

Porsche heads to exciting “Petit Le Mans" IMSA finale with title aspirations

09/10/2024 Porsche Penske Motorsport aims to take home the championship crowns at the final round of this year's IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. The works team heads to the 10-hour race at Road Atlanta as the leaders of the team and drivers' standings.

Porsche also ranks first in the manufacturers' classification. At the so-called Petit Le Mans, two works-run Porsche 963 will once again contest the top GTP class. In the No. 6 cockpit, Englishman Nick Tandy and Mathieu Jaminet from France receive reinforcement from Frenchman Kévin Estre. In the sister car, Australian Matt Campbell will support regular drivers Felipe Nasr from Brazil and American Dane Cameron. The Proton Competition and JDC-Miller MotorSports customer teams will field two more hybrid prototypes. The German Porsche contract driver Laurin Heinrich looks set to clinch three titles in the GTD Pro category with his team AO Racing. Three more 911 GT3 R tackle the GTD class.

The Preview

Porsche Penske Motorsport has a score to settle at the endurance classic at the Michelin Raceway Road Atlanta. Last year, the works team travelled to the so-called Petit Le Mans in the US state of Georgia as the leaders in the manufacturers' championship. Nick Tandy and Mathieu Jaminet also had a chance to clinch the drivers' title. However, the dream of taking home the first crown for the Porsche 963 was shattered for the British-French duo after 75 minutes, when Tandy became the unwitting victim of a collision caused by another competitor. Moreover, multiple safety car phases towards the end of the race caught the sister car off guard – ultimately relegating it to fourth place.

"We narrowly missed out on winning the title at Petit Le Mans in 2023. Now, after an incredibly demanding season, we're determined to make up for that," explains Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Racing LMDh. "We're travelling to Road Atlanta as the leaders of all three classifications and aim to take home the championship titles. Our tests here in mid-September prepared us well for the IMSA finale. But the 10-hour race is long. Given the extreme traffic with slower cars, the team and drivers face a tough task."

"So far, 'Victory Lane' at Road Atlanta has eluded our organization – we plan to change that with a solid end to the 2024 season," states Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. "Felipe Nasr and Dane Cameron head to Petit Le Mans with a healthy lead in the team and drivers' championship. As a group, we now require solid reliability and need to execute the basics at Road Atlanta. Technical problems in Indy affected the result of the number 7 car, but we were able to understand the issues and put counter measures into place."

Proton Competition would be more than happy to repeat its result from last year's Petit Le Mans: In 2023, Porsche works driver Gianmaria Bruni, Englishman Harry Tincknell and Swiss Neel Jani finished third – the best result so far for the German customer team's Porsche 963. This year, the Italian will share the cockpit at Road Atlanta with Dutchman Bent Viscaal and Alessio Picariello from Belgium. The fourth hybrid prototype from Weissach will be campaigned by JDC-Miller Motorsports crewed by Richard Westbrook and Phil Hanson from the UK and Dutchman Tijmen van der Helm. The trio recently secured a podium result at the penultimate IMSA race of the season in Indianapolis.

The championship situation in the top class

Porsche travels to Road Atlanta with excellent chances of scooping the title pool in all three GTP classifications. In the manufacturers' standings, the sports car manufacturer ranks first with 2,905 points ahead of Cadillac (2,781/-124) before the season finale. For a Porsche 963 to race at the Petit Le Mans alone, the brand receives 286 points in the worst case, while victory and pole position are rewarded with 385 points – a difference of 99 points. Consequently, just starting is enough to bring the championship home to Stuttgart. In the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, all vehicles, drivers and manufacturers that start behind the safety car in the formation laps are eligible for points. It

is not even necessary to cross the finish line under the chequered flag.

