

Best Porsche 911 RSR finishes on the podium at the 6 Hours of Fuji

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11/09/2022 The two 911 RSR fielded by the Porsche GT Team have finished the 6 Hours of Fuji (Japan) in positions three and four. Works drivers Michael Christensen from Denmark and Kévin Estre from France achieved a podium result at the wheel of the No. 92 car. In the manufacturer's classification, Porsche is just one point behind the leader and is still in contention for the title as they head to the final round of this year's FIA World Endurance Championship WEC in Bahrain on 12 November. No decision has yet been made in the drivers' world championship.

The race

In the close battle among manufacturers in the GTE-Pro class, Porsche clinched positions one and three in a successful qualifying session and tackled the endurance race in Japan with high hopes. However, it

became apparent early on in the race that the competitiveness on race day did not meet those expectations. The most important factors in the race: the tyres and the BoP rating of the vehicles.

“Sure, we made mistakes, but there was no doubt that today’s performance would never have been enough to beat Ferrari,” concludes Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. “It’s disappointing, but we have to move on and analyse the reasons. Perhaps the Balance of Performance issue needs to be revisited. Our goal is unchanged: we want to win the world championship in Bahrain.”

“Was it our fault today? Was it the Balance of Performance? We have to take a close look and then discuss it. The competition was similar for our customers in the GTE-Am class,” says Alexander Stehlig, Director Factory Motorsport FIA WEC. “It was not a good day for us. We have a lot of work ahead of us but, despite today’s events, we’re optimistic that we’ll be back in force in Bahrain and we can win the world championship.”

In air temperatures of around 29 degrees Celsius and bright sunshine, the asphalt temperature had reached over 50 degrees by the time the race started in the late morning. This threw a tough challenge at the teams, who had experienced cooler conditions in the previous practice sessions. The focus turned to the durability of the Michelin racing tyres which became a critical factor in the race. The Porsche GT Team opted for a soft-hot compound at the start of the race. This specification only offered about 30 minutes of decent grip before it decreased significantly and lap times increased.

Halfway through the first stint, both of the works team’s Porsche 911 RSR dropped from positions one and three to P3 and P4. Switching to a medium tyre compound brought more consistency, but still no real advantage in the fight for class victory. The positions were quickly established, with an unchanging order in the GTE-Pro category over long stretches. The 911 racing cars remained in their positions for the remainder of the race. Two penalties and a collision with an amateur vehicle relegated the No. 91 entry well behind its sister car.

In the GTE-Am category, Dempsey-Proton Competition celebrated a special anniversary: The No. 77 car contested its 77th WEC race. The 911 RSR driven by the German team owner Christian Ried and the two UK drivers Harry Tincknell and Sebastian Priaulx was also unsuccessful. After about four and a half hours of racing, the car retired with a technical defect. The best-placed 911 in the amateur class was the No. 46 vehicle campaigned by the customer team Project 1 in sixth place. The sister car took the flag in eighth place. Dempsey-Proton Racing’s No. 88 car crossed the finish line in ninth, with the GR Racing team in twelfth.

In the overall rankings, Porsche surrendered the lead in the manufacturers’ championship. The gap to the top of the leaderboard is only one point. In the drivers’ championship, Estre and Christensen still have a chance of clinching the title in second place. The final race of the 2022 FIA World Endurance Championship WEC will be contested in Bahrain on 12 November. The event near the capital Manama runs over eight hours and is the last factory outing for the successful Porsche 911 RSR.

Drivers' comments on the race

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "We tried everything but we couldn't do more today. We lacked quite a lot of speed. After starting from pole position, we managed to fend off the Ferraris for a while, but eventually, we couldn't hold them off anymore. They then gradually pulled away from us. The only possible chance would have been to make a smart strategic decision during a safety car phase, but this scenario didn't eventuate in the race."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "Ferrari was too strong, we couldn't match the pace. On the long straight, they were quite a bit faster than us. We could never make up for that in the corners – no chance. Although we put in an immaculate drive, we were more than 30 seconds behind at the end. That says it all."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "We had a really good car and squeezed everything we could out of it. But it wasn't enough to seriously challenge the competition today. Compared to our rivals, we lacked top speed and acceleration. That was obvious. Unfortunately, Porsche only managed to finish third and fourth. We have to turn this around in Bahrain."

