70 Years Porsche in Australia: Tarmac Top Gun

15/07/2021 To label Porsche as the 'top gun' of Australian tarmac rallying is not so much a compliment as a statement of fact. Porsche has scored more outright victories in Australian tarmac rallies than any other make, including a record 11 in the first and largest of these unique closed-road events – Targa Tasmania.

Since Australia embraced this motorsport discipline with the first Targa Tasmania in 1992, Porsches have appeared more times at the top of the results sheets than any other make. That's as much a reflection on their drivers as on the cars.

In Porsche international circles, Australians are regarded as amongst the most enthusiastic owners in the world. They drive their cars harder and more often, than their counterparts in almost every country.

That was obvious from the first running of Targa Tasmania, when rather than being a parade of international sporting cars – as its founders, the late John Large and Max Stahl, sold it to the Tasmanian Government and local residents – it was a serious motorsport event from the outset, with Porsche competitors at the forefront.

Porsche drivers, many of them from a very competitive coterie of Australian Porsche Club members, added the competitive edge and while none initially made it onto the podium for the outright results, the challenge had been laid down.

Amongst those who heard the call was expatriate New Zealander Jim Richards, who arrived on the starting line by default in 1993: a deal to have Peter Brock drive one of the new front-engined 968CS Coupes that had finished one-two on debut in that year's Sandown 6-Hour production sports car race, fell over due to sponsor issues at the 11th hour.

Richards and his Tasmanian co-driver, V8 Supercars race broadcaster Barry Oliver, immediately bonded with the Porsche and placed second outright, while David Brabham, standing in for his late father, Sir Jack (who had a conflict of dates) brought a modified basic 968 Coupe home fourth. The following year, Richards purchased one of the Porsche Cars Australia-owned 968CSs and went GT-Production racing, lauding it as the best-handling production car he had ever raced.

It was the beginnings of a bond between Richards and Porsche that resulted in him and Oliver becoming the most successful Targa team to date, accounting for eight of Porsche's 11 outright victories to date in the Tasmanian event.

However, they didn't take the first Porsche victory, which came in 1994 when circuit racer Andrew

Mediecke and Alan Taylor triumphed in the world's only right hand drive Porsche 944 Cup. Then, Peter Fitzgerald and Michael Mansour won in 1999 in Mansour's ex-Richards Porsche 911 Turbo and Matt Close and Cameron Reeves took victory in 2016 in Close's Porsche 911 GT3.

Meanwhile, Porsches in the 1990s and 2000s were lighting up the scoreboard in Australia's other major tarmac rallies that Targa Tasmania spawned. Alex Davison driving a 911 GT3 won Victoria's inaugural 2004 Porsche Mt. Buller Sprint, while Porsches, led by Richards, won the 2005 event. Richards/Oliver/Porsche then repeated their victory in 2006 and Victorian Matt Close took outright victory in 2015.

The Targa Tasmania Classic competition has also been something of a Porsche benefit over the years, with Melbourne's Rex Broadbent winning the Targa Tasmania Handicap Competition in 2002 and the Classic Outright Competition six times from 2007 – 2012. He also scored five outright victories in Classic Adelaide from 2002 – 2006 and again in 2010, while other Porsches won South Australia's Classics-only tarmac rally in 2008, 2009 and 2011.

Over in Perth, Jim Richards and Barry Oliver won Targa West with a 911 in 2007 and in Richards' Cayman S in 2014, crossing the Tasman to Richards' birth country for victory in the 2004 and 2005 Targa New Zealand.

Along the way there were assorted victories by Porsche crews in Victoria's Lake Mountain Sprint, Rally Tasmania, Targa West Coast, Targa Wrest Point, Rally Burnie and East Coast Targa. Amongst others.

Touring events for Porsche owners have proven immensely popular since they were introduced by Porsche Cars Australia, frequently selling out within weeks of entries opening.

That's not to say that Porsches have been invincible in tarmac rally events. The record books prove otherwise.

It's just that factory-fresh Porsches are competitive right off the showroom floor, which is why they continue to attract crews keen to perform well.

Jim Richards, who always owns the Porsche he tarmac rallies and washes them religiously at the end of each day's competition, pragmatically explains:

"We usually have very little maintenance to do," said Richards. "So sometimes we wash them twice at the end of each day!"

Visit porsche.com/australia/70years for more information regarding 70 Years of Porsche in Australia, as well as following @PorscheAus on social media.

Follow Porsche Cars Australia

On Instagram

On YouTube

On LinkedIn

On Twitter

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Michael Browning

Author
press@porsche.com.au

Link Collection

Link to this article
https://newsroom.porsche.com/en_AU/2021/history/70-years-porsche-in-australia-tarmac-top-gun-24555.html