

70 Years Porsche People: Jim Richards

30/09/2021 Jim Richards retired from full-time touring car racing at the end of 1995. It was around this time that Richards discovered a love for Porsche that would dominate the twilight years of his racing days.

Jim Richards has won everything worth winning in Australian motorsport. A seven-times Bathurst 1000 winner, four touring car titles to his name, a record eight Targa Tasmania crowns, plus a plethora of other accolades.

If Peter Brock had picked a different path in life, Richards, born and raised in New Zealand, would be The King.

While Jim's major records will be his great legacy, an unsung aspect of his career will be his longevity.

He retired from full-time touring car racing at the end of 1995, focusing his attention on other levels of national motorsport.

It was around this time that Richards discovered a love for Porsche that would dominate the twilight years of his racing days. Although he admits that it was not a love that he ever thought he'd have.

"I never thought I'd be a Porsche owner," the 73 year old says today.

"I thought they were overpriced, a lot like a modified Volkswagen, you might say.

"But I soon learnt that they weren't at all.

"I guess I should have known early on. I used to race against them on the roads back in New Zealand. I was blown away how my modified Anglia couldn't beat a standard little 356 Porsche in a straight line sprint!"

Richards first raced a Porsche in the 1994 Bathurst 12 Hour. Back then, it was a full-blown production car race, unlike the modern GT3 sports car mecca that it has evolved to.

Richards was drafted into the factory-supported Porsche 968 Clubsport program, joining fellow Stuttgart stalwart Peter Fitzgerald and Swiss sportscar ace Nicolas Leutwiler.

The trio finished second in that Bathurst 12 Hour, and Jim instantly fell in love. In fact, he was so smitten that he bought one of the three 968s that were imported down under for that event.

It would become the first of 26 Porsches that he has owned and raced over the past 25 years.

"The first race that I had in a Porsche was in a 968CS at the 12 Hour at Bathurst. I got the chance to buy one of those cars after driving them in the 12 Hour and a six hour race, and when I bought it, I asked if the motor had been replenished and they said "no, it's exactly as it finished."

"And I couldn't believe it. It just drove so good, and the performance was still good, it's reliability was good – everything was good about it."

Richards used the 968CS in the inaugural Australian GT Production Car Series in 1995, using it to win his first crown in a Porsche.

He would later go on to win three-straight Nations Cup titles (the forerunner to the rebirth of the Australian GT Championship) in a Porsche 996 GT3, as well as the inaugural Carrera Cup Australia title in 2003.

And that Carrera Cup crown was achieved at the ripe old age of 56!

With Carrera Cup now moving into a genuine breeding ground for sports car and touring car stars, he be believes that his age record is one that will be unlikely to be broken.

“I doubt anyone that old will win Carrera Cup again,” he said.

"The younger guys are coming in and doing a really good job. Not many guys stick around in that class.

“I truly believe that Carrera Cup is a brilliant stepping stone for young guys who want to pit their talents against of similar ability in cars that are exactly the same. It’s also the best stepping stone to Supercars, Super2 or even to head overseas.

“You look at the names that have come with Carrera Cup and gone onto big things in Supercars, you’ll see that it’s the ideal proving ground.”

While Richards is best-known for his circuit racing exploits, he proved unstoppable in tarmac-based rally events across Australia – most notably Targa Tasmania.

Richards has won that event a record eight times, and all of them in Porsche products.

“I drove a GT-R in Targa in the mid-1990s, and the turbo broke down and this and that, so ever since then, I always had Porsches,” he said.

“That relationship lasted 25 years, and never have I had one with a mechanical failure. I’ve clipped the edge of banks and holed radiators, but the car itself has never given me problems. They are absolutely brilliant.

“I found that you didn’t really have to modify them. They were road cars but race cars as well, and the modifications were minimal and the reliability was 100 percent.

“And I’ve had all of the variants. GT3s, GTR-S, GT2s, GT2 RSs, 968 – you name it.”

So, after a silver jubilee of history with Porsche, what does the brand mean to Jim?

“Every road-going Porsche that I’ve had, I’ve raced it in some kind of event or another. I’ve always been interested in competition,” he said.

“So for me when I think of Porsche, the first things that come to mind is performance, reliability and looks."

“I’ve bought about 26 Porsches and never had a major problem with them. Absolutely never. They are bullet proof.”

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Grant Rowley

press@porsche.com.au

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