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "We were clearly too slow. In such circumstances, it's not much fun if you're trailing behind. But we couldn't do more today. The car handled very well and our team did a great job."
Race result

Results

GTE-Pro class:
1. Pier Guidi/Calado (I/UK), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 217 laps
2. Molina/Fuoco (E/I), Ferrari 488 GTE #52, 217 laps
3. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 217 laps
4. Bruni/Lietz (I/A), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 216 laps
5. Milner/Tandy (USA/UK), Corvette C8.R #64, 215 laps

GTE-Am class:
1. Keating/Chaves/Sörensen (USA/P/DK), Aston Martin #33, 213 laps
2. Frey/Gatting/Bovy (CH/DK/B), Ferrari 488 GTE #85, 212 laps
3. Hoshino/Fujii/Fagg (J/J/UK), Aston Martin #777, 212 laps
6. Cairoli/Pedersen/Leutwiler (I/DK/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #46, 211 laps
8. Kimura/Millroy/Barnicoat (J/UK/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 211 laps
9. Poordad/Lindsey/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 211 laps
12. Wainwright/Barker/Pera (UK/UK/I), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 193 laps
DNF. Ried/Priaulx/Tincknell (D/UK/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 128 laps

Full results: https://fiawec.alkamelsystems.com

The qualifying

Michael Christensen's fastest qualifying lap handed the Porsche GT Team pole position in Fuji, Japan. This has earned the Dane and Kévin Estre (France) another critical point in their bid for the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC title. Gianmaria Bruni (Italy) starts from the third spot on the grid. Pole position at the penultimate race of the season marks the third for the factory team from Weissach. Previously, the 911 RSR had dominated the qualifying in the GTE-Pro class at Sebring (USA) and Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium).

"That was a first-class lap from Michael. First and third on the grid are great starting positions for tomorrow's race," concludes Thomas Laudenbach. The Vice President of Porsche Motorsport adds: "We want to get the absolute maximum out of this weekend and have the championship at the front of our minds at all times. A one-off victory in Japan is less important than winning the world championship – but of course, we wouldn't mind at all if we won here in Fuji."

"It was important that we were the best in qualifying because of the good starting position and the extra point towards the championship standings," explains Alexander Stehlig, Director Factory Motorsport FIA WEC. "On race day, we expect very warm temperatures – which will be slightly different to the practice sessions on Friday and Saturday. This throws a new challenge at us. Our goal is clear: we want to score perfect points."

In air temperatures of around 27 degrees Celsius and sunny conditions, Christensen set the fastest time of 1:36.371 minutes early in the ten-minute session. While his brand colleague Bruni matched his pace in the first sector on the 4.563-kilometre racetrack, he was hampered repeatedly by heavy traffic on his remaining laps. As such, the No. 91 Porsche, which he shares with Richard Lietz from Austria, missed out on a front grid row spot in the GTE-Pro category.

In the GTE-Am category, the two 911 RSR fielded by the Project 1 customer team achieved positions five and seven. Lining up on the grid directly behind them is Dempsey-Proton Racing's No. 77 car. The second vehicle campaigned by the experienced German squad tackles the race from P9. The 911 run by the UK team GR Racing claimed P10 in qualifying.

The six-hour race in Fuji gets underway on Sunday, 11 September, at 11:00 am local time (4:00 am CEST).

