

Porsche customer teams score six titles and a class win at the finale

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14/11/2021 Porsche and its customer teams have celebrated a perfect end to the 2021 season of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. At the finale at Road Atlanta, Porsche clinched the manufacturers' title in the GTD class and the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup.

The race

The Pfaff Motorsports team with regular drivers Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) and Zacharie Robichon (Canada) secured the team and drivers' championships with the Porsche 911 GT3 R. Wright Motorsports claimed all three titles in the Endurance Cup, which includes the long-distance races at Daytona, Sebring, Watkins Glen and the Petit Le Mans in the US state of Georgia. In the GTLM class, WeatherTech Racing achieved a one-two result at the last race with the 911 RSR.

“What a phenomenal end to the season,” said an ecstatic Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Motorsport. “All three titles in the GTD class and the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup for Porsche’s strong customer squads. Another class victory for the 911 RSR at its last outing in the North American racing series. And on Friday, Wright Motorsports won the manufacturers’, drivers’ and team classifications in the IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge with the Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 Clubsport. It doesn’t get better than that! Congratulations to the WeatherTech, Wright, Pfaff and Hardpoint teams and to the colleagues from Porsche Motorsport North America. And a huge thank you to everyone who made these tremendous successes possible through their hard work in the Weissach Development Centre.”

GTD title for Pfaff Motorsports

In cool temperatures of under ten degrees Celsius, the No. 9 car fielded by Pfaff Motorsports drove a flawless race at Road Atlanta. Works driver Vanthoor and his teammate Robichon avoided all trouble over the ten-hour race and crossed the finish line second in their class – enough to sweep the GTD title pool. For the Petit Le Mans race, the two received reinforcement in the cockpit from Porsche’s development driver Lars Kern from Germany.

Wright Motorsports delivered a tactically impressive and spirited performance. The 911 GT3 R (#16) lost two laps early on due to a puncture after a collision with a rival vehicle. Implementing a perfect strategy, the team managed to close the gap in less than three hours. Works driver Patrick Long from the USA, his compatriot Trent Hindman and Belgium’s Jan Heylen took the lead at the four and eight-hour mark, earning enough points to win the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup. In the closing phase, the car could no longer maintain the pace of the frontrunners due to a damaged rear and ultimately took the flag fifth in class.

“We couldn’t have wished for a better end to the season,” concluded Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. “It was all on from the first lap. We witnessed lots of overtaking, spills and thrills and ten caution phases. This weekend, everyone in the Porsche family provided the best all-round support during the preparation and the race and kept their cool. We got maximum rewards: all titles for the drivers, teams and manufacturers in the GTD class went to Wright, Pfaff and Porsche this weekend!”

Bad luck plagued the American customer crew Hardpoint at the last race of the 2021 season. In the turbulent early phase of Petit Le Mans, the No. 88 Porsche 911 GT3 R sustained significant damage to the radiator after a shunt with a competitor. The replacement of the damaged part cost the car driven by Americans Rob Ferriol and Andrew Davis and Britain’s Katherine Legge 15 laps. The team was unable to close the gap and crossed the finish line eighth in class.

The race in the GTLM class

In the GTLM class, the successful Porsche 911 RSR contested its last race in the IMSA series. From 2022, this vehicle category will no longer be contested in the North American racing series. The WeatherTech Racing customer team, which fielded two of the vehicles from Weissach at the season finale, achieved the best possible result: positions one and two at Road Atlanta. After a spectacular and heated battle against the manufacturer teams from Corvette and BMW, the No. 79 car crewed by Cooper MacNeil (USA), Matt Campbell (Australia) and Mathieu Jaminet (France) took the chequered flag in first place. Their teammates Kévin Estre, Frédéric Makowiecki (both France) and Michael Christensen from Denmark secured second in class in their No. 97 entry.

“A perfect swansong performance for the 911 RSR in a hotly contested race,” declared Steffen Höllwarth, Head of Operations GTLM. “We were the only team with two irons left in the fire at the end and we opted for different strategies. Overall, we made the fewest mistakes at the finale. It was a banner weekend for Porsche. All titles in the IMSA Michelin Pilot Cup, all titles in the GTD class and a one-two result in the GTLM category. Thanks to all involved.”

