

The Matt Campbell story

28/06/2022 From growing up in country Queensland to his early steps on the Porsche Pyramid and ultimate success in Australia and abroad, Matt Campbell's ascension to the very pinnacle of Sports Car racing – as a factory driver for Team Porsche Penske Motorsport aboard the brand-new Porsche 963 LMDh – is a remarkable story of perseverance, performance and passion. This is how his journey has unfolded to date.

Eight years. That's all it has taken for Matthew Campbell to climb all the way from taking his first, tentative steps to reaching the very top of Porsche's Motorsport Pyramid.

In that time, the now 27-year-old from Warwick in country Queensland has evolved from a quiet, reserved and cautious rookie, hustling an older model 911 GT3 Cup Car beyond its limits and against more modern machinery, to a confident, outgoing and complete driver paid to drive for two of the biggest brands in Motorsport; Porsche Motorsport and Roger Penske.

Campbell's addition to the list of factory drivers tabbed to join the exciting new Porsche 963 program, the car that will return Sports Car racing's most successful brand to the top class of racing in both America and Europe, represents the culmination of a dream and a story unlike any to have preceded

him.

That dream has been shared by an ever-growing legion of family, friends, supporters, sponsors and investors who have joined what has been a remarkable journey to the very top of global motorsport – one that came from very humble beginnings.

Matt would tell you know that the job has only just begun and that the story has only started.

However, there's plenty in this tale already worth telling.

Here's how he got to this point.

Origin story

Matt Campbell was born in Warwick, two hours inland from Queensland's capital Brisbane, in 1995 and it was always likely that motorsport was going to play a role in his life.

His Grandfather, Bill was key to the development of Morgan Park Raceway - a little circuit just outside of his hometown - and it was there, under his grandfather's tutelage, where Matt would complete his motorsport apprenticeship.

Campbell spent his youth pounding around the little circuit, having starting racing aged 14 aboard an Orange Datsun 1200 coupe called 'Daisy'.

(Incidentally, Matt still owns the car and drives it whenever he returns home to visit family and friends.)

He dovetailed racing his Datto with Formula Ford, claiming the Queensland championship in 2012 while at the same time gradually stepping into the national championship when time and budget allowed.

He contested the full Australian Formula Ford Championship in 2013, however the budget was tight. Still, he finished 9th overall, a pair of fifth-placed efforts his best result against a stacked field.

The Porsche journey begins

The first thoughts about driving a Porsche came in late 2013.

A challenging season in Formula Ford had not only been frustrating, but also financially challenging and he and his family supporters had to decide what shape the next step in his career would take. Would it be open wheel racing again? Or a switch to sports car racing, where opportunity appeared more promising.

Queensland-based New Zealander Andy McElrea opened the door, offering the then 17-year-old Campbell a test in a Porsche GT3 Cup Car at Queensland Raceway.

Campbell and the Porsche bonded immediately, and his pace and feedback impressed the McElrea squad who were keen to secure this untapped young talent. It was no time before Campbell had signed up for the subsequent season of GT3 Cup Challenge Australia (now Porsche Michelin Sprint Challenge) – the first level on the Porsche Pyramid.

It wouldn't be for outright honours, though. Budget constraints ensured he would compete in Class B of the championship, structured for the Generation 1 Type-997 GT3 Cup Cars.

He'd be racing against the outright, Gen II machines, which had 40 more horsepower and much more aero.

It didn't matter.

After one round in 2014 it was clear that only a disaster would stop him from winning his class that season – the bigger story throughout the year moreso how many of the outright cars at any given round could he beat? The answer was, *a lot* .

He sealed the class title with a round to spare, however it was his 'giant-killing' efforts in the older car that had grabbed people's attention.

The season finale' was set for Phillip Island and it was here that the world got their first look at what Campbell was capable of if given the right machinery when McElrea customer Michael Hovey offered up his later model car for a tilt at outright honours.

Against vastly more experienced drivers, the results were emphatic. He scored pole by 1.5 seconds, won the first nine-lap race by neatly 13, swept the weekend to claim the round overall and casually cut 2.5 seconds out of the existing lap record.