Drivers' comments on the qualifying

M**ichael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92):** "Personally, I'm delighted that I managed such a great

lap. With a view to the championship, the point for pole position can be very important, maybe even decisive. In the race, we'd like to control the field from the front – and that works best when you start from pole position. We did a perfect job today, now we're facing the next challenge on race day. I'm feeling optimistic."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "It was okay, but I was a bit unlucky on the first three laps – another car kept getting in my way. With a clear run, I definitely could've done better. Now we have to live with P3. Still, anything is possible in a long six-hour race."

Nicolas Leutwiler (Porsche 911 RSR #46): "Best Porsche in our class! That's what I was aiming for in qualifying. I'm really pleased. I concentrated so hard on the ideal racing line. I made just one small mistake on my flying lap. P5 is fine – anything is possible from that grid position. If we make it through without incident, we'll have a good chance."

Qualifying result

GTE-Pro class:
1. Christensen/Estre (DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #92, 1:36.371 minutes
2. Pier Guidi/Calado (I/UK), Ferrari 488 GTE #51, 1:36.566 minutes
3. Bruni/Lietz (I/A), Porsche 911 RSR #91, 1:36.800 minutes
4. Molina/Fuoco (E/I), Ferrari 488 GTE #52, 1:36.851 minutes
5. Milner/Tandy (USA/UK), Corvette C8.R #64, 1:37.127 minutes

GTE-Am class:
1. Keating/Chaves/Sörensen (USA/P/DK), Aston Martin #33, 1:39.309 minutes
2. Bovy/Frey/Gatting (B/CH/DK), Ferrari 488 GTE #85, 1:39.371 minutes
3. Dezoteux/Ragues/Aubry (F/F/F), Ferrari 488 GTE #71, 1:39.461 minutes
5. Cairoli/Pedersen/Leutwiler (I/DK/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #46, 1:39.796 minutes
7. Kimura/Millroy/Barnicoat (J/UK/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 1:39.853 minutes
8. Ried/Priaulx/Tincknell (D/UK/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 1:39.874 minutes
9. Poordad/Lindsey/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 RSR #88, 1:40.052 minutes
10. Wainwright/Barker/Pera (UK/UK/I), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 1:40.271 minutes

The preview

Porsche travels to round five of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC in Fuji as the series leader. The factory squad aims to clinch its third GTE-Pro class win of the season in Japan and is eager to take another step towards claiming the world title. After recovering from an illness, Richard Lietz returns to the cockpit of the No. 91 Porsche 911 RSR.

The six-hour race at the foot of Mount Fuji will be contested on the second weekend of September for

the first time in two years. In 2020 and 2021, the event was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. The last time the endurance race was held in Japan, Kévin Estre (France) and Michael Christensen (Denmark) took the flag in second place in the GTE-Pro category at the wheel of their Porsche 911 RSR. The year before, the duo won the race on the storied circuit in the Shizuoka Prefecture.

“We’re on the finish straight of the final season with the Porsche 911 RSR in the GTE-Pro class. The competition is tighter than it’s ever been. We’ll do our very best to take home the big trophies at the end of the season,” states Alexander Stehlig. The Director of Factory Motorsport FIA WEC adds: “We used the time since the last race in Monza for detailed analyses so that we can continue to improve. After an intense start to the year with four races and several tests within seven months, the team also got the chance to take a break. We’re heading to Japan fully energised and highly motivated.”

Since its opening in 1966, the 4.563-kilometre Fuji Speedway has hosted four Formula 1 races. The circuit lies at the foot of Mount Fuji, Japan’s highest mountain at 3,776 metres. The snow-capped peak of the volcano is often the spectacular backdrop in photos taken at the racetrack. The track layout features a broad range of corner radii as well as the longest straight on the World Endurance Championship calendar at 1.475 kilometres in length.

“For the very long straight, air resistance should be as low as possible to achieve a high top speed. At the same time, we need a lot of downforce for the many semi-fast corners – this means we have to find a good compromise when setting up the vehicle,” says Alexander Stehlig, explaining the challenge the engineers grapple with when working out an ideal setup. “We face an additional task this season: The race in Fuji is about a month earlier than in previous years, which means it’ll be late summer in Japan with higher temperatures expected. This will affect tyre use. Plus, the asphalt on the Fuji Speedway is demanding. That will be a major issue at the upcoming race.”