For Porsche, the races in the North American sports car series with the 911 RSR were a resounding success, with seven title wins in the IMSA championship, five victories in the North American Endurance Cup, 24 race wins and 62 podium places over a total of eight seasons. Next season, the experienced customer teams will tackle the GTD Pro and GTD classes with the 911 GT3 R, before Porsche returns in 2023 with an LMDh prototype to take on the fight for overall victory at the world’s greatest endurance races.

Drivers' comments on the race

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): “That was awesome! So much happened in this long race. We tried to stay out of trouble at all times and our car was great. Unfortunately, we couldn’t get past the Aston Martin and win our class. I tried at the end but of course, I didn’t want to risk too much. It was all about the championship and we did it. I’m very proud of the team and my teammates!”

Zacharie Robichon (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): “I’m lost for words. We achieved this triumph as a team – everyone worked perfectly together. I couldn’t be more proud of my Pfaff Motorsports colleagues. I’m simply thrilled and I’ve shed a tear or two since the race ended. All my dreams came true today. I still can’t believe it!”

Patrick Long (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16):“There are so many reasons for Porsche and the customer teams to throw a huge party today. It was an extremely turbulent day for me and my teammates in the cockpit and the pits. The fact that we had to pit more often than all the other cars says it all. I’m very proud of the team. We had the ideal strategy to earn the points needed to win the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup: Mission accomplished! That was my last race as a full-time professional for Porsche.

But that didn't play a role in the race today. I'm not going to think about that until tomorrow."

Cooper MacNeil (Porsche 911 RSR #79):"A great day for Porsche, for our WeatherTech Racing squad and our operations team Proton Competition. To finish the very last race of the GTLM class with a one-two result for the Porsche 911 RSR is simply spectacular. Thanks to all mechanics, engineers and my driver colleagues. The last race of the season couldn't have ended better."

Mathieu Jaminet (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "What a completely crazy race! We were locked in a tough battle with the Corvette until shortly before the end and a collision with a prototype threw us back. At that point in time, our teammates were in the lead. While we were in second place, the sister car let us pass and handed us the win. Such things are part of motorsport. I would have preferred to have won in a more traditional sporty way out on the track, so I feel a little sorry for my colleagues, but we witnessed a perfect day for Porsche."

Matt Campbell (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "First and second place for WeatherTech Racing is sensational. Heading into the weekend, we'd secretly hoped for such a scenario to happen – and now it's come true. I want to thank our colleagues in the No. 97 car. Obviously, without their support, we wouldn't have won. It was perfect teamwork all around. To achieve the maximum success again with the 911 RSR at the last race of the GTLM class is perfect."

Kevin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #97): "It was a really cool race, which we crowned with a one-two success. Our strategy was ideal and that put me in the lead with our No. 97 car. We were in first place with three laps to go, then I let the sister car pass – no big deal. I'm proud of the team and I'm proud to be part of this perfect farewell for the 911 RSR in the IMSA championship."

Results

Result GTLM class

1. MacNeil/Campbell/Jaminet (USA/AUS/F), Porsche 911 RSR #79, 390 laps
2. Estre/Christensen/Makowiecki (F/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #97, 390 laps
3. Edwards/Krohn/Farfus (USA/FIN/BR), BMW M8 GTE #24, 389 laps
4. Tandy/Milner/Sims (GB/USA/GB), Chevrolet Corvette #4, 381 laps
5. De Phillippi/Eng/Spengler (USA/A/CDN), BMW M8 GTE #25, 281 laps
6. Garcia/Taylor/Catsburg (E/USA/B), Chevrolet Corvette #3, 150 laps

Result GTD class

1. De Angelis/Gunn/James (CDN/GB/USA), Aston Martin #23, 378 laps
2. Robichon/Vanthoor/Kern (CDN/B/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9, 378 laps
3. Montecalvo/Veach/Megennis (USA/USA/USA), Lexus #12, 377 laps
5. Long/Hindman/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16, 376 laps
8. Ferriol/Legge/Davis (USA/GB/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #88, 359 laps

