

Porsche Penske Motorsport's strong performance rewarded with podium spot

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10/09/2023 Porsche Penske Motorsport has secured the second podium result in the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC with the Porsche 963. At the sixth and penultimate round of the season at the Fuji Speedway in Japan, works drivers Kévin Estre from France, André Lotterer from Germany and Belgian Laurens Vanthoor finished third. The works team's No. 6 car spent two-thirds of the six-hour race in the lead but was ultimately unable to defend the top spot. The No. 5 sister car only managed to finish in twelfth place due to penalties and technical problems. In the GTE Am class, the customer teams netted many points towards the world championship with the Porsche 911 RSR.

Race

In sunshine and temperatures of around 27 degrees Celsius, Laurens Vanthoor treated the record crowd of 54,700 spectators to some gripping race action right at the start. Heading into the race from P3 on the grid, the Belgian promptly swept past his rivals in the sprint to the first corner. During his two stints, he extended the lead over his pursuers to over ten seconds. Vanthoor then handed the hybrid prototype to his works driver colleague Kévin Estre. The Frenchman stayed in the lead until the last lap of his two stints but had to allow the first of two Toyotas past right before the final pit stop.

While Germany's André Lotterer was not quite able to match the pace of the experienced Japanese at their home race in Fuji in the last third of the race, he put in a commanding drive to bring home the second podium finish of the year. However, his brand colleagues Dane Cameron from the USA, Michael Christensen from Denmark and Frédéric Makowiecki from France were plagued by misfortune. The trio in the No. 5 car suffered a puncture on the first lap, had to serve two penalties and ultimately spent a lot of time in the pits for repairs. Despite clocking some very fast lap times, the No. 5 entry finished twelfth in the top hypercar class.

“The Porsche 963 and the entire team put in an extremely strong performance today,” says Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President of Porsche Motorsport. “A huge compliment to everyone who worked so hard for such a podium result. Third place was the well-deserved reward today. We showcased the car's potential over the weekend and very much enjoyed our time in the lead in the first four hours of racing. That was fantastic! It's a shame that our number 5 car was hit by bad luck because their pace was very strong, as well. Now we're heading to the season finale in Bahrain feeling highly motivated and confident.”

“Congratulations to everyone on our team. Everyone did a first-class job out on the track, in the development centre in Weissach and at the team headquarters in Mannheim and Mooresville,” explains Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. “It was great to see how we kept improving the car throughout the weekend. And it was even better that we turned this into a well-deserved podium finish in the race. Congratulations to Toyota for securing the manufacturers' crown early.”

“We were aiming for the podium and we achieved that,” states Jonathan Diuguid. The Managing Director of Porsche Penske Motorsport is delighted with the success of the No. 6 vehicle. In terms of the sister car, he adds: “Unfortunately, the No. 5 vehicle encountered a lot of bad luck. We'll take a good look at this and work out why. But now we're pleased that our pace was great today and we led the race for four hours. We're very excited about the season finale.”

In the manufacturers' championship, Porsche achieved third place and heads to the final round of the 2023 FIA WEC as the best LMDh brand in the overall classification. Finishing in third, Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor advanced to sixth place in the drivers' standings, while their teammates Cameron/Christensen/Makowiecki rank seventh.

The two customer-run Porsche 963 wrapped up the six-hour race at the foot of Mount Fuji in sixth and ninth positions. Hertz Team Jota's No. 38 entry maintained a steady pace with impressive lap times. The identical No. 99 car fielded by Proton Competition was equally as fast but lost eight laps due to a seat-belt system defect.

GTE-Am class: Porsche customer teams harvest a bunch of points in Japan

In the GTE-Am category, the Iron Dames team were once again among the frontrunners. The pink Porsche 911 RSR driven by the all-female trio Sarah Bovy (Belgium), Michelle Gatting (Denmark) and Rahel Frey (Switzerland) were on course for a podium finish over long stretches but ultimately took the flag in fourth place. The nine-elevens campaigned by Project1 – AO Racing and Dempsey-Proton Racing followed in fifth and sixth. GR Racing and Iron Lynx wrapped up the penultimate race of the season in eighth and eleventh place.

The final round of the 2023 FIA WEC will be contested on 4 November at the Bahrain International Circuit. The last world championship race of the year runs over eight hours.

Drivers' comments on the race

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): "Although the Toyotas were a bit stronger than us today, I'm totally satisfied with third place. Our pace today was great and we deservedly led the race for four hours. Our tremendous progress was obvious here. That makes us very positive. We want to do just as well in Bahrain – preferably even a little better."

