahrain. We want to reward ourselves for the great work this season with the world championship titles."

"When we started this LMDh program from scratch two years ago, we could only dream of being IMSA champions and in contention to win the World Endurance Championship," states Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. "Even with decades of title-winning experience from both Penske and Porsche, you shouldn't underestimate what it takes to build a world-class race team from the ground up. Everyone who has contributed to this can be proud. That said, we'll approach this final round with level heads. We need to operate smoothly, put everything we have learned into place, and ensure that we have a clean weekend with both cars. The pressure is on, and everyone in the team is feeling it, but this is where champions thrive."

In the Hypercar class, the Proton Competition customer team fields another Porsche 963. Bahrain will be the last WEC race for the Hertz Team Jota with its approximately 690 HP (515 kW) hybrid prototypes from Porsche. The customer squad, which won the WEC race in Spa-Francorchamps this year, is switching brands for the 2025 season. Manthey has already secured the titles in the new LMGT3 class. The No. 92 Porsche 911 GT3 R shared by Klaus Bachler from Austria, Joel Sturm from Germany and Alex Malykhin from Great Britain has dominated the team and driver standings of the FIA Endurance Trophy. The No. 91 sister car is driven by the Le Mans class winners Richard Lietz from Austria, Yasser Shahin from Australia and the Dutchman Morris Schuring. Earlier this season, Porsche secured the manufacturers' title in IMSA's GTD Pro class with the 911 GT3 R as well. That title was joined by both team (AO Racing) and drivers' (Laurin Heinrich) championships in the all professional driver category in IMSA.

class

Porsche heads to the final round leading the manufacturers' standings in the World Endurance Championship with 161 points. A maximum of 39 points are still up for grabs for pole position and overall victory in the eight-hour race. The Toyota factory team is 10 points behind, with Ferrari currently trailing Porsche by 27 points. If Porsche wins in Bahrain or is the best-placed Hypercar works team, the WEC title is in the bag. If the best Porsche Penske Motorsport racing car finishes second, no Toyota should win. If the Japanese brand misses out on victory, a position directly behind the best Toyota is enough. Ferrari still has an outside chance.

In the drivers' world championship, Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor rank first with 150 points after seven of the eight races of the season. They are trailed by the Ferrari trio in the No. 50 car (115 points) and the No. 7 Toyota with 113 points. In any case, an eighth place in the race is enough for the No. 6 Porsche 963 crew to secure the coveted title.

The race

The FIA WEC was first contested on the 3.362-mile (5.412-kilometer) Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir near the Manama capital in its 2012 inaugural season. The only time the endurance race was not held there was in the 2018/2019 season. High daytime temperatures, falling temperatures at dusk and fine sand sweeping over the asphalt make the race a huge challenge for teams, engineers and drivers. Tire wear is a major consideration on the 15-turn Grand Prix circuit. A steady pace over a full stint is regarded as the key to success. For the eight-hour race in Bahrain, points will be multiplied by a factor of 1.5 and rounded up (38-27-23-18-15-12-9-6-3-2).

On Sunday (November 3) after the season finale, many vehicles will be on the track once again, including the Porsche 963 and the Porsche 911 GT3 R. The FIA WEC runs its traditional "rookie test" at the end of the season with two official sessions. The organizers of the World Endurance Championship have nominated two young Frenchmen from the European Le Mans Series (ELMS) for the rookie test. Gillian Henrion will drive the No. 92 of Manthey PureRxcing, with Reshad de Gerus taking the wheel of the world-championship-winning Hypercar – which could be the Porsche 963 from Porsche Penske Motorsport if they win the title. The works team is also deploying the Frenchman Mathieu Jaminet to test. Jaminet finished second in the IMSA drivers' championship this season with teammate Nick Tandy (United Kingdom) just behind their Porsche Penske Motorsport teammates, Dane Cameron (Huntersville, North Carolina) and Felipe Nasr (Brazil).

TV / Stream:

North American viewers can watch the full WEC race from Bahrain on Motor Trend TV and the Max streaming app beginning at 5:30 a.m. ET on November 2. Free Practice 3 can be seen 3:50 a.m. on

November 1 followed by qualifying at 7:50 a.m.

