

Ice Race Aspen: The Porsche 911 GT1 takes to the ice with Stéphane Ortelli

12/02/2024 Across a three-day spectacle of modern and historic races and demonstration drives, the Porsche 911 GT1 was undoubtedly the star attraction of Ice Race Aspen.

Spying the Le Mans-winning Porsche 911 GT1 against a wintery Colorado mountainside, veteran Porsche racer Stéphane Ortelli could be forgiven for thinking he was dreaming. It's a far cry from the Circuit de La Sarthe on that sweltering June afternoon in 1998, when Ortelli and teammates Laurent Aïello and Allan McNish clinched the 24 Hours for Porsche in this very car. So how has one of the factory's most celebrated race cars found its way from the Porsche Museum in Zuffenhausen to the snowy streets of Aspen?

The latest addition to the fast-growing phenomenon that is, or was, the GP Ice Race took place over the weekend. Now rebranded as the F.A.T International Ice Race, this is the brainchild of Ferdinand Porsche, Ferry Porsche's grandson, who five years ago revived the historic event that was held on the frozen Lake

Zell in Austria until 1974. Drawing Porsche enthusiasts from around the world to the tiny town of Zell Am See, home to the Porsche family for generations, the reborn Ice Race has quickly become one of the most eagerly anticipated events in the international motoring calendar. So much so that the decision was taken to go further in 2024, with a second outing across the pond in Aspen.

First Ice Race in Aspen

Why Aspen? Aside from a climate comparable to alpine Austria at this time of year, this small town perched high up in the Rocky Mountains has its own surprising motorsport history. In 1951, the first of five annual street races started here, right in front of Aspen's famous Hotel Jerome, with a field of cars weaving through its unpaved streets. By the end of 1955, racing on public roads in Colorado had been outlawed, but the competitive spirit would linger for generations to come.

Almost 70 years later, the F.A.T Ice Race Aspen saw an eclectic collection of modern and historic racing cars being put through their paces at the Tree Farm in Carbondale, a few kilometres north of Aspen itself. And undoubtedly the most remarkable car to take to the ice, for spectators and driver alike, was the Porsche 911 GT1.

In order to allow a car weighing just over 1000 kg, and with a heavily boosted 550 hp at the rear wheels, to drive in such unlikely conditions, the Porsche Museum's engineers fitted special winter tyres, at the same time raising the suspension to allow room for the new rubber inside the GT1-98's wheel wells. An additional pre-heating system from the 919 Hybrid was also installed, with revised software to simplify the car's complex operating procedure.

When the car was unloaded onto the ice for the first, Ortelli could hardly believe his eyes.

“When I first saw her here, in the snow and against all the trees, it was like a beautiful painting,” says the 53-year-old Frenchman. “It looked incredible. And I couldn't believe I was really going to driver her here.”

"It's more like ballett"

Ortelli points out that despite the incongruous sight of the 911 GT1 on snow, Porsche's early sports cars were designed for, and developed in, the mountains, with unparalleled traction, powerful brakes and sublime steering sensitivity, all of which this car also enjoys. But surely the identity of the GT1 is described by ultra-high levels grip and downforce, by huge top speeds down Le Man's six-kilometre Mulsanne Straight?

“You have to forget about all that!“ Ortelli laughs. “Here, it's more like ballet. The tyres grip well on the compact snow and you can immediately feel the car's potential and follow the racing line, but you have to use the weight transfer to turn. Partly because the car is so stiff, but also because the steering rack is

so quick. We all know that when you go sideways you need to steer to compensate for the angle of the car, but in the GT1 you have so little lock. For me that has been the most challenging thing to adapt to. You find full lock so fast that you need to play with the gas and left foot brake to limit the slide. It was a lot of work on the wheel and the pedals. But it really was like a ballet, and on the snow, this car can really dance!"

The sight of such a specialised GT race car sliding across the snow soon became a social media sensation, even catching the attention of Ortelli's teammates. "Allan and Laurent were super happy that I was driving the car here," he says. "They have both contacted me over the weekend to say how cool it was to see it in the snow. This is what's great about the Porsche Museum. They not only prepare the cars for shows, but make sure we can drive them, and drive them fast. Even Le Mans winners on snow. I will remember this experience for the rest of my life!"

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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