

Porsche congratulates Derek Bell on his 80th birthday

31/10/2021 Derek Bell still has it – a certain, special smile that induced fear in many of his competitors at the race track: warm, yet confident of victory at the same time. Today, the Briton celebrates his 80th birthday.

"We would like to wish our former works driver a very happy birthday. Derek Bell was a successful driver for Porsche on and off for 35 years," says Thomas Laudenbach, Head of Porsche Motorsport.

Born on 31 October 1941 in the London suburb of Pinner in Middlesex, Bell was 23 when he began his racing career at British club events. Just one year later, in 1965, he was competing in the British Formula Three Championship. His talent didn't go unnoticed, and promotion to the Formula Two European Championship and Formula One quickly followed. The Brit contested his first endurance race at the Circuit de la Sarthe in 1970, and his final 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1996. He started Le Mans no fewer than 26 times and took victory on five occasions, including four times in a Porsche.

First start as works driver at Le Mans

“I first competed for Porsche at Le Mans in 1971. During testing that weekend, they worked out that I was hitting 396 km/h on the Mulsanne straight. I knew we were fast, but not quite that fast, because I’d only ever experienced that speed before during a take-off at Heathrow. So that was what my initiation with Porsche at Le Mans looked like,” he recalls.

Another thing that has stuck with him to this day is the reliability of the cars: “In all that time, only once did something break.” From the Porsche side of things, everything was always possible, says the 80-year-old. “They always had the future in mind. It was just a matter of making sure the vehicle ran and was safe. That was their job.” Bell names winning with the Porsche 936/81 in 1981 as his fondest memory of Le Mans. “Before the first practice session, I hadn’t even sat in that car. But we got the pole position, led every lap, and eventually won the race. That was an unforgettable moment for me because it was a comeback of sorts. I’m very grateful to Porsche for that opportunity,” says the birthday boy.

Impressions from the racing career of Derek Bell

He and his teammate Jacky Ickx won the endurance classic with a 14-lap lead. They were almost an hour faster than the runner-up. “No matter where I was seen with Jacky, he always attracted a crowd. I would sometimes joke: ‘Hi, I’m Derek, I drive here too’,” Bell says with a laugh. “I always looked up to him and admired him. Even today, we’re still friends.”

Bell scored numerous victories in the Porsche 956/962 with his teammates Stefan Bellof, Jacky Ickx and Hans-Joachim Stuck, and won the World Endurance Championship title in 1985 and 1986. “In my 52 active years in the world of motorsport, Derek has not only been a great friend, but also my best and dearest teammate”, says “Striezel” Stuck, before adding: “It’s no coincidence that our pit board said “BeSt”. In 1992, he shared the cockpit of a Porsche 962 at Le Mans with his son, Justin Bell, and Tiff Needell. They took 12th place. Today, Bell lives in Florida.

Results during his racing career with Porsche:

1971
1. Platz 1000km Buenos Aires, Porsche 917
5. Platz 12h Sebring, Porsche 917
3. Platz 1000km Brands Hatch, Porsche 917
2. Platz 1000km Monza, Porsche 917
2. Platz 1000km Spa, Porsche 917
3. Platz 6h Watkins Glen, Porsche 917
2. Platz 1000km Barcelona, Porsche 917
1. Platz 1000km Paris, Porsche 917

1976
3. Platz 1000km Nurburgring, Porsche 934
7. Platz 1000km Nurburgring, Porsche 911 Carrera RSR
4. Platz 6h Zeltweg, Porsche 935
3. Platz 6h Monza, Porsche 934

1978
3. Platz 1000km Nurburgring, Porsche 934

1979
3. Platz 6 h Riverside, Porsche 935

1980
2. Platz 6 h Vallelunga, Porsche 908/03

1981
1. Platz 24h Le Mans, Porsche 936/81
1. Platz 500 km Mid Ohio, Porsche 935
2. Platz 24 h Daytona, Porsche 935
2. Platz 6 h Silverstone, Porsche 956
1. Platz 24 h Le Mans, Porsche 956
2. Platz 1000 km Spa, Porsche 956
1. Platz 6 h Fuji, Porsche 956
1. Platz 1000 km Brands Hatch, Porsche 956
2. Platz 9 h Kyalami, Porsche 956
3. Platz 3 h Daytona, Porsche 935

