

Twenty-five years on: Porsche brings LMP 2000 racing car to life

05/12/2024 A journey back in time to 1999 begins with a roll-out on the Weissach Development Centre test track. The LMP 2000 was originally designed to take victory at Le Mans. However, midway through the development, the company decided, for budgetary reasons, to discontinue the project after the car was completed.

After only 78 kilometres of testing, a car cover was draped over it and it was parked up for more than two decades. That is until the team from Porsche Heritage and Museum brought the LMP 2000 back to life, complete with the multitude of myths that swirl around its existence. Twenty-five years later, many who were part of the original programme met again at the car's most recent roll-out, at which Allan McNish was at the wheel, just as he was in 1999.

Stories of a project close to the hearts

"A project close to our heart" is the phrase that one keeps hearing at the Weissach Development Centre

when people are talking about the LMP 2000. The car, which has not yet done a single race lap, has never been far from the thoughts of the people who created it for the past two and a half decades. On the 25th anniversary of the original runs on 2 and 3 November 1999, the Porsche Heritage and Museum team has made the car ready to be driven again. At the wheel was Allan McNish, who was the last person to drive the racing car back in 1999.

While the 54-year-old drove the first laps of the 2.88-km test track, parts of the team that was involved in the project, which bore the internal name '9R3' a quarter of a century ago, joined in the excitement. Those there included Norbert Singer, then Race Engineer, Head of Motorsport Thomas Laudenbach, then Application Engineer and Herbert Ampferer, former Head of the Racing Department. In addition, Armin Burger, coordinator of Historical Motorsport; Traugott Brecht, Technical Advisor of Historical Motorsport; Timo Bernhard, Le Mans winner and Brand Ambassador; Steffen Wolf, Engineer in the field of Engine Management Systems as well as Alexander E. Klein, Head of Heritage Operations and Communication took part.

For each and every one of them, the LMP 2000 is more than just a car. It is a chapter of their personal Porsche story. What unites them all is that these are stories of a project close to their hearts, stories of a racing car that never took part in a race, has no success story to tell and has fewer than 80 km on the clock. The car was originally developed for the LMP900 Le Mans prototype class, meaning it weighed in at no more than 900 kg, in accordance with the regulations of that particular category. And the goal? Overall victory in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The stats are no less impressive than the car's goal was: a power output of more than 600 PS, from a naturally aspirated 5.5 litre V10.

An emotional journey through time at the Weissach test track

"Fantastic! It feels like I have just gone back 25 years," says Le Mans winner McNish, as he finishes his first test runs in the recommissioned LMP 2000. "The smiles on the faces of the people here are just as impressive as the sound of the engine that builds up behind you on the long straight!" As a Porsche works driver, the Scottish racer got to drive the car for the first time on 3 November 1999 – when he was 29 years old – at a cool 8.6 degrees Celsius and a humidity of 68 per cent. On that day, despite tyres that were not right for the low temperature, he reached a top speed of 302 km/h, covering 60 km, a run which included setting a lap record. The day before, Bob Wollek, who died in 2001, had already completed the first few kilometres in the car. Together, they clocked up 78 km in the LMP 2000 over two days. "Bob would certainly have come today to see this," says McNish.

For everyone there, it was as if the LMP 2000 had been catapulted into the present direct from the past, a piece of living motorsport history. While McNish is still raving about how it felt like he had never been away after that Wednesday in November 1999, Timo Bernhard remembers his own personal LMP 2000 moment: "I saw the car and imagined what it would be like to drive it one day," he says. Shortly before that, the man who would go on to win Le Mans himself, but who was just 18 years old at the time, had signed his contract as a Porsche Junior driver. "It makes me very proud that 25 years later I was able to complete a few test laps with the racing car," Bernhard laughs. "The LMP 2000 radiated

confidence. The V10 engine feels buttery soft; the car is extremely light and agile with a lot of downforce. The almost linear power delivery is amazing, the sound incredible," the 43-year-old is effusive in his praise. For him, the open cockpit and the view it provides embody freedom. "It was a great honour for me and felt like we had carried on telling the story."

Working together with the motorsport team from Formula E

The idea of rebuilding the LMP 2000 grew over several years. For the Porsche Heritage and Museum team, restorations are more than just journeys through time into the company's history - they are above all technical projects in which historic vehicles are put back into operation or kept running using new methods. 'Every time I saw the LMP 2000 covered in the museum warehouse, I thought about the 1999 roll-out,' says Armin Burger. 'In the end, we quickly agreed to bring the racing car back to life in time for its anniversary,' adds Alexander E. Klein. The Head of Heritage Operations and Communication has never forgotten the LMP 2000 either. "So many people have asked me if the legendary car really exists and if so, where it is," Klein says of the originally secret project from 1998 and 1999.

Back in Weissach, Burger's colleague Traugott Brecht began to gradually remove the bodywork from the black racing car. "We worked carefully up to the engine until one day we dared to do the first fire-up," Burger remembers. The moment of the first engine start was exciting – and all 10 cylinders ran perfectly. The team then devoted itself to the gearbox, which was already a major challenge even back in 1999. "Making the gearbox work again was one of the biggest tasks in recent months," Burger explains, pointing to the original steering wheel and its shift paddles.

