

Speed meets style: the design of the Porsche 963

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06/06/2023 Stéphane Lenglin penned the design of the Porsche 963 Le Mans prototype, which is rather unusual, given that this is a performance-oriented racing car and Lenglin is not an aerodynamic engineer but a designer. But when has Porsche been bound by the rules? In this interview, Lenglin tells us all about it.

Stéphane, what makes the Porsche 963 so special in your eyes?

The 963 marks the return of Porsche to the premier class of endurance racing. In addition, it is the first time since the 911 GT1 from 1998 that Style Porsche and Porsche Motorsport have built a prototype vehicle together. At the same time, it celebrates the 25th anniversary of the 'joint' Le Mans victory.

It's a very special anniversary for you personally as well, isn't it?

That's right. The double Porsche victory was also the first time I ever attended Le Mans. My brother and I were with my father at a friend's house in Paris, and the race was on TV. Suddenly my father said "Come on, we're going there right now". At first, we thought he was kidding – but he was deadly serious. So, we impulsively set off for Le Mans at midnight. When we got there, us kids just fell asleep in the grass at the side of the track. [*laughs*] And now, 25 years later, I designed one of the cars competing there. It's totally surreal.

What we have here is design in combination with a focus on pure performance. How do you design a beautiful and equally fast racing car?

That indeed was the challenge. As designers, we always play with proportions. And when the specifications came in, it was clear to everyone in the team that we would need a very, very long wheelbase. Above all, however, the form had to comply with the regulations. The first trick for me was to go straight into the detail. For example, we divided the car into three parts – front, centre section and rear – and then made it a little shorter and smaller visually using the colour design. It just works.

So not just pure functionality?

No, it wasn't purely function, there's also quite a bit of form. Still, we had a bit of freedom to work. As I said, it's the first time in 25 years that Porsche has had this special style. We get to do design! That also means that we worked closely together with all the other teams. First there was the sketch, which we sent to the engineers before building the model together. It was like playing ping-pong, always going back and forth.

What is your favourite angle from which to view the vehicle?

From above and the back. When you look at the 963 from the side, it's very flat and very long. From the front, the car seems really small. But from a slightly higher vantage point, it always looks perfect. We were thinking about the television cameras from the helicopter and the fans in the stands when we did that. You often see the cars from above. We wanted to accentuate that angle.

About the livery: what do the lines that run across the car tell us? What do they represent?

These lines were inspired by the past. But the idea was also to show how fast the 963 can go. The lines get very wide towards the back and pick up a lot of speed. On the other hand, they also highlight the shape of the car and make it look more aesthetic.

And what was the greatest challenge?

The greatest challenge was that the car had to be really fast. As a designer, you want to design beautiful things. Here I had to let go a bit and tell myself, "You don't just design to make things look nice". Working together with the engineers was an important experience for me in this process because they pointed out when one of my ideas was not the best for performance. That was very interesting for me –

and made everything so much more intense.

What exactly tells us that this is a Porsche?

There are a few details that point to the Porsche DNA. The four-point headlights, for example. We also tried to keep the nose as low as possible. And if you look closely, you'll find the unmistakable Porsche flyline, despite the fin prescribed by the regulations.

Can you briefly summarise for us what else constitutes the Porsche design language here?

It's this purist style and commitment to simplicity. Nobody else has that. And then there's the attention to detail, the technology, the whole package. Everything that says: this can only be a Porsche.

Information

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