

Porsche celebrates fifty years since the original audacious adventure

25/04/2025 On April 28, 1975 a one-off Porsche 917 race car left the Weissach development center. It headed not for a track – like every 917 before – but instead, and for the very first time, it took to public roads.

It was an audacious adventure driven by the passion of a private owner and the commitment of a small team within Porsche to fulfil the wishes of customers, no matter how outlandish the request. Fittingly, that first exploratory drive did not end after a prudent cruise around local roads, but when the car reached Paris – several hundred miles later. It was a feat that would go on to inspire many more adventures in the decades that would follow.

The car – 917 chassis 30 – which was originally raced, featured an array of changes that dominated endurance racing in the early 1970s. Some of the enhancements were mandated by the laws of the time, and others at the request of its owner – Italian businessman and Martini heir Gregorio Rossi di Montelera – known more simply as “Count Rossi”, a renowned Porsche enthusiast.

Finished in Martini Silver, the car featured a set of rudimentary exhaust mufflers, additional mirrors, side indicators and even a horn. It carried the mandatory spare tire beneath its rear clamshell.

Inside there were small concessions to comfort – the two seats (a requirement for endurance racers of this period) were re-finished in tan leather (commissioned from Hermes) with accompanying suede surfacers for the roof lining, doors and dashboard.

The gear shifter retained the same wooden finish as the racers, and even kept the same drilled, lightweight key. The car originally wore an Alabama license plate obtained by Count Rossi.

Today the car is still enjoyed by its enthusiastic current owner on the open roads in the south of France where it resides – now registered in the U.K. and having undergone recent restoration work (albeit preserving its original paint and interior) to prepare it for its next half century of surprising other road users.

Importantly, as it's descendent enjoys success on the track today, the spirit and desire within Porsche that allowed the creation of a 917 for the road all that time ago remains very much alive five decades on – prompting the question: what if?

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Brendan Mok

Head of PR & Communications – Porsche Asia Pacific
brendan.mok@porsche-ap.com

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart