

Porsche begins FIA WEC title defence mission in Qatar

20/02/2025 Porsche enters the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) season with high ambitions. After securing the drivers' title last year, the factory team now aims for the manufacturers' championship as well.

The 2025 season kicks off on February 28 at the Lusail International Circuit in Qatar. The race, titled "Qatar 1812 km," runs over a ten-hour distance. Competing in the top Hypercar class are the Porsche Penske Motorsport factory squad and the customer team Proton Competition, fielding a total of three Porsche 963. In the LMGT3 category, the Iron Dames and Manthey 1st Phorm each enter a Porsche 911 GT3 R.

Last year, the 10-hour race in Qatar, near the capital Doha, made its debut on the FIA WEC calendar. Porsche factory drivers Kévin Estre from France, Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium, and Germany's André Lotterer laid the foundation for their eventual drivers' world championship title with a victory. Two additional Porsche 963 completed the podium in second and third place. In the LMGT3 category, Austrian Klaus Bachler, Briton Alex Malykhin, and German Joel Sturm began their championship-

winning campaign with a class victory in the Porsche 911 GT3 R. Expectations are correspondingly high as the 2025 FIA WEC season gets underway.

"After winning the drivers' title last year, our goal is now to claim the biggest trophy for manufacturers as well," says Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. "In the North American IMSA series, we have already underlined our ambitions with a second consecutive Daytona victory. Now, we aim to make an optimal start in the World Endurance Championship and repeat our triumph in Qatar. We will not relent. The Porsche 963 is meant to continue the legacy of legendary endurance racing prototypes like the 917, 935, 956, 962 and 919 Hybrid. These icons from Weissach have shaped endurance racing for years. We intend to achieve the same with our current hybrid prototype."

"With another win at the 24 Hours of Daytona, we had a perfect start to the new season in North America. Now, we want to carry that momentum onto the world stage," summarizes Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. "Despite our successes last year, we have continued to refine every aspect – from team operations to the driver lineup and even the Porsche 963 itself. We enter an even more competitive Hypercar class well-prepared. The Qatar circuit suited us well last year, and I see no reason why that should change this season."

The No. 5 Porsche Penske Motorsport entry will be shared by Danish driver Michael Christensen, Frenchman Mathieu Jaminet, and fellow Frenchman Julien Andlauer, who has been promoted to the factory driver lineup for 2025. In the No. 6 car, reigning world champions Kévin Estre and Laurens Vanthoor are joined by Australian Matt Campbell. Vanthoor was part of the victorious Porsche Penske Motorsport crew at the 24 Hours of Daytona in January. Since its race debut in January 2023, the Porsche 963 has been the most successful car in the LMDh category and aims to assert itself against LMH competitors in the top class of the FIA WEC this year.

Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport, looks ahead to the two-day Prologue test at the Lusail International Circuit: "During the prologue in Qatar our team will make final preparations to have a strong start to the season. Porsche Penske Motorsport started 2025 with another win at the 24 Hours of Daytona and look to repeat our performance in Qatar as well. The team has made some small changes to our driver line-up for the new year, and we have good continuity within the rest of the team to position us to build on our performances of the 2024 season."

Porsche Penske Motorsport's two hybrid prototypes, each producing approximately 500 kW (680 PS), along with Proton Competition's identical Porsche 963, will compete in the Hypercar class. A total of 18 cars from eight different manufacturers will battle for overall victories in the top category of the FIA WEC in 2025. Teams, drivers, and fans will get a first glimpse of the heightened competition during the WEC Prologue on February 21 and 22, where all teams will participate in four test sessions at the Lusail International Circuit. The season opener will take place at the same venue on February 28 over a ten-hour (1,812 km) distance.

In the LMGT3 class, Manthey enters the season as the defending champion. The customer team from the Eifel region will field a Porsche 911 GT3 R under the Manthey 1st Phorm banner. Factory driver

Richard Lietz from Austria will share driving duties in the No. 92 car with American Ryan Hardwick and Italian Riccardo Pera. Additionally, Manthey will oversee the Iron Dames' Porsche 911 GT3 R, producing up to 416 kW (565 PS). This successful initiative promoting women in motorsport is strengthening its collaboration with Porsche Motorsport this year. The No. 85 car will be driven by former DTM racer Rahel Frey from Switzerland, Frenchwoman Célia Martin and Denmark's Michelle Gatting, a new member of Porsche Motorsport's extended driver squad.