It was a dominant, crushing performance and it was at that point we knew it was unlikely we'd see Matt Campbell back in Cup Challenge in 2015. He deserved a shot at Carrera Cup – and a shot he would get.

Tough start, fast finish: Carrera Cup year 1

McElrea Racing was quick to move and make sure they had this young superstar-in-the-making locked away for the 2015 Porsche Carrera Cup Australia season, even if budget was still a factor.

With the support of his family, McElrea had launched an investment scheme to attract financial backers to his racing program, wherein they would get a payoff down the road should he graduate to a professional career and earn an income from driving.

Though officially locked in for the season, the reality was that Campbell fronted at the Adelaide 500 - the demanding street circuit in Adelaide the host of the opening round of the championship - with two rounds of budget secured and nothing else in the tank.

And then, just when things were looking up, news filtered through at the event that Matt's grandfather, a fundamental influence in his on and off-track life, had passed away.

It made a tough weekend - his first on a street circuit - even more challenging.

Campbell qualified 12th, failed to finish two races and left Adelaide 11th in the championship and last of the Professional class runners. It wasn't the start he, the team or those watching were expecting.

The championship moved to Albert Park and the Australian Grand Prix for round two. Campbell qualified second – missing pole by two-thousands of a second – and posted four consistent finishes in the top seven in a solid rebound from the round one challenges.

The pair of Pro-Am endurance races at Phillip Island, always wild and unpredictable affairs, delivered a non-finish and an 11th outright however the signs were positive enough for the investors to keep the faith. A front-row start and a string of solid top six finishes at Townsville, the half-way point of the championship, were positive though any meaningful position in the championship seemed a long way off.

And then the championship headed to Sydney Motorsport Park in New South Wales and things *just clicked*.

Campbell qualified third, however raced championship leader Nick Foster hard in the opening race: leading initially before following the form driver of 2015 home in a stout second position – his first podium.

However, a five-second penalty for Foster was enough to elevate the young Queenslander to the top spot and just like that, Matt Campbell was a Carrera Cup winner for the first time.

He did it again later in the day, out-duelling Foster in a tense finish to claim his second win and his first when he got the chequered flag first.

From that point on it was like a light bulb had been not just flicked on, but also turned up to maximum brightness.

Campbell left Sydney with two race wins and a fifth however would finish no lower than second in the remaining eight races of that season, including slamming home victories in the final four races – one at Bathurst and in a dominant display all three on the streets of Surfers Paradise – to edge out former champion Steven Richards for third in the championship.

The season might have been challenging to begin with, but it finished with a flourish: Campbell out-scoring everyone across the final four rounds and sending a firm message for the following season: Watch out, *I'm coming for the title* .

2016: Promise, Delivered

Matt Campbell's 2016 season commenced with two simple goals: win the championship and secure the nomination to attend the Porsche Junior Shootout in Europe at the end of the year.

It never really looked like anyone else had a look in.

Strong competition ensured the Championship ebbed and flowed across the first four rounds but by the middle of the season he put his head down and the field didn't see which way he went.

As it was in 2015, the second half of the 2016 season told the full story of Campbell's year: he won nine of the final 11 races, including five in a row across rounds at Bathurst and the Gold Coast.

He defeated former Porsche works driver Alex Davison for the Porsche Carrera Cup Australia Championship, lifting the trophy in style in a season that had seen him win 13 races, 4 of the 8 rounds and score pole position at every round bar one.

Naturally, his nomination to head to the Porsche Shootout in Germany was assured.

In three remarkable seasons, Matt Campbell had risen from almost complete unknown, with talent aplenty but no budget and limited opportunity, to becoming one of the hottest young properties on the Australian motorsport landscape.

Despite attracting the attention of several major Supercars Championship teams in Australia (*See: Side Hustle, below*), it was clear that Europe would be his next challenge.

