70 Years Porsche People: The year Porsche was the 'real' touring car champion

02/09/2021 The story of Alan Hamilton and a unique 911T/R entering the Australian Touring Car Championship.

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When you think about the Australian Touring Car Championship, what springs to your mind? Dick Johnson? His Ford Falcons or Sierras? Jamie Whincup and his domination in Vodafone or Red Bull Commodores? Or do you simply associate the ATCC with Australia's premier motorsport series?

Modern regulations have rendered the pit lane to no more than Ford or GM products, but there has been times when a big variety of brands fought for the greatest prize on the local scene.

And there was also one very special year when a Porsche not only contended for the ATCC title, but actually scored the most points in the season ...

Up until 1968, the touring car crown was contested over just one race. These days, the likes of Shane van Gisbergen and Chaz Mostert need to enter over 30 races to have a chance at the coveted crown!

In that '68 race, young gun Alan Hamilton – the son of Norman Hamilton, Australia's Porsche importer and distributor at the time – entered a unique 911T/R. In a big field of 30 cars, led by heavy-hitting V8s, the nimble 2.0 litre 911 finished third and proved that his orange giant killer could, potentially, contend for the title.

The following year in 1969, the championship celebrated its 10th season and, for the first time, was played out over multiple rounds.

The favourites for the crown were the likely protagonists. Ford Mustangs for Ian 'Pete' Geoghegan and Bob Jane, plus Norm Beechey's wild HK Monaro among a horde of Ford Cortinas and Morris Cooper Ss.

The outlier in the pack was Hamilton's 911. The 920kg rocket would was some 200kg lighter than its V8s rivals, albeit also short 200hp. The facts were simple – no one gave Hamilton a real chance.

But Hamilton's 911 had a secret weapon up his sleeve ... reliability.

Together, Hamilton and the now infamous 911 almost pulled off a hack that, if achieved, would still be

celebrated today as the ATCC's biggest upset.

The first round at Calder saw the V8s dominate. Hamilton claimed third and in the following races at Bathurst, Mallala, Surfers Paradise and Symmons Plains, he finished a remarkable second place in all four. While the Victorian could not match the one lap pace, he would always be there at the end.

Across the five round affair, Hamilton outscored the entire pack, finishing with three more championship points than Geoghegan and his Mustang.

However, the regulations of the time stated that each entrant would drop their worst round score over the five events. For Hamilton, his third place at Calder was put in the bin, and for Geoghegan, his disqualification (for push starting his car in pit lane) from the last round at Tasmania's Symmons Plains was his dropped score.

The final result? Geoghegan won the title by one point on a count back, claiming his fourth (of five) crowns and denying Hamilton and the 911 the underdog upset that championship would have ever seen.

And the circumstances of the final round were even more amazing. With Geoghegan out of the picture, Hamilton needed to win the race to take the title. Beechey's Monaro had won the penultimate round at Surfers Paradise and had a stranglehold on the race, only for a gearbox issue to jam his car in top gear. Chasing down the smoking HK, Hamilton was all over Beechey at the final corner but could not make a pass before the line, denying him the title.

Today, Hamilton does not dwell on the outcome of that 1969 ATCC. Above anything, he is mostly proud that his mighty 911 took the fight to the muscle cars of the era.

"Yep, it was the battle of David and Goliath and a hell of a lot of fun," said Hamilton.

"My car was very little removed from a standard road car. It had standard 911 S brakes, wheels, gearbox, and basically a standard engine.

"In those days the 911 S had 178 horsepower off the showroom floor and my engine had 204hp.

"The Mustangs and Holdens were running probably 400hp those days, so yeah, I was up against it, but that was half of the fun.

"And I felt that my driving suited the 911 at the time too. The faster the circuit the more i enjoyed it. I found a track like Calder was good for spectators, but not really a driver circuit. Whereas places like Sandown, Phillip Island, Lakeside, Warwick Farm were very much more a specialist track. You needed to have been there a few times to feel like you had the circuit under control.

"There were other special non-championship races in that era, like Lakeside. At that track, in a genuine

straight fight with Geoghegan, the orange 911 won the Gold Medal Series. It was not a bad effort at all."

By the end of 1969, the Porsche 911 had attracted attention from private concerns, eager to take advantage of the sports car's speed and reliability.

Jim McKeown and Brian Foley were super competitive in 1970, with McKeown taking two round wins and finishing second in the championship.

McKeown finished fourth in the 1971 ATCC, taking two podium finishes. It remains the final time that a Porsche competed in the domestic touring car class.

But what happened to Hamilton's own ATCC entry?

"We got Jim and Brian racing the 911s in 1970, so I felt there was no point in me continuing – competing against our owners in that area," said the former Porsche Cars Australia boss.

"I was getting more involved in the operation of our overall business. I did more racing at Spa and Le Mans, but when I disappeared into the black forrest one day, I decided that I'm the businessman not a racing car driver. And really thats the reason I was in and out of motor sport. It had became a hobby and not a profession."

While Hamilton's orange 911 did not go down as a touring car victor, the car can still be enjoyed by fans, thanks to its preservation at the Bowden Collection in Queensland.

A true gem of the sport, and other for a regulation technicality, an Australian Touring Car champion.

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Grant Rowley

press@porsche.com.au

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart