

The Australian links to Porsche's incredible Le Mans heritage

12/06/2025 Porsche will challenge for a record 20th outright win at the annual, iconic 24 Hours of Le Mans Endurance race in France this weekend.

It's a track record unmatched by any other brand, the first victory in 1970 starting a legacy that continues this year as Porsche Penske Motorsport seek to return the brand to the top step of the iconic Le Mans podium at an outright level for the first time since 2017.

Australians have had a significant impact in that successful journey, both behind the steering wheel and behind the scenes.

From the legendary Vern Schuppan claiming his outright success in 1983 to Yasser Shahin's GT class victory last year, or experienced engineers like Jeromy Moore behind the scenes, the antipodean approach has been a large part of Porsche's Le Mans history.

As the iconic race approaches again this weekend, here's a look back at some of the key moments

where some down-under Porsche passion have been intrinsically linked.

Vern Schuppan

Vern Schuppan is Australia's best known, least-known racing driver.

If he were English, the quietly spoken man from the mining town of Whyalla, in regional South Australia, would be feted as one of the greatest of all time in his field.

Instead, this high achieving Sports Car legend flew under the radar in Australia, despite arguably becoming our finest ever export in the field and just our second ever Le Mans 24 Hour winner.

Schuppan left Australia young with a dream to pursue his motorsport goals, which included Formula One and a successful stint in US-based Indy Car racing.

However it was at Le Mans where Vern found his groove.

He made his debut at La Sarthe in 1973, finished third and then second in 1977 driving for the Mirage team - however it was a move to Porsche in 1981 where things really began to gel, Schuppan finishing second in 1981, driving a Porsche 936 with Jochen Mass and US legend Hurley Haywood.

The debut of the 956 a year later saw Schuppan and Mass second outright again, however in 1983 it all came together – though only just.

With Haywood and Al Hobert sharing the driving duties, Schuppan's Rothmans Porsche 956 was walking wounded at the end of the 24 Hours, limping to the line after overheating issues caused engine damage. Remarkably, the engine seized on the final lap however was able to be re-fired to limp to the line.

In the sister car, British ace Derek Bell was flying. He unlapped himself from Holbert and in one of the closest ever finishes at La Sarthe, fell just 17 seconds short of passing the team car as it limped towards the finish line.

The car died as it crossed the line, but it didn't matter. Schuppan was a Le Mans winner for the first time, after a decade of trying.

It was a towering achievement. Outside of the Formula One world titles achieved by Brabham and Jones, it ranked as one of the most significant motorsport achievements by an Australian on the global stage to that point.

Ironically, Schuppan defended his win with Jones the following year – finishing sixth – and would return to Le Mans a further six times.

His final start came in 1989 where, driving a Porsche 962C, one of his co-drivers was a Brabham; Sir Jack's middle son Gary shared the driving duties. They finished 13th outright and 10th in class, capping off Schuppan's remarkable career with a strong result.

Vern Schuppan's 16 Le Mans 24 Hour starts make him the second most experienced Australian ever to tackle the race; and his five outright podiums and one victory certainly the most successful.

Nineteen Eighty-Four

If there was a year that defines the connection between Australian drivers and Porsche at Le Mans, it was 1984.

The rollcall of Australian drivers to race that year was, frankly, remarkable, with no less than seven competing and all of them behind the wheel of a Porsche.

First, there was Alan Jones, the 1980 Formula One world champion with Williams, who appeared driving a Kremer Racing Porsche 956B with defending winner Vern Schuppan and French Le Mans expert Jean-Pierre Jarier.

Jones' Le Mans debut was successful. He, Schuppan and Jarier finished sixth outright as Porsche swept the top seven places and eight of the top 10 with the crushingly dominant 956.

Also driving a Kremer Porsche was Victorian privateer Rusty French. French's most notable racing success came in 1983, when he won the Australian GT Championship driving a Porsche 935. Rusty drove with Tiff Needell and David Sutherland and finished ninth outright.

Further back was Allan Grice, hero to Aussie privateer racers everywhere thanks to his longstanding reputation of taking on the Factory teams at Bathurst and giving them a proper scare.

Like French and Jones, Grice was on debut in 1984, driving another privately entered Porsche 956 with Alain de Cadenet and Chris Craft for Charles Ivey Racing. The car lasted through the night but was out late in the race.

And then there was Peter Brock and Larry Perkins.

With all the heraldry that came from being the most famous name in Australian motorsport, the all-star combination paired the then-current Bathurst champions with another iconic Touring Car hero in Bob Jane, who would fund the enterprise via his massive T-Marts empire.

