

Top Spin

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28/08/2018 Rod Laver and Mark Webber: Hot laps with an enduring hero of the pro tennis circuit.

Fifty years ago this week, one of the most remarkable talents in the whole history of professional tennis won his final grand slam at the US Open. To celebrate the start of the 2018 tournament, we took living legend Rod Laver for a spin in the 911 GT3RS. And who better to do the wheel work than our own former world champion and fellow Australian Mark Webber?

Laver won 11 Grand Slams and an astonishing 200 singles titles in his career. He is also the only man to have achieved a clean sweep of slams in a single year in the Open era. Physically slight and a relatively modest 5ft 8" in height, he nevertheless dominated the pro and amateur international tennis scene for the best part of a decade, displaying what many experts regarded as the perfect serve-and-volley technique, backed up by a lethal left-handed serve and typical antipodean tenacity.

GT3 RS: street-legal evolution of the 991.2 series 911

Today, all the 80-year-old Laver has to do is sit back and (try to) relax as his equally committed countryman unleashes Porsche's latest Rennsport road-racer around the tight and winding circuit of the Porsche Experience Centre in Silverstone.

The GT3 RS was launched earlier this year, a competition-honed street-legal evolution of the 991.2 series 911, with 9,000rpm and 520 PS (Fuel consumption combined 12.8 l/100 km; CO2 emissions 291 g/km) accessible from its atmospheric 4.0-litre flat-six. Rose-jointed suspension, enhanced aerodynamics and increased downforce promised even more focus than the GT3 that came before it, making this the ultimate expression of Weissach's normally-aspirated road/race programme.

Mark demonstrates the necessity of a smooth driving style

As Mark gradually builds the speed into the short straights and fast bends of the PEC, you can see the surprise on Rod's face turning to astonishment and delight. The acceleration, the braking, the cornering grip on a deftly balanced throttle. Mark demonstrates the necessity of a smooth driving style, combined with the professional racer's natural ability to hustle a car right up to the limit.

Laver, still a cool head in the heat of battle, remains impressively calm throughout, enjoying every sensation, watching a fellow sportsman at work, marvelling at the depths of Porsche's most uncompromising track weapon. It's been an honour for us to spend a little time and have a little fun with this most distinguished of sporting gentlemen.

Watch the video here:

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