A special highlight of the WEC round in Japan is the “Circuit Safari”. Shortly before the start of the third free practice on Saturday, all teams will send at least one of their vehicles out to lap the racetrack at almost race pace. At the same time, buses will gain access to transport many fans around the circuit. The event has proved popular among spectators and gives the passengers lasting impressions of the sheer speed of the sports car and prototypes as well as the race action in the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC.

The Porsche GT Team drivers

The two Le Mans class winners Richard Lietz from Austria and Italy’s Gianmaria Bruni join forces in the ca. 378 kW (515 PS) Porsche 911 RSR with the starting number 91. The Italian currently lies second in the drivers’ championship, with his Austrian teammate in fourth. While illness forced the regular driver Lietz to miss the race at Monza (Italy), he now returns to the squad. Position three in the overall rankings is occupied by their brand colleagues Kévin Estre from France and Michael Christensen from Denmark. The two drivers in the No. 92 cockpit won the season-opening round in Sebring (USA).

Porsche leads the manufacturers' classification after four of six races.

The customer teams

Dempsey-Proton Racing fields two Porsche 911 RSR racers at the WEC race in Fuji. Team owner Christian Ried from Germany shares driving duties in the No. 77 car with the two English racing drivers Harry Tincknell and Sebastian Priaulx. The No. 88 sister car is shared by Americans Fred Poordad and Patrick Lindsey as well as Belgium's Jan Heylen.

Project 1's No. 46 entry will be driven by Switzerland's Nicolas Leutwiler, Mikkel Pedersen from Denmark and Italy's Matteo Cairoli. Ben Barnicoat and Oliver Millroy from the UK join forces in the No. 56 car fielded by the German customer team with the American Brendan Iribe. GR Racing's No. 86 car is helmed by the UK duo Michael Wainwright and Ben Barker as well as Riccardo Pera from Italy.

Drivers' comments before the race

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "It's finally time for a long-haul journey again. Even though we're racing in September in Fuji this year, we're hoping for some unpredictable weather. We recently saw in Monza that we struggle under certain circumstances. I reckon some rain or changeable conditions could improve our chances. We want to win in Japan to give us the best possible chance in the fight for the world championship title at the season finale in Bahrain."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 911 RSR #91): "The last time we were in Japan was 2019 – so it's high time that we finally race in front of the amazing fans in Fuji. With the championship entering a very heated phase, the race will be enormously important. When we competed there three years ago, our car was very fast, but luck wasn't on our side. I hope that everything will run smoothly this year. We want to win the titles on the farewell tour of our factory nine-elevens – both for Porsche in the manufacturer's championship and in the driver's championship."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "After a two-year hiatus, I'm delighted to be back racing in Japan. I enjoy the country and the culture, the respectful people and the passionate fans. The track at Fuji has always suited our Porsche 911 RSR – that makes me optimistic. The fight for the championship is extremely tight this year, it's vital that we're right at the front in the upcoming race and that we bring home maximum points."

Michael Christensen (Porsche 911 RSR #92): "The anticipation for the upcoming race is particularly high. We've all been suffering from a kind of 'Japan withdrawal' because we weren't able to travel there for two years. For the first time, the Fuji event will take place earlier in mid-September. We have to expect much higher temperatures than in previous years. This year's title fight is so close that the championship will be decided by two factors: the best preparation and the lowest margin of error. Clearly, these are the things we'll focus on."

The schedule (all times CEST)

Friday, 9 September
4:00 am to 5:30 am: Free practice 1
8:30 am to 10:00 am: Free practice 2

Saturday, 10 September
3:00 am to 3:12 am: Circuit Safari
3:20 pm – 4:20 pm: Free practice 3
7:40 pm – 7:50 pm: Qualifying GTE

Sunday, 11 September
4:00 am to 10:00 am: Race

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