The situation in the team and drivers' classifications is similar. Here, the number 7 car driven by the regular crew Dane Cameron and Felipe Nasr leads with 2,650 points, followed by the sister car (2,526/-124) crewed by Mathieu Jaminet and Nick Tandy and the No. 1 Cadillac (2,486/-164). The difference between a win including pole position and just participating is 165 points for eleven vehicles. This means: If Cameron and Nasr's Porsche 963 qualifies in ninth place or better and rolls across the starting line, the fight for the title will go down to the wire between Porsche Penske Motorsport's two works driver crews.

The battle for the Michelin Endurance Cup, which includes the long-distance races in Daytona, Sebring, Watkins Glen, Indianapolis and Road Atlanta, is even closer. The Porsche 963 duo Cameron and Nasr leads with 37 points, followed by Renger van der Zande/Sébastian Bourdais (33) and Jack Aitken, Pipo Derani and Tom Blomqvist (32). Points are awarded at Petit Le Mans after four, eight and ten hours. The leaders can make up to three points per classification – a maximum of nine. This means that Tandy and Jaminet (30) as well as Jordan Taylor and Louis Deletraz (28) still also have a chance of winning the title.

Laurin Heinrich and AO Racing set sights on GTD Pro title for Porsche

Leading the GTD Pro category, Porsche also has a real shot at taking home the manufacturers' title at the IMSA season finale. The Stuttgart sports car manufacturer holds a 122-point lead over Aston Martin. Former Porsche Junior Laurin Heinrich sits at the top of the drivers' championship leaderboard with a 99-point advantage over Ross Gunn from the UK. Simply put, fifth place in qualifying and in the race is enough for the German to conclude his first full season in the North American sports car championship as champion. For AO Racing, which fields the 911 GT3 R for the German driver, the same situation applies in the bid for the title against the Heart of Racing team. At Road Atlanta, Heinrich once again receives support from Frenchman Julien Andlauer and works driver Michael Christensen from Denmark at the wheel of the "Rexy" racer decked out in its distinctive dinosaur look. All three drivers have come up through the ranks of Porsche Motorsport's junior development initiative.

Three more 911 GT3 R will contest the GTD class. In this category, professionals share the cockpit with so-called gentlemen drivers. In addition to MDK Motorsports and Wright Motorsports, Andretti Motorsports is represented in Georgia with a 911.

The race

The so-called "Petit Le Mans" race has been a regular fixture on the North American sports car calendar since 1988 – with this year marking its 26th running. The Michelin Raceway Road Atlanta is located

about 80 kilometres northeast of Atlanta, the headquarters of Porsche Cars North America. The ten-hour race on the 4.088-kilometre course is extremely popular among fans and drivers. The tradition-steeped circuit close to the town of Braselton features twelve turns – including the famous 'esses', a particularly fast downhill section. A critical factor that teams must be ready for is changeable autumn conditions in the US state of Georgia, which can bring hot temperatures and sunshine as well as torrential rain and even thunderstorms.

Such unpredictable weather handed Porsche its greatest success to date at Road Atlanta. In 2015, Nick Tandy (United Kingdom), Patrick Pilet (France) and Richard Lietz (Austria) outpaced the more powerful prototypes in heavy rain to clinch a sensational overall victory in the Porsche 911 RSR – the only one for the sports car manufacturer at Road Atlanta to date. Porsche has so far notched up a total of 24 class wins at the "Petit Le Mans".

Live stream of the race

Outside the USA and Canada, the race will be broadcast live over the full distance of 10 hours in a free stream on imsa.tv. The website scoring.imsa.com offers live timing. The eleventh and final round of the season gets underway on Saturday, 12 October at 12:10 am local time (18:10 pm CEST).

Drivers' comments ahead of the race

Nick Tandy (Porsche 963 #6): "Road Atlanta is a beautiful track, and Petit Le Mans is a special event, even if it wasn't particularly our strongest circuit last year. That's why we've invested a lot of work including tests in Mooresville and Weissach to perfectly prepare the Porsche 963 and the team for this."

