

Twelve young guns eager to become the next Porsche Junior

16/11/2023 The door to a professional racing career will swing open for one Porsche Junior. Twelve talented up-and-coming racing drivers took part in a three-day selection process at the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve in Portugal. All of them hail from the worldwide Porsche one-make cups. Their goal: to become the 30th Junior in the 26-year history of this exemplary development initiative for young drivers. Historically, the programme has produced world champions, Le Mans overall winners and DTM champions.

The twelve invited Porsche Junior candidates all have one thing in common: they were no older than 24 at the time of the selection process. In 2023, these talented youngsters turned heads at the wheel of the 911 GT3 Cup contesting one of the sports car manufacturers' more than 30 one-make cup series. On the 4.653-kilometre Autódromo Internacional do Algarve, they pitted themselves against their rivals in ideal conditions. During the two days, the youngsters turned a total of 820 laps over a total of 3,841 kilometres on the Portuguese Grand Prix circuit. The four Cup racing cars they had at their disposal were powered exclusively by nearly potential CO2-neutral fuel from the Chilean eFuels pilot plant "Haru Oni". The plant is the result of a joint initiative between Porsche, the Chilean company HIF Global

(Highly Innovative Fuels) and international partners such as Siemens Energy. HIF Global runs the facility.

“For us, it’s all about ensuring as much of a level playing field for everyone as possible,” emphasises Sascha Maassen. The former Porsche works driver supports the junior drivers as a mentor before, during and after the race weekends and is also a member of the selection panel. “The participants should make the difference, not the external conditions. We take great care to fulfil this responsibility, for example, by balancing out weight advantages and disadvantages to the best of our ability. Fast lap times and flawless performances with the 911 GT3 Cup on the track certainly play an important role. At the same time, however, we also look at how the candidates behave beyond that: How they work alongside the engineers, what feedback they give on the car, and whether they are capable of learning and can motivate a team. A Porsche Junior automatically acts as a representative of the brand. They must be able to deal with media and be capable of developing mental resilience. In the end, it's the overall package that the talented youngster brings to the party that makes the difference.”

For the twelve candidates, taking part in the Porsche Junior selection programme is one of the most important milestones in their young motorsport careers: in addition to sponsorship of up to 225,000 euros, the winner receives extensive support from Porsche Motorsport. This support programme covers all relevant aspects of a professional career and has helped numerous Porsche juniors achieve works driver status in the past. Like their predecessors, the new junior faces a busy season. In 2024, this will include the eight races in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup as part of European Formula 1 races and, ideally, participation in one of the regional Porsche Carrera Cups. Moreover, they take part in mental training sessions, media seminars, PR appointments and other marketing activities. Sports medicine specialists also accompany the young driver.

Twelve candidates from nine countries on three continents with one goal

Nineteen-year-old Callum Hedge was able to claim an unofficial award before the test days even began: the prize for the longest journey to get there. This year, the New Zealander won the Porsche Carrera Cup Australia as well as the Formula Regional Americas. What's more, he finished second in the Formula Regional Oceania. Riley Dickson also took a long intercontinental flight: The 21-year-old American from near the Texan capital of Austin prevailed in the Carrera Cup North America. Valters Zviedris travelled to Portugal from Latvia. The 22-year-old won the Porsche Sprint Challenge Northern Europe.

Aldo Festante (23) competed in the Carrera Cup Italy. For the second time, 21-year-old Swede Hampus Ericsson represented the Carrera Cup Scandinavia in the Junior shootout. As the winner of the Carrera Cup Great Britain, Adam Smalley was delighted with his ticket to the Algarve. The 22-year-old also finished third in the Porsche Sprint Challenge Southern Europe during 2023. Johannes Kapfinger was nominated by Porsche Schweiz AG. As a newcomer to motor racing, the 20-year-old from Germany won the GT3 Cup in the Porsche Sprint Challenge Switzerland. Alessandro Ghiretti, on the other hand, was sent from Carrera Cup France, where he finished in second place. In addition, the 21-year-old was

crowned best rookie in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup.

By far the largest delegation of four drivers came from the Netherlands. Dirk Schouten (22) lined up on the grid in the Carrera Cup Benelux. Seventeen-year-old Robert de Haan won that championship as well as the Porsche Sprint Challenge Southern Europe, and was the second-best rookie in the Carrera Cup Great Britain. Morris Schuring (18) finished fifth in the 2023 Carrera Cup Deutschland and fourth in the Supercup, after winning races in both series. The same applies to his compatriot Loek Hartog: The towering 21-year-old has won four races in the German Carrera Cup and one in the Supercup. This is his second time taking part in the Porsche Motorsport selection shootout.

From Porsche Junior to world champs, Le Mans winners and DTM champions

Porsche's junior programme dates back to the 1997 season. Since then, the successful sponsorship programme has boosted the careers of 29 racing drivers. Today's Porsche brand ambassador Timo Bernhard (Porsche Junior from 2000 to 2001), Marc Lieb (2000 to 2002) and Earl Bamber (2014) are prime examples of the programme's success: All three have won the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans at least once at the helm of the Porsche 919 Hybrid, as well as titles in the FIA World Endurance Championship. This year, Austrian Thomas Preining, Junior from 2017 to 2018, was crowned the first DTM champion in Porsche history with the new 911 GT3 R. Laurin Heinrich from Germany won the Carrera Cup Deutschland in his 2022 junior season and also advanced into the DTM. His successor Bastian Buus from Denmark is the current Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup champion.

“We're immensely proud of the Porsche Junior initiative,” states Le Mans winner and sports car world champion Marc Lieb, one of the first participants in this talent development programme and current Sports Communication Manager at Porsche. “It's one of the most prolific junior programmes in motorsport and sets us apart from other manufacturers. This programme gave my career a decisive boost and paved my path into professional motorsport 23 years ago. Without this support, my dream of winning the 24 Hours of Le Mans would probably never have come true.”

Video

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