1982
2. Platz 24h Daytona, Porsche 935

1983
1. Platz Brands Hatch, Porsche 908/03 Turbo
1. Platz 6 h Riverside, Porsche 935
1. Platz 1000 km Silverstone, Porsche 956
2. Platz 24 h Le Mans, Porsche 956
2. Platz 1000 km Spa, Porsche 956
3. Platz 1000 km Brands Hatch, Porsche 956
1. Platz 1000 km Fuji, Porsche 956
3. Platz 1000 km Mugello, Porsche 956
1. Platz 1000 km Kyalami, Porsche 956

1984

2. Platz 24 h Daytona, Porsche 935
3. Platz 12 h Sebring, Porsche 935
1. Platz 1000 km Monza, Porsche 956
2. Platz 6 h Riverside, Porsche 962
1. Platz 500 km Mid Ohio, Porsche 962
1. Platz 6 h Watkins Glen, Porsche 962
1. Platz 1000 km Nurburgring, Porsche 956
3. Platz 3 h Portland, Porsche 962
1. Platz 500 Miles Road America, Porsche 962
1. Platz 1000 km Spa, Porsche 956
1. Platz 500 km Pocono, Porsche 962
1. Platz 1000 km Fuji, Porsche 956
1. Platz 3 h Daytona, Porsche 962
1. Platz 1000 km Sandown, Porsche 956

1985
2. Platz 24 h Daytona, Porsche 962
1. Platz 3 h Miami, Porsche 962
2. Platz 12 h Sebring, Porsche 962
2. Platz 1000 km Monza, Porsche 956
2. Platz 1000 km Silverstone, Porsche 956
1. Platz 500 km Charlotte, Porsche 962
1. Platz 500 km Mid Ohio, Porsche 962
3. Platz 24 h Le Mans, Porsche 962
1. Platz 3 h Watkins Glen, Porsche 962
1. Platz 1000 km Hockenheim, Porsche 962
1. Platz 1000 km Mosport, Porsche 962
2. Platz 1000 km Spa, Porsche 962
1. Platz 500 km Ponoco, Porsche 962
1. Platz 1000 km Brands Hatch, Porsche 962
1. Platz 500 km Watkins Glen, Porsche 962

1986
1. Platz 24 h Daytona, Porsche 962
3. Platz 12 h Sebring, Porsche 962
3. Platz 500 km Road Atlanta, Porsche 962
1. Platz 360 km Monza, Porsche 962
2. Platz 1000 km Silverstone, Porsche 962
1. Platz 24 h Le Mans, Porsche 962
1. Platz 500 km Mid Ohio, Porsche 962
3. Platz Supercup Hockenheim, Porsche 956
1. Platz 500 km Watkins Glen, Porsche 962
2. Platz 1000 km Brands Hatch, Porsche 956

2. Platz 300 km Sears Point, Porsche 962
2. Platz 1000 km Nürburgring, Porsche 962
3. Platz 1000 km Spa, Porsche 962
2. Platz 500 km Watkins Glen, Porsche 962

1987
1. Platz 24 h Daytona, Porsche 962
2. Platz 360 km Jarama, Porsche 962
3. Platz 1000 km Jerez, Porsche 962
2. Platz 1000 km Monza, Porsche 962
3. Platz 1000 km Silverstone, Porsche 962
1. Platz 24 h Le Mans, Porsche 962
2. Platz 3 h West Palm Beach, Porsche 962
3. Platz 500 Miles Road America, Porsche 962
2. Platz 1000 km Nurburgring, Porsche 962
1. Platz 3 h San Antonio, Porsche 962

1988
3. Platz 500 km Road Atlanta, Porsche 962
2. Platz 24 h Le Mans, Porsche 962
2. Platz 500 km Watkins Glen, Porsche 962
2. Platz 500 km Road America, Porsche 962

1989
1. Platz 24 h Daytona, Porsche 962

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