The qualifying

The Porsche customer team WeatherTech Racing has scored a good grid spot at the qualifying for the final event of this season's IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. In the hunt for top times on the Road Atlanta circuit in the US state of Georgia, the Australian works driver Matt Campbell posted the second-fastest time at the wheel of the No. 79 car. His brand colleague Frédéric Makowiecki from France planted the No. 97 sister car on P4. In the GTD class for vehicles complying with the FIA GT3 regulations, the best Porsche 911 GT3 R tackles the so-called Petit Le Mans race over ten hours from position seven.

Over the course of the 15-minute qualifying session, the two ca. 515 PS Porsche 911 RSR gradually upped their pace. In glorious sunshine and temperatures of around 20 degrees Celsius, Campbell and Makowiecki carefully brought their Michelin tyres to the optimal working temperature over several laps. Midway through the session, the pair then began their attack. First, Makowiecki topped the timesheets. Shortly afterwards Campbell replaced him at the top, only to be ousted by a BMW. In the final third of the qualifying, yellow flags were waved repeatedly. Under these conditions, setting a better time proved impossible for the two nine-eleven.

"The result is okay," says Steffen Höllwarth, Head of Operations GTLM. "In all sessions, our focus was on preparing for the race. At no point was it about training for that one flying lap. With second and fourth, we're well-positioned to tackle the last race of the season." The "Petit Le Mans" will be the last outing for the Porsche 911 RSR in the North American racing series. From 2022, the GTLM class will no longer be contested in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship.

In the GTD category, the American Trent Hindman was the fastest qualifier at the wheel of a Porsche 911 GT3 R. Driving for the Wright Motorsports customer squad, the amateur racer achieved seventh place after a close qualifying battle. An incredible result considering an accident during the second free practice on Thursday: Overnight, Wright Motorsports had to have a replacement chassis sent from Cincinnati, some 750 kilometres away, which the team then rebuilt on Friday. The job was completed shortly before the qualifying session. Canadian Zacharie Robichon planted the No. 9 car fielded by Pfaff Motorsports on P8. The identical 500+ PS Porsche 911 GT3 R campaigned by the Hardpoint crew takes up the race from position twelve.

"From nothing to seventh place is a super result and a solid basis for Wright Motorsports after the previous day's total write-off," states Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. "In the second qualifying session, which was all about earning points, the results didn't quite meet our expectations. With a gap of 0.3 seconds, Laurens Vanthoor was the fastest Porsche driver in sixth place. We're feeling very positive about the race. We'll do our very best to claim both titles with Wright Motorsports and Pfaff Motorsports."

The last race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship season at Road Atlanta, contested over ten hours, gets underway on Saturday, 13 November, at 12:10 local time (6:10pm CET). The entire

race can be viewed live outside the USA and Canada on www.imsa.com. Live timing is available at scoring.imsa.com.

Drivers' qualifying quotes

Matt Campbell (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "It was alright. I did my utmost to tap the full potential of the 911 RSR – there was nothing more I could do. The BMW was simply faster over a lap. Second on the grid is a good starting position for a long ten-hour race. We'll make some tweaks to the setup of our car, then we'll be well prepared to tackle the season finale."

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 911 RSR #97): "I'm not happy with my performance. Pole position was out of reach, but fourth isn't what I'd envisaged. The car's setup wasn't perfect. It certainly didn't help that I spun at one point. As a result, the tyres weren't much good for hot laps. I hope our car will have a better setup for the race."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "I'm not entirely satisfied with our result. We'd hoped for more. The car's balance wasn't ideal in the qualifying session. In the hunt for points, I qualified in sixth place. Compared to our main rivals in the championship, we've lost a few points; our advantage isn't that big. We still have to work on some set-up improvements before the start of the race."