Will Stevens (Porsche 963 #38): "It was a clean race with one exception, unfortunately, we were handed a drive-through penalty. If that hadn't happened, we could have grabbed fourth place. Then we would've been in front of the Ferraris! In that sense, it was a positive weekend. We're gradually working our way closer to the factory teams. In this respect, too, we've learned a lot and want to translate this into further progress at the season finale in Bahrain. Then comes the winter break, where we will work just as hard to make real progress for the coming year."

Neel Jani (Porsche 963 #99): "Harry drove a very strong stint at the beginning. We were running in the region of fifth place. Unfortunately, there was a small mishap during a driver change and the seatbelt buckle broke – what a shame. We had to fix it, of course, but it meant the end of our race. We used the remaining laps as a test. Our pace was great. In the end, I managed at times to match the pace of the three top cars. Now it's time to perform like this over the entire race distance."

Race result

Hypercar class:
1. Conway/Kobayashi/Lopez (UK/J/ARG), Toyota #7, 229 laps
2. Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa (CH/NZ/J), Toyota #8, 229 laps
3. Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6, 229 laps
6. Da Costa/Ye/Stevens (P/CHN/UK), Porsche 963 #38, 228 laps
9. Bruni/Tincknell/Jani (I/UK/CH), Porsche 963 #99, 221 laps
12. Cameron/Christensen/Makowiecki (USA/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 185 laps

GTE-Am class:
1. Flohr/Castellacci/Rigon (CH/I/I), Ferrari #54, 210 laps
2. Kimura/Huffaker/Myata (J/USA/J), Ferrari #57, 210 laps
3. Keating/Varrone/Catsburg (USA/ARG/NL), Corvette #33, 210 laps
4. Bovy/Gatting/Frey (B/DK/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #85, 210 laps
5. Hyett/Jeannette/Cairoli (USA/USA/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 210 laps
6. Ried/Pedersen/Andlauer (D/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 210 laps
8. Wainwright/Pera/Barker (UK/I/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 210 laps
11. Schiavoni/Cressoni/Picariello (I/I/B), Porsche 911 RSR #60, 209 laps

Full results: fiawec.alkamelsystems.com.

Qualifying

The two Porsche 963 fielded by the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team have locked out the second grid row for round six of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC. In the Hypercar qualifying at the Fuji Speedway in Japan, works driver Kévin Estre (No. 6) and Frédéric Makowiecki (No. 5) secured positions three and four. With this, the French duo has achieved the best qualifying result since the debut of the Porsche 963 in the FIA WEC. The identical prototypes from the customer teams Hertz Team Jota and Proton Competition turned the eighth and ninth fastest lap. In the GTE-Am class, the Porsche 911 RSR campaigned by Iron Dames put in an impressive performance setting the second fastest lap time.

The qualifying session for round six was held in high humidity and temperatures of around 26 degrees Celsius. After some heavy rain on Friday and Saturday morning, the track offered little grip during the 15-minute session. While the asphalt remained dry in many places early on, the rainfall increased in the last five minutes, which prevented better times. Under these tricky conditions, works drivers Kévin Estre and Frédéric Makowiecki tapped the full potential of their 500 kW (680 PS) hybrid prototypes.

While a large contingent of the hypercar field headed straight out of pit lane at the start of the session, the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team initially waited. After about a minute, Estre attempted a

flying lap in the No. 6 car, followed by his brand colleague Makowiecki two minutes later in the No. 5 entry. Their patience paid off: Both drivers got a cleaner run and were only slightly hampered by traffic. The two works drivers continued to improve over the first five laps and ended up securing third and fourth.

“This is a very good result for our entire team,” sums up Urs Kuratle. The Director Factory Motorsport LMDh adds: “It’s been a long road this weekend. We’ve systematically improved our setup from practice to practice. That made this excellent result in qualifying possible. We could’ve been even closer to the top. Both drivers were making considerable gains in the final lap, but then the rain started and it was too wet in the third sector, so we couldn’t push as hard. Our customer teams are starting from the midfield in their two Porsche 963s. Let’s see what we can do from there in the race.”

“That was a great session. We’re very pleased with third and fourth on the grid,” grins Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. “Both cars were very close in qualifying. This shows that the drivers and the whole team have done their best. We’re well prepared for the race. We aren’t quite at the top, but those positions are well within reach. Tomorrow, we want to fight at the very front.”