The drivers weren't new to Le Mans. Brock had raced there first in 1976 and then again in 1981, sharing a Porsche 924 GT with his Bathurst winning co-pilot Jim Richards and his former Holden Dealer Team teammate, Colin Bond. That car was entered by Porsche Cars Australia, at that point run by local

importer Alan Hamilton, himself a former racer. Though high profile and high quality, the team failed to qualify for the race and spent their weekend on the reserve list.

Perkins' Le Mans debut came between Brock's first start and the non-event of the '81 Porsche campaign, driving with Gordon Spice and John Rulon-Miller in a Porsche 911 in the 1978 race. They finished 14th.

All the elements were in place for something big. Unfortunately, things didn't end up quite as they had hoped.

Perkins qualified the car a strong 15th, but despite high fuel consumption and oppressive in-car heat – that forced a driver change at every stop – he and Brock had hauled their bright orange Porsche into fifth position by the three-hour mark.

That's until a wheel came loose with Brock behind the wheel, just after 6:15pm on Saturday evening. The limp home and repairs cost them 28 minutes, but they remained in the game. A broken rear rocker arm cost them a further 15 minutes at 9pm, so the decision was taken to press on throughout the night in a bid to make up time.

They had hauled themselves back into the Top 20, when Perkins found lapped traffic in the Esses just before 2:00 A.M. There was an off, with the car ending in the catch fencing just beyond the famous Dunlop bridge, and their race was over.

They had, however, proven a point. Two Touring Car racers and an Aussie sponsor had come from the other side of the world and properly demonstrated their competitive intent. It wouldn't be the last time.

Mark Webber

Following his Formula One career, Mark Webber returned to Le Mans with Porsche in 2014 as the next phase of his successful career evolved.

2014 was a learning year, but 2015 was the real challenge – a chance to add Le Mans to his Monaco victories and join the very few who had claimed both of the famous European Motorsport Majors.

Ultimately, he was a lap short. He, Timo Bernhard and Kiwi Brendon Hartley finished behind the sister car to deliver Porsche a crushing 1-2 result; their 17th outright win at Le Mans and their first in more than 15 years.

Though not a win, Webber's second position was a useful haul of points as he built towards the end of season goal of lifting the WEC crown. Not a win, but important none the less.

Webber remains an ambassador for Porsche to this day, his contribution to the brand a key part of their

recent and ongoing success in Sports Car and GT Racing globally.

Matt Campbell

As well as being one of the contenders for this year's race with his Porsche Penske Motorsport team, Matt Campbell's rise to the top of the sport was heralded by a remarkable Le Mans class victory in 2018 – just four years after he first started driving a one-make Porsche Cup Car in Australia.

There, driving with team owner Christian Reid and young Frenchman Julien Andlauer, Campbell's team claimed the GTE-AM class in the iconic around-the-clock race and would go on to finish second in the championship that season.

Campbell's success has continued since then, including claiming victory in the Daytona 24 Hours and key races in both the FIA World Endurance Championship and IMSA Sports Car Championship.

A Le Mans outright win still awaits; however this year could offer the best possible chance yet for the young man from Warwick, in country Queensland.

Jeromy Moore

Perhaps not as well known as Schuppan, Webber or Campbell, Australian engineer Jeromy Moore's contribution to Porsche's Le Mans success is significant.

Having departed the Supercars scene in Australia for a factory position with Porsche, Moore engineered Mark Webber's side of the garage to the FIA World Endurance Championship – and second at Le Mans – in 2015.

He then led the engineering program on the sister car, driven by Marc Lieb, Romain Dumas and Neil Jani, that not only claimed a second World Title but also Porsche's 18th outright Le Mans victory.

Following Porsche's withdrawal from the top class of the sport the following year, Moore was assigned a new challenge; leading the development of the brand-new generation Porsche 911 RSR.

The car was instantly successful, scoring a 1-2 result on debut in the opening round of the 2019-20 FIA World Endurance Championship at Silverstone.

"It came down to Fritz (Enzinger, Porsche's Vice President of Motorsport) complimenting me by saying 'this is one of the best ones we've made'," Moore said following his return to Australia.

"It was a very humbling experience being told that from someone very high up within Porsche: when you're working on a 911 you have pressure that it has to be a nice-looking car and it has to represent

the brand and perform. It is another level again when you have to make a good race car and a good 911."

Yasser Shahin

Adelaide-based Businessman-turned-racer Yasser Shahin is Porsche's most recent Le Mans champion, helping to secure the 111th class victory for the brand in the iconic race.

Pairing with works driver Richard Lietz and Morris Schuring, Shahin took the flag first in the debut of the brand-new LM GT3 category in the 2024 race driving a Porsche 992 GT3R for Manthey EMA Motorsport.

The team completed 281 laps, winning their class by a lap.

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