

The success story of the Porsche 963

08/11/2024 Porsche Penske Motorsport wins a total of seven titles with the Porsche 963.

The 2024 season will go down as one of the most successful in Porsche's storied motorsport history. In only the second year with the Porsche 963, the German sports car manufacturer won seven of eight possible global titles together with the Porsche Penske Motorsport factory race team. Consistent improvement of the team structure itself as well as determined focus on the reliability and performance of the hybrid prototype race car were the leading factors in this monumental season of success.

Atlanta. The overall results of the 2024 season in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) were six of six possible titles in the North American GTP class as well as the world championship crown for the factory drivers Kévin Estre (France), André Lotterer (Germany) and Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) in the WEC Hypercar class. Porsche only missed the WEC manufacturer's title by a narrow two points.

"'Nobody's perfect' - we already used this slogan in 1983, when only one third-party manufacturer

appeared in the top 10 of the 24 Hours of Le Mans," smiles Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. 41 years ago, Porsche immortalized the Le Mans result under that title on a legendary poster: racing cars from Stuttgart in the first eight places in the overall classification and in tenth place, with a Sauber BMW in between. In 2024, the longed-for 20th overall victory in Le Mans failed to materialize, but the results of the season are still impressive.

"It was an incredibly successful year," explains Laudenbach. "With the Porsche 963 and our global team Porsche Penske Motorsport, we won seven out of eight possible titles in a very strong competitive environment. That fills me with great pride. This result is a well-deserved reward for the hard work of everyone involved at the racetracks, at our team locations in Mannheim [Germany] and Mooresville [North Carolina] and in the development department in Weissach [Germany, Porsche Motorsport headquarters]. We brought the Porsche 963 and the entire program to the top within a short period of time."

Porsche 963 project: The consistent development is bearing fruit

Review. On December 16, 2020, Porsche publicly announced for the first time that it would return to the top classes of the world's two largest endurance series: the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC). The basis for this was the decision by the motorsport authorities FIA and IMSA to introduce a common set of rules for the top vehicles for the 2023 season: hybrid prototypes in the LMDh (**L**e **M**ans **D**aytona **h**ybrid) category.

The collaboration with Team Penske to form a new global motorsports team in Porsche Penske Motorsport came in May 2021 as the next step on the way to Porsche's return to the top class of both IMSA and the World Championship, including to the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Porsche selected Multimatic as the chassis partner from the four approved LMDh chassis manufacturers. Following the chassis announcement, the decision was made to use a 4.6-liter V8 engine, which was also recently used in a hybrid configuration in the 918 Spyder super sports car. The roots of the high-revving engine go back even further, namely to the very successful Porsche RS Spyder racing prototype from the 2000s which was also raced in a partnership with Team Penske. Porsche Penske Motorsport set up its operations centers for IMSA at Team Penske headquarters in Mooresville, North Carolina and the FIA WEC in Mannheim, Germany. On January 13, 2022, the new Porsche 963 came to life for the first time during a highly acclaimed roll-out on the test track in Weissach, Germany. Test drives over more than 18,640 miles (30,000 kilometers) formed the basis for the global racing premiere for the hybrid prototype celebrated at the 24 Hours of Daytona in January 2023.

Debut season 2023: First race victories and a book full of homework

The Daytona endurance racing classic at the start of the new Porsche Penske Motorsport team's first season filled the list of tasks. The Porsche 963 had demonstrated enormous performance potential right from the start, but further progress had to be made in the areas of reliability and operations.

Although the number 7 started the race from the front row and was able to complete numerous laps in the lead in its debut, the "works" cars ultimately finished in a disappointing seventh and eighth place. At the start of the FIA WEC season in Sebring, Florida, Porsche also missed out on the hoped for success with positions five and six. Consistent improvements subsequently caused the performance curve to rise steeply.

In the IMSA championship, Porsche earned its first podium finish for the 963 at the 12 Hours of Sebring, the second race of the season in North America. The first global victory for the car came at the following race in Long Beach, California. Further triumphs followed, including at Road America and a one-two result in Indianapolis. Porsche only narrowly missed a championship title it the inaugural GTP class season in the finale at Michelin Raceway Road Atlanta. The first podium finishes were also achieved in the WEC. However, the big breakthrough, a race victory, failed to materialize on the international series stage.