The two Porsche 963 fielded by customer teams Proton Competition and Hertz Team Jota secured grid positions in the midfield of the top hypercar class. At the helm of the #38 Hertz Team Jota car, Portugal’s António Félix da Costa finished in eighth position, with his works driver colleague Ginamaria Bruni from Italy lining up directly behind him in ninth place at the wheel of the #99 Proton Competition car.

GTE-Am class: All-female Iron Dames crew starts from P2
In the GTE-Am category, Porsche’s customer teams had varying degrees of success with the proven 911 RSR. In the hunt for top times at the foot of Mount Fuji, Sarah Bovy again turned heads. The Belgian planted the No. 85 Iron Dames car on the second grid spot. At the end of the 15-minute session, she was only 0.035 seconds off pole position. The identical ca. 378 kW (515 PS) 911 racers fielded by Project1 - AO Racing, Dempsey-Proton Racing and GR Racing form a trio in eighth, ninth and tenth place. Iron Lynx’s 911 RSR tackles the race from 13th place in its class.

Round six of the FIA WEC at the Fuji Speedway around 100 kilometres southwest of Tokyo runs over six hours. The race gets underway on Sunday, September 9 at 11:00 am local time (04:00 am CEST).

Driver’s comments on qualifying

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 963 #5):“It’s a great result for us. We’ve made leaps and bounds with the car. It makes me proud to see how much we’ve improved since the start of the season. I think the car will be strong in the race as well. I’m really optimistic. Even if the weather conditions change throughout the day, I’m not worried at all; during practice we did well here in the rain and on a dry track.”

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): “Our Porsche Penske Motorsport cars are lined up alongside each other

on the second row of the grid – brilliant! The car felt better than it previously had in qualifying, and that translated into our best result in the hunt for top times. This is proof that our hard work is paying off. We're constantly improving. We also hit the ground running in qualifying. It's not quite pole position, but it's a clear step in that direction. Now we'll see how we do over the distance in the race. In any case, the car feels fantastic."

António Félix da Costa (Porsche 963 #38): "I'm disappointed. We were really looking forward to qualifying and wanted to go for the top. Unfortunately, other cars kept getting in the way on my last laps. That cost three or four-tenths of a second each time. It was a bit unlucky. We could have been much further forward. The race tomorrow will run over six hours. That's still ample time to make a significant improvement in our ranking."

Gianmaria Bruni (Porsche 963 #99):"We learned a lot in the practice sessions. In qualifying, I was creeping closer and closer to the limit, but then it started to rain. On my fastest lap, I wasn't able to make any considerable gains in the last sector because the track was wet. We gambled a bit there – but it doesn't matter. We're satisfied. Let's see how the weather develops on race day and what's possible for us then."

Sarah Bovy (Porsche 911 RSR #85): "It was incredibly close in qualifying. I wanted to pull it all together into one last hot lap at the very end, but unfortunately, it was too late to improve my time. The front grid row is excellent. I'll try to replace my colleague Ben Keating at the front in the first few laps. Let's see how that goes. Hopefully, it'll be an entertaining race. A bit of rain could spice things up and raise our chances of success."

Qualifying result

Hypercar class:
1. Conway/Kobayashi/Lopez (UK/J/ARG), Toyota #7, 1:27.794 minutes
2. Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa (CH/NZ/J), Toyota #8, 1:28.418 minutes
3. Estre/Lotterer/Vanthoor (F/D/B), Porsche 963 #6, 1:28.667 minutes
4. Cameron/Christensen/Makowiecki (USA/DK/F), Porsche 963 #5, 1:28.717 minutes
8. Da Costa/Ye/Stevens (P/CHN/UK), Porsche 963 #38, 1:29.111 minutes
9. Bruni/Tincknell/Jani (I/UK/CH), Porsche 963 #99, 1:29.338 minutes

GTE-Am class:
1. Keating/Varrone/Catsburg (USA/ARG/NL), Corvette #33, 1:38.338 minutes
2. Bovy/Gatting/Frey (B/DK/CH), Porsche 911 RSR #85, 1:38.373 minutes
3. Hoshino/Stevenson/Fujii (J/UK/J), Aston Martin #777, 1:38.875 minutes
8. Hyett/Jeannette/Cairoli (USA/USA/I), Porsche 911 RSR #56, 1:39.179 minutes
9. Ried/Pedersen/Andlauer (D/DK/F), Porsche 911 RSR #77, 1:39.183 minutes
10. Wainwright/Pera/Barker (UK/I/UK), Porsche 911 RSR #86, 1:39.202 minutes
13. Schiavoni/Cressoni/Picariello (I/I/B), Porsche 911 RSR #60, 1:40.292 minutes

Full results: fiawec.alkamelsystems.com.