Trent Hindman (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "We had a tough time because of an accident during a practice session. Our team managed to rebuild the car from scratch – a fantastic effort! Wright Motorsports is simply one of the best squads in the paddock. It was important for us to take part in the qualifying. It also served as a shakedown for us for the race. We had to check that everything worked again after the rebuild."

Andrew Davis (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "These were my first ever qualifying laps in daylight with the Porsche 911 GT3 R. My previous experience was limited to a few laps during a rainy practice at night. Under such conditions, twelfth is certainly not bad. The car's setup is good, so I'm feeling confident for the race."

Grid positions GTLM class

1. Edwards/Krohn/Farfus (USA/FIN/BR), BMW M8 GTE #24
2. MacNeil/Campbell/Jaminet (USA/AUS/F), Porsche 911 RSR #79
3. Garcia/Taylor/Catsburg (E/USA/B), Chevrolet Corvette #3
4. Estre/Christensen/Makowiecki (F/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #97
5. Tandy/Milner/Sims (GB/USA/GB), Chevrolet Corvette #4
6. De Phillippi/Eng/Spengler (USA/A/CDN), BMW M8 GTE #25

Grid positions GTD class

1. Kirkwood/Hawksworth/Telitz (USA/GB/USA), Lexus RC F GT3 #14
2. Yount/Conwright/Hites (USA/USA/RCH), Audi R8 LMS GT3 #42
3. Auberlen/Foley/Read (USA/USA/AUS), BMW M6 GT3 #96
7. Long/Hindman/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16
8. Robichon/Vanthoor/Kern (CDN/B/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9
12. Ferriol/Legge/Davis (USA/GB/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #88

The preview

Pfaff Motorsports tackles the storied 10-hour race as the overall leaders of the GTD class. The Canadian squad is now eager to clinch the trophy. At the event in the US state of Georgia, Wright Motorsports sets its sights on first place in the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup. The endurance classics at Daytona, Sebring, Watkins Glen and Road Atlanta count towards this classification. In the GTLM class, the Porsche 911 RSR fielded by WeatherTech Racing will contest its last outing in the American sports car racing series. The team fields two ca. 515 PS 911 racers at their swan song performance in the US. The GTLM class is equivalent to the GTE category in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC). From 2022, it will no longer be contested in the IMSA Series.

Since 1988, the Petit Le Mans has taken place annually on the 4.088-kilometre Road Atlanta circuit, which features 12 turns and several spectacular passages. In addition to the sensational overall victory of 2015, Porsche has notched up a total of 24 class wins. Last year, works drivers Matt Campbell from Australia and Frédéric Makowiecki from France won the hotly contested GTLM category with Brit Nick Tandy, in the Porsche 911 RSR.

“We’re coming to the end of an era, as this will be the last race in the GTLM class,” explains IMSA Head of Operations Steffen Höllwarth. “This category has offered outstanding motorsport at the highest level over the past years. We’ve witnessed nail-biting duels and tough but always fair races on some of the most beautiful racetracks in the world. Porsche has achieved many major successes in this series. This season, the WeatherTech Racing customer team flies the flag with the 911 RSR. We’d like to wrap up the season with a powerful farewell performance against the factory squads – as we did with the class win at Sebring. The 911 RSR won last year’s Petit Le Mans race. We aim to climb to the top of the podium again at this year’s finale.”

The 10-hour race at Road Atlanta counts towards the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup – a special competition encompassing the four longest races of the season. After strong performances at the endurance classics at Daytona, Sebring and Watkins Glen, Porsche currently ranks first in the Endurance Cup in the GTD class for vehicles complying with the FIA GT3 regulations.

“We’re expecting a fabulous finale,” says Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. “We’re

travelling to Road Atlanta with three teams in the top 10 and we're leading all three championship rankings. But it's not all smooth sailing," states the engineer. "The track is a real challenge. Among other characteristics, it has a very long straight that allows slipstream duels. You have to cut Turn 3 hard to keep the momentum. Hitting the kerb can damage the car. What's more, we have to be prepared for very changeable weather conditions at this time of the year. A race over 10 hours will certainly not be easy for the drivers and their cars."