Shootout, Supercup success

In late 2016 Campbell became the first driver from the Southern Hemisphere to win the Porsche junior shootout, earning him a scholarship fund to support a Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup campaign in 2017.

Running alongside the Formula 1 World Championship, Supercup serves as the top of Porsche's one-make racing pyramid. Success there, against the best and most competitive field in one-make racing around the world, would almost guarantee that his rapid progression through the Porsche ranks would continue.

Campbell signed with Fach Auto Tech and launched into his maiden Supercup campaign at the

Catalunya circuit in Barcelona with a pair of pole positions and finishes of fifth and third in the first two races, respectively.

Fifth in Monaco was followed by his first win just a few weeks later at Austria's Red Bull Ring, where he started from pole and beat home Michael Ammermüller – generally regarded as the top one-make Porsche racer in the world – to claim his first major trophy in international competition.

Challenging rounds at Silverstone, where he was seventh, and Hungary, where he battled to 16th position, hurt his championship chances, but he wasn't out of the fight.

Much like his two seasons in Carrera Cup Australia, Campbell finished strongly; slamming home victories in the final three races of the season in Italy and Mexico to secure third in the championship in his debut season. His four victories stood as the equal most of any driver while his five pole positions were the most of anyone on the grid. He was also the only driver not driving for a Lechner Racing-supported team to claim a victories in the 2017 season.

Campbell's strong Supercup season left him in an interesting position within the Porsche hierarchy; clearly too talented to let go, but with an already busy Junior driver squad there was only a finite number of places in which to seat him moving forward.

Porsche wasn't about to let go of this talent, though: Campbell signed as a 'Porsche Young Professional', where drivers making the step from the one-make pyramid were given a chance to develop and learn their craft with the host of Porsche Customer teams competing in top level GTE and GT3 endurance competition around the world. Campbell was one of the first signed.

That move would be perfect, as it would lead the young Queenslander to two of his most important successes' yet.

Endurance success

With the season of Supercup behind him, Campbell graduated to the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) in 2018, driving with Dempsey Proton Racing in the howling Porsche 911 GTE.

There, driving with team owner Christian Reid and young Frenchman Julien Andlauer, he won five races and finished second in the LM GTE-AM class of the 2018-19 season.

Remarkably his first win came in just his second WEC start at the biggest race of them all: the 2018 running of the Le Mans 24 Hours. Four years after first driving a Cup Car, Campbell stood on the iconic podium at the Circuit de la Sarthe, overlooking 200,000 fans as a Le Mans winner for Porsche.

With the WEC season split across two calendar years, 2019 saw a host of GT3 running added to Campbell's schedule, including starts in the Blancpain GT Endurance Cup (Now GT World Challenge

Europe) and GT World Challenge America championships driving the 911 GT3R.

He was also one of Porsche's nominated factory drivers to support their efforts to claim the Intercontinental GT Challenge, a five-event global GT3 Championship based on some of the major endurance events on the schedule for the popular global formula.

It was here where Campbell delivered arguably his finest moment to date, leading the Earl Bamber Motorsport Porsche team to victory in the 2019 Liqui Moly Bathurst 12 Hour.

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Matt Campbell – Bathurst 12 Hour

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The story of that race, and Campbell's starring role in dragging his car to the lead in a breathtaking 20-minute battle to the line, has been well told since and sits among the most impressive drives to a Bathurst win in the long history of racing at Mount Panorama.

Having re-started the race third, Campbell quickly grabbed second and then, with barely 10 minutes on the clock, squeezed down the inside of the race leader Forrest's Elbow, barging his way through to the lead before pulling away to give Porsche their first Bathurst win.

Bamber's team were euphoric. Campbell called it his finest ever drive and those watching it weren't about to disagree. As big as winning at Le Mans was, for this Aussie kid now racing on the global stage, delivering Porsche their maiden Bathurst triumph was probably even bigger.

Recent times

Off the back of victories at Le Mans and Bathurst, Campbell was announced as a full Porsche factory driver ahead of the 2020 racing season.

The announcement came just six years after his stunning GT3 Cup Challenge debut and only three after committing to move to Europe to chase his racing dream abroad.