The race

The Lusail International Circuit, inaugurated in 2004, hosts the FIA WEC season opener for the second consecutive year in 2025. The "Qatar 1812 km" race takes its name from Qatar's National Day on December 18. The 5.419-kilometer track with its 16 curves is located north of Doha and is also used by Formula 1 and MotoGP.

The over-one-kilometer-long start-finish straight demands low drag for maximum top speed, while the twisty second sector requires high downforce and strong traction. Optimal use of the racing tires will be key. As the race begins at 14:00 local time (12:00 CET) on February 28, teams can expect high air and track temperatures, which will drop significantly in the second half of the race as night falls. The checkered flag will be waved at midnight (22:00 CET).

Driver statements ahead of the first race of the season

Julien Andlauer (Porsche 963 #5): "A new year, a new season, a new team, and new challenges – I have never been this excited for a season opener! Finally, I get to compete in the World Championship with the factory team – a dream come true! I am already very familiar with the Porsche 963 from my extensive experience with customer teams. Over the winter, we have prepared meticulously. I spent a lot of time in the simulator to adapt to the factory team's procedures. I hope we can be at the sharp end right from the start of the season. A victory in Qatar would be the perfect beginning to my latest adventure."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): "Laurens and I enter Qatar as the reigning world champions. That is a very special feeling. My memories of the Qatar circuit couldn't be better: we were extremely strong there in 2024 and secured an immediate victory. Our clear objective is to defend the title, but it will be a tough challenge. Our competitors haven't been hibernating – they've surely used all their experience from last year to make improvements. The circuit in Doha is quite unique. The entire track is very flat, with hardly any bumps and a lot of grip. Getting the tires into the optimal operating window will be crucial. I am really looking forward to getting back on track."

Neel Jani (Porsche 963 #99):"Last year, the Qatar circuit was a great hunting ground for the Porsche 963. Our team has made significant progress over the past months. I believe we are now better prepared to unlock the full potential of the car. Last year, we struggled to get the tires into the right

temperature window. I hope we've made a step forward in this area. This season, I have new teammates. My collaboration with Nico Pino at the IMSA season opener in Daytona already went well. Now, Nico Varrone joins us, bringing extensive experience from various series and cars. We need to quickly develop strong team cohesion. I am really looking forward to the first race with my new teammates."

Rahel Frey (Porsche 911 GT3 R #85):"I am really excited about the FIA WEC season opener in Qatar, especially since we will be competing in a Porsche 911 GT3 R with the reigning championship-winning team. Our preparations have gone very well, thanks in part to the Iron Dames' winter training camp. We are fit and highly motivated. Our first race of the year in Daytona was promising. We've already visited the Manthey headquarters. Now, the first race is just around the corner. Let's get started!"

Riccardo Pera (Porsche 911 GT3 R #92): "I am thrilled to be returning to the FIA WEC. Racing for Manthey is an absolute dream come true for me. We are well set up in terms of the team, car and drivers – as evidenced by our podium finish at the Asian Le Mans Series season opener in Malaysia. The collaboration with experienced and fast teammates like Richard Lietz and Ryan Hardwick gives me confidence. I am eagerly looking forward to Qatar. The competition will be fierce."

Porsche race cars and drivers in Qatar

Hypercar class (Porsche 963):

Porsche Penske Motorsport #5: Julien Andlauer (FRA), Michael Christensen (DNK), Mathieu Jaminet (FRA)

Porsche Penske Motorsport #6: Matt Campbell (AUS), Kévin Estre (FRA), Laurens Vanthoor (BEL)

Proton Competition #99: Neel Jani (SUI), Nico Pino (CHL), Nico Varrone (ARG)

LMGT3 class (Porsche 911 GT3 R):

Iron Dames #85: Rahel Frey (SUI), Michelle Gatting (DNK), Célia Martin (FRA)

Manthey 1st Phorm #92: Ryan Hardwick (USA), Richard Lietz (AUT), Riccardo Pera (ITA)

The schedule (local time, CET +2 hours)

Friday, February 21

13:00 – 16:00: Prologue Session 1

18:00 – 22:00: Prologue Session 2

Saturday, February 22

12:00 – 15:00: Prologue Session 3

17:00 – 21:00: Prologue Session 4

Wednesday, February 26

12:00 – 13:30: Free Practice 1

17:30 – 19:00: Free Practice 2

Thursday, February 27

12:00 – 13:00: Free Practice 3

17:00 – 17:12: Qualifying LMGT3

17:20 – 17:30: Hyperpole LMGT3

17:40 – 17:52: Qualifying Hypercar

18:00 – 18:10: Hyperpole Hypercar

Friday, February 28

14:00 – 00:00: Race "Qatar 1812 km"

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