"The results, especially at Le Mans, fell short of our expectations at the time. When Porsche competes in the top class, there can only ever be one goal: victory," says Laudenbach. As the season progressed, the specifications continued to fill up. The areas for improvement were then worked through. "The experiences from 2023 gave us a large list of homework for the short winter break. We managed to optimize the reliability and performance of the car as well as the team structure," explains Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. "After incredibly hard work, we came to Daytona in January 2024 and won. That was the key. It showed: We can do it!"

Victory at the 24 Hours of Daytona 2024: Strong sign at the start of the new year

Extensive adjustments finally put Porsche on the road to victory. At the start of the IMSA season, the 24 Hours of Daytona in January, the number 7 racing car with factory drivers Matt Campbell (Australia), Felipe Nasr (Brazil) and Dane Cameron (Huntersville, North Carolina) together with Indianapolis 500 winner Josef Newgarden (Nashville, Tennessee) won. "That's when the ball really started rolling," says Campbell, looking back with delight. Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport, explains: "The victory at Daytona was the key to all further successes this season. Right at the start of the year, we proved to the world and ourselves that we can achieve anything. I have been in motorsport for 20 years. I know that there are beautiful and difficult phases. Of course, sometimes we experience days when we wonder why we invest maximum energy and countless hours in this sport. The answer is Daytona: moments like these are incomparable!"

The initial spark in IMSA also lit the fire for the FIA WEC. At the start of the world championship in Qatar, the two Porsche 963s took first and third place, the first WEC victory for the prototype. "The great weekend in Qatar confirmed to us, as in IMSA, we can compete with other LMDh cars in the WEC and also beat the LMH Hypercars. That was very important," says Kuratle. In both racing series, Porsche and the works drivers took the overall lead at the start of the season. 2024 started strong and brought

further bright highlights, ultimately winning seven titles.

There were four wins in nine races in the IMSA series. With the exception of Indianapolis, at least one Porsche 963 from the factory team reached the podium in every race. As a result of that consistent high performance, Porsche won the manufacturers' championship, Porsche Penske Motorsport won the team championship and the factory aces Felipe Nasr and Dane Cameron won the drivers' crown. Three more titles in the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup rounded off the impeccable record in the North American championship. It includes the five longest races of the year at Daytona, Sebring, Watkins Glen, Indianapolis and Road Atlanta. In the FIA WEC, Porsche Penske Motorsport triumphed in Qatar and Fuji, Japan. At the races in Imola (Italy), Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium), São Paulo (Brazil) and Sakhir (Bahrain), podium successes brought many world championship points. In the end, Kévin Estre, André Lotterer and Laurens Vanthoor celebrated winning the Drivers' World Championship. Porsche finished second in the manufacturers' title missing that championship accolade by only two points. “We can look back on an extremely successful season,” says Laudenbach happily. “But we would have liked to have won the Manufacturers' World Championship and the 20th overall victory in Le Mans. These are now our biggest goals for the 2025 season.”

The Porsche 963 and the 24 Hours of Le Mans: Love at third sight?

After the disappointing debut of the 963 at Le Mans 2023, Porsche showed considerable improvement at the world's most famous endurance race this year. However, the hoped-for overall victory failed to materialize. The pole position by Kévin Estre, numerous laps leading in the race and fourth and sixth place finishes underlined the progress. What's more, the long-distance classic in France demonstrated the important improvements in the area of reliability. In its analysis of the 2023 season, Porsche identified engine vibrations as the probable cause of failures in the standard hybrid system. After the victory at Daytona and the stable performance at Le Mans over 24 hours, it was clear the experienced Porsche engineers had found a functional, fast, cost-effective and sustainable solution that would enable the Porsche 963 to achieve further great successes in the years to come.

“Victory or podium finishes at Daytona, Qatar and Spa do not necessarily mean success at Le Mans. We always knew that, but unfortunately, we had to experience it firsthand this year,” reports Jonathan Diuguid. “The goal for 2025 is therefore clearly defined: we want the victory in Le Mans!” Next year, Porsche Penske Motorsport will take part in the world’s largest endurance race in France with at least two factory entries. Everyone involved wants to further extend Porsche's record at Le Mans with a 20th overall win. “Despite all the successes this year, there is this little race in France that everyone wants to win. We haven't managed that – not yet…” laughs Kuratle, looking at the highlight of the coming season.

Statistics Porsche Penske Motorsport 2024

IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship:

Number of races: 9

Wins: 4

Further podium places: 8

Pole positions: 1

FIA World Endurance Championship WEC:

Number of races: 8

Wins: 2

Further podium places: 7

Pole positions: 2

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