FIA WEC standings:

fiawec.alkamelsystems.com

More comments ahead of the race

Michael Christensen, Driver, No. 5 Porsche Penske Motorsport Porsche 963:
"Bahrain is always a very special race. The tire wear is substantial, and the strain from heat and race length is significant. There are still a lot of points up for grabs there. Throughout the season, we've been among the frontrunners in almost every race. I'm sure that'll also be the case in Bahrain. We'd like to wrap up the season with another success – be that a win or at least a podium finish. We want to do everything we can to secure the world championship manufacturers' title."

Laurens Vanthoor, Driver, No. 6 Porsche Penske Motorsport Porsche 963:
"We have an incredibly exciting weekend ahead of us. Considering the championship standings, one might think that everything is wrapped up – but that's definitely not the case! It looks promising, but with 1.5 times as many points awarded in Bahrain, the standings are still wide open. With that in mind, I'm looking forward to the race with somewhat mixed feelings. If we manage to approach this competition with the same consistency and concentration as the previous races, maybe our high hopes will be fulfilled. Last year, we weren't particularly strong in Bahrain. However, we've understood exactly why that was. We want to tap our true potential. Winning the championship would be an absolute dream come true for everyone in the team."

Will Stevens, Driver, No. 12 Hertz Team Jota Porsche 963:
"I'm really looking forward to Bahrain. Historically, we've done pretty well on this track as a team. Last year we were quite competitive there and after securing the FIA World Cup for Hypercar Teams, I think we now have the confidence to head into Bahrain with a more aggressive strategy. We'd like to end the season on a high with a successful weekend and obviously, as our last race on this journey with Porsche, it would be even nicer to conclude the season strong for the brand too."

Oliver Rasmussen, Driver, No. 38 Hertz Team Jota Porsche 963:
"Bahrain is the last race of the season, which makes me a bit disappointed because we've had a good run, and we underlined our potential. Finishing in the points in Fuji was a perfect example that we're capable of really good stuff. Everything has to play out in Bahrain. I know the car is going to be good, which is always reassuring. It'll be an exciting weekend with an eight-hour race. That's two hours longer than normal – so anything can happen..."

Neel Jani, Driver, No. 99 Proton Competition Porsche 963:
"I always enjoy visiting Bahrain. Coming into the winter, being on a great track in warm, sunny

conditions is always a treat. Things haven't always gone our way in previous races. Mostly small things went wrong, but they had a big impact on our performance. I'm hoping we can put this behind us. We want to realize our full potential at the end of the year and show the world our maximum performance."

Morris Schuring, Driver, No. 91 Manthey EMA Porsche 911 GT3 R:
"Our anticipation for the race in Bahrain is mixed with a touch of melancholy because the season will soon be over. I've had a lot of fun this year! We still have an iron in the fire in the season finale: we're fighting for vice championship honors with our car. We currently rank second in the drivers' standings, but the gaps are extremely small. We have to give it our all once again. I really like the circuit in Bahrain. We'll be sweating a lot in the heat there – but we're used to that after racing in Fuji and Austin."

Joel Sturm, Driver, No. 92 Manthey PureRxcing Porsche 911 GT3 R:
"We already took home the title at the last race in Fuji. Now, we want to enjoy the best possible end to the season in Bahrain and welcome the winter with a win – or at least another podium finish. We plan to thoroughly enjoy our last race of the year and leave our mark on the season."

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Subline: Urs Kuratle (Director Factory Motorsport LMDh)

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Subline: Jonathan Diugiud (Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport)

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Subline: Porsche 963, Porsche Penske Motorsport (#5), Matt Campbell (AUS), Michael Christensen (DK), Frederic Makowiecki (F); Proton Competition (#99), Julien Andlauer (F), Neel Jani (CH), Harry Tincknell (UK); Porsche Penske Motorsport (#6), Kevin Estre (F), Andre Lotterer (D), Laurens Vanthoor (B)

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