

Lunch with a legend: Laurin Heinrich meets Henri Pescarolo

10/09/2025 Two generations, one passion: Laurin Heinrich and Henri Pescarolo talk racing, Porsche heritage, and the magic of Suzuka – including a special bet.

A Slate Grey Neo Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet turns into a long, wide, sun-baked gravel driveway, leading towards a rustic converted farmhouse. At the wheel is Porsche driver Laurin Heinrich, who has made the once-in-a-lifetime trip to meet a fellow racer.

His host for the day had a career that most can only dream of and among his many successes, there is one in particular that Heinrich is here to talk about – a win in Japan's most gruelling race, the Suzuka 1000km. We're talking about Porsche racing icon Henri Pescarolo.

Racing legend Henri Pescarolo

Pescarolo is a name synonymous with sportscar racing. A record 33 appearances at the 24 Hours of Le

Mans – an event he won on four occasions, including with Porsche in 1984 – marks just the tip of the iceberg in his glittering career. He enjoyed victories all over the globe, including Spa, Daytona, Buenos Aires, Kyalami and Watkins Glen, to name just a few. And then there was Suzuka, in 1981 – the victory that prompted Heinrich to make today's journey.

Following a warm welcome, Heinrich presents Pescarolo with a framed image of their respective Suzuka 1000km cars: Pescarolo's race-winning 935 at the top and Heinrich's 911 GT3 R below. On the back of the picture, Heinrich has written a message of thanks for the invitation.

The German racer from Würzburg has enjoyed a superb start to his motorsport career with Porsche. At only 23 years of age, his racing CV already looks impressive, with Heinrich being the IMSA SportsCar Championship GTD Pro champion and also taking wins in the Porsche Supercup, GT World Challenge Asia and Porsche Carrera Cup Germany.

The 2022 Porsche Junior's next big test is the Suzuka 1000km, which returns for the first time since 2019. Heinrich will be competing for Origine Motorsport along with fellow former Porsche Junior Bastian Buus and Alessio Picariello, a former Porsche Motorsport Asia Pacific Selected Driver, as Porsche looks to add to its record of 11 race wins at the event.

Porsche 911 GT3 R with a special livery

Having won at Suzuka in the GT World Challenge Asia last year, Heinrich will be aiming to put another trophy in his already-full cabinet, and that's why he's come to meet Pescarolo. His 1981 win at the event proved so meaningful to the brand that Heinrich's Origine Motorsport Porsche 911 GT3 R will be running a tribute livery to that win, one of three Pro Porsche entries that will use classic re-makes of famous Porsche designs.

Inside the house, the two begin talking about the famous race. What is clear from the beginning is the difference in preparation and knowledge of the circuit. Pescarolo's trip to Suzuka in 1981 was his first at the venue, and the circuit wasn't the worldwide fan favourite it is today as it had not yet made its Formula One debut.

“I didn't know anything about the track,” explains Pescarolo. “I was pleasantly surprised how good it was to drive. At the time it was one of the most interesting circuits over a lap and had every type of corner you could possibly imagine. I had the opportunity to race all over the world, so every new circuit was a surprise. To me, Suzuka felt like a European track in Japan, so that was an interesting discovery.”

Heinrich knows the Suzuka track

In comparison, Heinrich has already had the opportunity to race on the figure-of-eight circuit, when he travelled to the Mie Prefecture for Round 4 of the 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge Asia Powered by

AWS championship.

“It means a lot to me and I’m extremely excited,” he says. “This race was a big endurance classic in the past and now it's been revived and is finally coming back. As Henri knows, Suzuka is a track where the driver can make a real difference, as proven when I raced there last year in the GT World Challenge Asia, which was one of the best weekends of my racing career. I’ve been preparing well and I’m looking forward to teaming up with Alessio, Bastian and the Origine Motorsport squad, all of whom I have full trust in.

“I’m also honoured to carry Henri and Bob’s 1981 livery on our car. It’s always a good sign to use a livery which has a winning history. We want to make everyone proud and put in a performance that is worthy of this incredible design. Our goal is to win and I believe we are capable of achieving it.”

“It’s amazing to see that history is still important to Porsche”

Discussing the livery, Pescarolo continues: “At the end of my career, I took a keen interest in helping promising young drivers, and I'm still following their progression today. I’m so pleased to see Laurin driving such a great car and to be doing it in our iconic livery at Suzuka. It’s a brilliant idea to have the 1981 winning colours on the Porsche 911 GT3 R. For me, Porsche has always been a fantastic competitor in global sportscar racing, and it’s amazing to see that history is still important to such a big manufacturer. It shows how proud Porsche is of the heritage behind its racing.”

The two are sitting at a table in Pescarolo’s typically French dining room. A variety of paintings and photographs hang on the walls, which lead into the 83-year-old’s kitchen. Pots and pans hang above the oven, which is in use as Pescarolo is making lunch. Being a talented cook and a keen wine collector, one could be forgiven for thinking that Pescarolo worked as a chef, if it wasn’t for the smattering of motorsport memorabilia around the house. That includes pictures of Pescarolo in action during his Formula One days, a model of his first Le Mans-winning car, shared with the legendary Graham Hill in 1972 and three 1:18 size replicas of Pescarolo Sport cars that raced at Circuit de la Sarthe in the 2000s.

Different career paths

Conversation moves to the two men’s respective journeys with Porsche. While Pescarolo was already a three-time Le Mans winner, Formula One podium-sitter and superstar of the sportscar world, when he raced for Porsche, Heinrich first represented the marque aged 17 in 2019, then with just a single Formula Four season to his name.