In that time, he had won the Porsche Carrera Cup Australia title, plus major races in the Bathurst 12 Hour and his class at Le Mans. He'd scored several GT World Challenge and IMSA Sports Car Series outright victories, plus more class success in the WEC.

Campbell's time has since been spent hustling on both sides of the Atlantic, continuing his participation in Porsche-supported FIA World Endurance Championship campaigns in LM GTE-AM, in the Intercontinental GT Challenge (IGTC) and in GT World Challenge events in the Americas and Europe.

He helped GPX Racing to second in the 2020 GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup and Porsche to second in the IGTC, before finishing third with Dempsey-Proton Racing in the 2021 WEC Season.

In 2021 he headed stateside, joining Porsche squad Weather Tech Racing in the IMSA Sports Car Championship, before joining Pfaff Motorsport for the 2022 season.

At the time of publication, he and co-driver Mathieu Jaminet lead the GT Daytona class in the IMSA series heading into the second half of the season.

Side hustle

Outside of his Porsche success, Campbell's career has included several other starring performances that have attracted headlines.

His debut season in Carrera Cup attracted the interest of Supercars Championship team Nissan Motorsport, who signed him to race in the 2016 Endurance races at Sandown, Bathurst and the Gold Coast.

A year later he contested the same races with the most successful team in the sport: Triple Eight Race Engineering, driving alongside renowned New Zealander, Shane van Gisbergen. He finished fifth at Bathurst before scoring his first Supercars podium a fortnight later at one of his favourite playgrounds, the Surfers Paradise Street Circuit.

There were ventures into GT Racing in Australia, too – a starring performance to put a Trophy Class GT car on the outright pole position of an Australian GT round at Phillip Island grabbing plenty of attention – while it was reportedly his efforts in qualifying for the 2016 Bathurst 12 Hour, driving a McLaren GT3 for privateer Tony Walls, that drew the attention of Roland Dane and prompted the Triple Eight owner to secure his services for the subsequent Supercars endurance season.

Campbell's 12 Hour record is, in fact, remarkable: he has made 7 starts in Australia's international enduro and finished on the class podium on four occasions, including his 2014 debut driving a pocket

rocket Fiat Abarth hot hatch.

He was second outright and first in Pro-Am in 2017 and second in the Pro-Am category the following year, both times with Porsche customer squad, Competition Motorsport.

Following his win in 2019, he famously put an Absolute Racing-entered 911 GT3R on pole position for the 2020 race, topping the Shootout and backing up Porsche's first win on the mountain with their first pole position, too.

Matt Campbell – Season 2022

Info

Author: Richard Craill

Image Sublines

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Title: 2014_GT3Cup_action.jpg
Subline: 2014: Matt impressed with his skills in Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Australia, finishing fourth overall

Path: media/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Carrera_Cup debut-R1-2015adelaide-.jpg
Subline: 2015: Pushing hard at the first round of the Porsche Carrera Cup Australia championship

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Subline: 2016: Chasing tenths on the road to becoming the Porsche Carrera Cup Australia champion

Path: media/Images/img_5.jpg
Title: PCAU17_0292_fine.jpg
Subline: 2017: Campbell finished third overall in his debut season in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup, his first year racing in Europe

Path: media/Images/img_6.jpg
Title: Le Mans GTE Am victory podium.jpg
Subline: 2018: Tasting victory in the GTE-AM class at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, just four years after first driving a Porsche Cup racing car

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Title: Bathurst 12Hr victory (1).jpg
Subline: 2019: Taking victory at the Bathurst 12 Hour

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Subline: 2020: Celebrating pole position at the Bathurst 12 Hour

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Subline: 2021: Chasing the sun at the 24 Hours of Le Mans

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Subline: 2022: Flying high at the gruelling 24 Hours of Nürburgring

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Title: Matt Campbell Portrait 2022.jpg
Subline: Campbell will pilot the new Porsche 963 prototype for Porsche Penske Motorsport in 2023

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