"We found four control units and tried to access them with an old computer," explains Steffen Wolf. The engineer from the engine management systems division at Porsche Heritage and Museum helped the team to get the V10, which was once intended as a competition engine for the future, to work. Wolf is part of the success story of the Porsche 919 Hybrid. What drives it is the constant increase in efficiency; the challenge of getting the best out of what is there. "Anyone who has ever heard a V10 engine knows that it will make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. The muscular sound at idle, the touch of the accelerator that allows the low flywheel mass to rev up quickly," reminisces Wolf. Without the control unit description file, the assignment and reading of the signals was a Sisyphean task. "We needed a control unit that reacted to the signal from the paddle on the steering wheel and then actuated the shift. As paddle shifting wasn't possible, it had to be set up so that upshifting and downshifting took place when the clutch was actuated," says Wolf.

Alongside colleagues from Bosch as well as Timo Flammer, Christoph Abraham and Robin Maurer from the Motorsport and Formula E department at Porsche, the team from Porsche Heritage and Museum worked intensively on a solution. A Formula E control unit was then used to transmit the shift signal from the shift paddle to the gearbox. "We started the engine and, with sufficient hydraulic pressure, pressed the clutch, pulled the shift paddle and were able to put it in gear," Burger recalls about the moment the gear engaged, when he knew that a shakedown run would be possible in the near future.

The V10 of the LMP 2000 is based on an earlier Porsche Formula 1 engine – a high-revving 3.5-litre engine with pneumatic valve control, originally developed for entry into Formula 1 in the early 1990s. For use at Le Mans, the creators modified the engine – which was originally designed for much shorter racing distances. Wolf often thinks back to his LMP 2000 moment, and he also repeatedly uses the phrase 'project close to my heart' and the word 'honour' when talking about repairing the car and the 2024 roll-out. "Since joining Porsche in 2012, I have heard a lot of stories about this car. It was only years later that I saw it in the warehouse, carefully covered with a cream-coloured silk cloth. To see it driving again today is indescribable."

The roll-out as a welcome and farewell at the same time

For Norbert Singer, the carbon-chassised LMP 2000 is also a project close to his heart. He thinks back to 1998, when the idea for this car was born. At that time, the experienced Racing Engineer, his team and the Porsche 911 GT1 '98 achieved a double victory in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. "Back in Weissach, we were considering whether we would like to line up again the following year with a GT1 or an LMP," says Singer. The decision was quickly made in favour of a prototype that had tyres that didn't wear as heavily, was more economical in terms of fuel consumption and allowed for triple stints instead of double stints – a concept that promised fewer pit stops and which would save valuable racing time."

As the time before the 1999 season was too short, we planned the LMP to race in 2000," says the racing engineer, who has earned the nickname 'Mr Le Mans' at Porsche. Singer, who turned 85 a few days ago, was part of 16 of Porsche's 19 overall victories at Le Mans. "We opted for a 10-cylinder naturally aspirated engine instead of a turbocharged one, and an open-top car that, for aerodynamic reasons, allows for more downforce," explains Singer. But even while the team was still firmly focused on participation in Le Mans, the project was cancelled in August 1999. Participation in the 24-hour race was turned down for budgetary reasons. Even so, then-CEO Wendelin Wiedeking approved the completion of the car and let the LMP 2000 have its original shakedown test. "The original roll-out was both a welcome and a farewell. We were full of joy – but also sadness and regret," says Singer.

For Herbert Ampferer, former Head of Motorsport at Porsche, the anniversary event also held a special significance. On the day of the 1999 roll-out, he was not on site, so he was all the more pleased to be there 25 years later. "It was absolutely a project close to my heart. I can still remember exactly the call I received 25 years ago while on my business trip: 'The LMP 2000 is driving – but you'll never see it,'" remembers Ampferer. "We wanted the LMP 2000 to show what we could do. The development process took almost 14 months. I feel very honoured to see it driving for myself for the first time today, 25 years later." In contrast to former Head of Motorsport Ampferer, the current Head of Motorsport, Thomas Laudenbach, at that time working as application engineer, was on site for the record run in 1999. "I can still remember exactly how Allan got out and said: 'This car has great potential'."

The 25-year anniversary run is not only a technical success for the whole team, but also honours everyone who invested their time, energy and passion in the development of the car. The LMP 2000 embodied the essence of what the company is: a determination to constantly redefine what is feasible

and the courage to hold on to great ideas even against resistance. The LMP 2000 is and will remain a project close to our hearts, and one that reflects the values of Porsche. Unveiled, full of stories. Ready to finally tell them.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Video

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Image Sublines

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Title: Allan McNish, LMP 2000, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Allan McNish

Path: Twenty-five years on: Porsche brings LMP 2000 racing car to life/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Traugott Brecht, Timo Bernhard, Porsche Brand Ambassador, Armin Burger (l-r), Weisssach, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Traugott Brecht, Timo Bernhard and Armin Burger

Path: Twenty-five years on: Porsche brings LMP 2000 racing car to life/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Steffen Wolf, engine management systems division at Porsche Heritage and Museum, LMP 2000, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Steffen Wolf

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Title: Nobert Singer, LMP 2000, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Norbert Singer

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Title: Herbert Ampferer, Former Head of Motorsport, Allan McNish, racing driver, Norbert Singer, Former race engineer (l-r), Weissach, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Herbert Ampferer, Allan McNish and Norbert Singer

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