“Joining Porsche as a junior driver saved my career,” he tells Pescarolo. “I had an opportunity to continue racing, which would’ve been impossible otherwise. Porsche has an obvious ladder to the top, starting in Sprint Challenge or Carrera Cup, before moving on to Supercup, where they are scouting for talent.

Then it is always the same procedure – they do a junior shootout with the best drivers from the Carrera Cup, and choose one to become the Porsche Junior for the following season. That was my plan and I was delighted when I was selected for 2022. "With my lack of funding, we had to find another way and Porsche gave me this opportunity to chase my dream and make a living from my passion. It's been a unique path and something I'm very grateful for, and I'm hoping it's a relationship that will be long-lasting and successful."

For Pescarolo, rising through the ranks as a young driver was a very different experience: "In my time it was impossible to drive anything before you got your driver's license and there was no karting, so we couldn't start from such a young age like many do now," he reveals. "When I was 16, I had flying lessons and wanted to be a pilot. I could not legally drive a car but I could fly people around!"

In contrast to Heinrich, Pescarolo began his motorsport adventure aged 22, just one year younger than Heinrich is now. After success in French Formula Three and Formula Two, he advanced to Formula One, but it was outside of single seaters where he made his name. "I was lucky to have been in good teams in sportscars, but in Formula One it was more difficult as I was always in a car that couldn't win," he says. "When I joined Porsche in the late 1970s, we were extremely competitive. I should have won the 24 Hours of Le Mans three times with Porsche, instead of just once, but unfortunately our Porsche 936 broke down on two occasions. "I remember my first year with Martini Racing in 1977, I shared the car with Jacky Ickx. We were unbeatable and it was just about finishing the event, but the engine blew up and that was the end of our race. After another DNF the following year alongside Jacky and Jochen Mass, I was so happy to finally get the job done in 1984 in the NewMan Joest Racing Porsche 956B."

Heinrich: "I have so much respect for you"

While mechanical issues obviously still exist in Heinrich's career, the Porsche 911 GT3 R is much more reliable than the cars Pescarolo took the wheel of. When asked how he thinks his car compares to those of previous eras, Heinrich replies: "I can only imagine! I don't know how it feels to drive these crazy cars, but I know nowadays we have so much more help, with electronics, paddle shift, ABS, two different traction control systems and a host of data to help us analyse. The competition is still as tough as ever, the cars may be easier to drive but I would say it is not easier to win, just very different." He looks over at Pescarolo as he continues: "I have so much respect for you and your competitors for driving those cars. I would love to experience the power and the difficulty of them one day, but I'm not sure I'd be very fast!"

Pescarolo laughs and nods his head as he replies: "We also used to have a fantastic computer for understanding the cars – our backsides in the seat! That's all we had back then, the Porsche chassis has made awesome progress since then. I remember the Porsche 935, it had more than 800 horsepower – it was more of a prototype, a purebred racing car, it didn't even look like a Porsche. Whereas nowadays the GT cars are more based on the road-going versions."

The retired driver shares stories from his racing days, of victories, of disappointments and of crashes,

including one from his time in Formula Three, when it was announced in the pit lane that his accident had been fatal.

A fascinated Heinrich listens intently. “I could listen to Henri all day,” he grins. “These stories are from a time I didn't experience but I'm always looking to learn about the history of our sport. I can't believe they pushed these cars to the limit in races like Le Mans and Daytona, with just two drivers per car in all weather – conditions we would not race in today. I would've loved to have experienced it just to see what it was like, and there's a lot I can take away from listening to Henri talk about his long and successful career.”

Advice for the Suzuka race

With Heinrich's flight back to Germany looming, the conversation cycles back to the upcoming race at Suzuka, with Pescarolo sharing words of wisdom with Heinrich. “Laurin is already very experienced at just 23 – he's raced around the globe which will help him develop and especially at a track like Suzuka. The aim there as a driver is to fully understand the car and what it is doing, the driver must adapt to the limits of the car and not push it too far, which is also very important in endurance events. Japan is different to anywhere else in the world when it comes to motorsport. The passion the fans have make it such a special place to win a race. Very special. Suzuka is a beautiful track and very interesting to drive.”

“Competing is Asia is so dynamic,” agrees Heinrich. “Some of the world's greatest circuits are there and it was always a dream of mine to race around them. Specifically in Japan, the atmosphere is incredible, which makes me want to be successful even more.

“The Porsche 911 GT3 R is very suitable for endurance racing. I've had some great results in it, including victory at the Sebring 12 Hours and second place at the Rolex 24 in Daytona earlier this year. I've spent so much time in the car, I've been able to adapt my driving style to fit the demands of it. Suzuka will be a track that should fit our performance, but we know it will still be a big team effort. No endurance race goes according to plan, so we have to work closely with the team and do everything we can to be fast throughout.”

A farewell bet

With lunch eaten, the two drivers' afternoon draws closer to its end. But there is still time for Pescarolo to show his young friend around the farm, with Heinrich taking particular interest in Pescarolo's helicopter, which he still regularly flies. The retired racer shows him the controls and offers him a flight, but with time running out, Heinrich has to decline.

Shortly afterwards, as Heinrich gets into the car to leave, the pair make a bet – if Heinrich wins the Suzuka 1000km, he will return to the farm and in Pescarolo's helicopter, the pair will take to the skies.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Consumption data

911 Carrera Cabriolet (WLTP)*: Consommation combinée (gamme): 10.3 – 10.1 l/100 km; Emissions de CO_2 combinée (gamme): 235 – 231 g/km; Statut [StandHeute]

*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

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