The Porsche drivers and customer teams

The cockpit of the No. 79 Porsche 911 RSR fielded by WeatherTech Racing is shared by the two works drivers Matt Campbell from Australia and Mathieu Jaminet from France with the American privateer Cooper MacNeil. In March, this trio won the famous Sebring 12-hour race with the No. 79 car against tough opposition from manufacturer teams. Thanks to this great achievement as well as the class win at Road America, the squad currently ranks third overall before the last race of the year. To farewell the Porsche 911 RSR from the North American championship, WeatherTech Racing fields a second No. 97 car driven by the French factory drivers Kévin Estre and Frédéric Makowiecki as well as the Dane Michael Christensen.

In the GTD class, the Pfaff Motorsports customer team is set to sweep the title pool. Works driver Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium, Porsche's development driver Lars Kern from Germany and Canadian Zacharie Robichon share driving duties in the No. 9 Porsche 911 GT3 R. The squad from Ontario currently leads the GTD rankings after four class wins. In the manufacturers' classification, Porsche holds first place – thanks also to the strong performances of the two other GTD teams. Wright Motorsports campaigns the No. 16 Porsche 911 GT3 R helmed by the American factory pilot Patrick Long (US), his compatriot Trent Hindmann and Belgium's Jan Heylen. The team from the US state of Ohio holds a narrow lead over Pfaff Motorsports in the fight for the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup. The two Americans Rob Ferriol and Andrew Davis join forces with Katherine Legge from the UK in the No. 88 Porsche 911 GT3 R campaigned by Hardpoint.

The schedule (local time, CET -6 hours)

Thursday, 11 November
09:20 – 10:20: Free Practice 1
14:20 – 15:35: Free Practice 2
18:30 – 20:00: Free Practice 3

Friday, 12 November
15:45 – 16:25: Qualifying GT

Saturday, 13 November
09:15 – 09:35: Warmup

12:10 – 22:10: Race

Live streaming of the race

The 10-hour IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship race at Road Atlanta gets underway on Saturday (13 November), at 12:10 local time (18:10 CET). The entire race can be viewed live outside the US and Canada on www.imsa.com. Live timing is available at scoring.imsa.com.

Drivers' comments before the race

Mathieu Jaminet (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "The Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta is a fantastic event to wrap up the season in the US. Porsche has always been strong here. I assume it'll be another tactical race this year. We need to be among the frontrunners in the final stages, then anything is possible. This approach worked perfectly for us when we won at Sebring. We'd really like to climb to the top of the podium again at the Porsche 911 RSR's last outing in the IMSA series."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #97): "I'm really looking forward to my race at Road Atlanta. It'll be emotional – the last race for the Porsche 911 RSR in North America. The IMSA battles are usually fierce. At the same time, endurance events require a clever strategy. Whoever is ahead in the final hour still has a chance to win. It's spectacular and exciting. It's great to finally tackle such an event again with Michael. This is also my first time sharing the cockpit with Fred. Although it's a new situation, it's no big deal because we know each other really well. I'm confident that we'll be successful at the Petit Le Mans."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "For us, it's all about winning the title – so it's the most important race of the year for the team, my teammates and me. Although we have high hopes for the championship, we mustn't put ourselves under too much pressure. We shouldn't start calculating, but rather approach this race like any other."

Patrick Long (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "The race at Road Atlanta will be an exciting conclusion to this season. Because of the championship situation, I think a lot of teams will be thinking about tactical manoeuvres. Let's see who comes out best at the end. The Porsche 911 GT3 R was very strong in the GTD class recently. We want to carry this momentum into the last race and achieve a top result. If we succeed in this, then we can hopefully make an important contribution to Porsche winning the manufacturers' title."

Katherine Legge (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "The Petit Le Mans is one of my all-time favourite races on the IMSA calendar every year. I simply enjoy endurance races – especially when they run into the night. November can get quite chilly in Georgia. That factor plays a significant role. We completed a successful test at Road Atlanta and we're confident that we'll have a strong car here. We'd like to conclude the season with a good result."

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