Dane Cameron (Porsche 963 #7):"Petit Le Mans will be a massive challenge with so many cars racing on a relatively small, high-speed circuit like Road Atlanta. But we've put ourselves in a good position to win the drivers' and manufacturers' titles. Now we need one more strong performance to bring home the trophies."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 963 #5): "I'm looking forward to the race, although it'll be tough for us. I'm sharing the cockpit with Bent and Alessio. It's their first time at Road Atlanta. I'm very happy with the progress of the Proton 963 crew. Despite limited testing time, the team improved a lot during our first full season with the Porsche 963. We will try our best to finish the season with another good performance."

Richard Westbrook (Porsche 963 #85): "After the podium result in Indy, we're heading to Petit Le Mans with a confidence boost. We're starting to get into a sweet spot with our Porsche 963 – I wish it wasn't our last round. Despite storms, we had a good test at Road Atlanta last week, and we found a direction for the race. Traffic management is the most important thing at Petit Le Mans because you

have to overtake dozens of GT cars per lap. Our eyes are wide open for that. We want to finish the season like at the last round: with a podium or maybe even better…"

Laurin Heinrich (Porsche 911 GT3 R #77): "After our victory in Indianapolis, we're heading to Road Atlanta feeling particularly motivated. We hold a 99-point lead in the championship. That sounds like a lot, but it isn't in the IMSA – it could be close. Obviously, my big goal is to win the title. I'm super excited about my first Petit Le Mans. Two years ago, I competed in the USA for the first time at Road Atlanta and took a lights-to-flag victory in the Porsche Carrera Cup North America. So, I have fond memories of this challenging old-school course. It's one of my favourites. The 10-hour distance is long. As always, we're excellently positioned with our car, and we have a strong trio with Michael Christensen and Julien Andlauer. We'll tackle this race like all others. We want to win."

An overview of vehicles and drivers

GTP class (Porsche 963)
Proton Competition #5: Gianmaria Bruni (I) / Bent Viscaal (NL) / Alessio Picariello (B)
Porsche Penske Motorsport #6: Mathieu Jaminet (F) / Nick Tandy (UK) / Kévin Estre (F)
Porsche Penske Motorsport #7: Dane Cameron (USA) / Felipe Nasr (BR) / Matt Campbell (AUS)
JDC-Miller MotorSports #85: Tijmen van der Helm (NL) / Richard Westbrook (UK) / Phil Hanson (UK)

GTD Pro class (Porsche 911 GT3 R)
AO Racing #77: Laurin Heinrich (D) / Julien Andlauer (F) / Michael Christensen (DK)

GTD class (Porsche 911 GT3 R)

MDK Motorsports (#86); Anders Fjordbach (DK) / Kerong Li (CHN) / Klaus Bachler (A)
Wright Motorsports (#120): Adam Adelson (USA) / Elliott Skeer (USA) / Jan Heylen (B)
Andretti Motorsports (#43): Jarett Andretti (USA) / Gabby Chavez (USA) / Scott Hargrove (CDN)

The schedule (local time, CEST -6)

Thursday, 10 October
10:40 – 12:10 hrs: Free practice 1
15:20 – 16:45 hrs: Free practice 2
19:30 – 21:00 hrs: Free practice 3

Friday, 11 October
15:25 – 15:40 hrs: Qualifying GTD-Pro / GTD
16:15 – 16:30 hrs: Qualifying GTP

Saturday, 12 October

12:10 – 22:10 hrs: 10-hour race
12:10 Uhr – 22:10 Uhr: 10-Stunden-Rennen

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Title: Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh, IMSA, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Urs Kuratle (Director Factory Motorsport LMDh)

Path: Porsche heads to exciting "Petit Le Mans" IMSA finale with title aspirations /Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport, IMSA, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Jonathan Diuguid (Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport)

Path: Porsche heads to exciting "Petit Le Mans" IMSA finale with title aspirations /Images/img_4.jpg
Title: Laurin Heinrich (D), AO Racing (#77), IMSA, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Laurin Heinrich (D)

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