Preview

In the second to last race of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), the works team will run two Porsche 963 in the hypercar class. The Hertz Team Jota and Proton Competition customer squads also take up the challenge at the six-hour race in Fuji, Japan. Each team fields one of the hybrid prototypes from Weissach. In the GTE-Am category, a total of five customer-run Porsche 911 RSR racers will fight for points and trophies.

The FIA World Endurance Championship WEC turns onto the home straight with the penultimate race of the year at the storied Fuji racetrack. On the former Formula 1 circuit at the foot of Japan's most iconic mountain, the Porsche Penske Motorsport works squad is aiming for a podium finish. At the previous round in Monza, the two Porsche 963 crossed the finish line in fourth and seventh. Like in Italy, two more hybrid prototypes from Weissach will contest the penultimate round of the season in Japan: The customer teams Proton Competition and Hertz Team Jota will once again tackle the hypercar class.

“Japan is an important market for Porsche. We're looking forward to showcasing our Porsche 963 in racing conditions to the extraordinary fans in Fuji," explains Thomas Laudenbach. The Vice President of Porsche Motorsport adds: “The competition in the FIA WEC hypercar class hasn't been balanced recently. We're hoping that the performance structure will be different in the penultimate round of the season. Our goal is clear: We want to finally get back on the podium and be as successful in the World Endurance Championship as we are with the Porsche 963 in the American IMSA series.“

“The Fuji circuit has some very unique characteristics," says Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Racing LMDh. “With the longest straight on the WEC calendar at almost 1.5 kilometres coupled with several tight and technical corners in the third sector, the circuit throws big challenges at engineers and drivers. In Fuji, the challenge is to find the ideal balance between downforce and top speed. These conditions are somewhat reminiscent of Le Mans. We were very fast there in June so this makes me confident for the race in Japan.“

“It's no secret that the European stage of the season had highs and lows but the overall trajectory since Sebring has ultimately been positive," states Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. “Despite missing out on the podium, our Monza performance was strong so we aim to continue this momentum as we head to Asia and the Middle East. The Fuji event will require perfect reliability – we've, of course, not had the chance to test there so we're eager to learn as much as possible during the practice sessions where every lap will count. Then, during the race, we'll have to make sure we're smart with the tyres – managing the track surface that has high degradation – and that we use the infamous changeable weather conditions at Fuji to our advantage. I've no doubt we'll put on a fantastic show for the fans as we aim for another WEC podium.“

The regular driver crews of this season will once again share driving duties in the two Porsche 963 of the Porsche Penske Motorsport works team. The American Dane Cameron shares the cockpit of the No. 5 car with his works driver colleagues Michael Christensen from Denmark and Frédéric Makowiecki from France. In the No. 6 sister car, Frenchman Kévin Estre and Belgian Laurens Vanthoor join forces with three-time overall Le Mans winner André Lotterer from Germany. In the FIA WEC manufacturers' classification, Porsche ranks fourth after five of seven races this season.

The WEC race

Opened in 1966, the 16-turn, 4.563-kilometre Fuji Speedway lies at the foot of Mount Fuji, Japan's highest mountain at 3,776 metres. The snow-capped peak of the volcano, which was made a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2013 and is revered by the Japanese as a sacred natural monument, is often used as the spectacular backdrop in photos taken at the racetrack. The circuit layout features a wide range of corner radii as well as the longest straight on the World Endurance Championship calendar at 1.475 kilometres in length.

A special highlight of the WEC weekend in Japan is the "Circuit Safari". Shortly before the third free practice session on Saturday, all teams will send one of their vehicles onto the track at almost race speed. At the same time, coaches will be given access to the racetrack, offering fans a chance to experience the circuit up close. This annual event is a huge hit with spectators, with the bus rides giving them lasting memories of the impressive pace of the prototypes and GT vehicles as well as the racing operations of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC.

Porsche's customer teams and drivers

The privateer teams Proton Competition and Hertz Team Jota field one Porsche 963 each in the top hypercar class. Works driver António Félix da Costa from Portugal, Will Stevens from the UK and the Porsche Motorsport Asia-Pacific selected driver from China Yifei Ye will compete for the British team, which led the field for some laps at the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 2023. Works drivers Gianmaria Bruni from Italy, Neel Jani from Switzerland and Englishman Harry Tincknell will share the Proton Competition car.

Five 911 RSR will tackle the GTE-Am class. Project1 - AO again fields "Rexy", a favourite with the fans. The bright green 911 decked out in a dinosaur design will be helmed by the Americans PJ Hyett and Gunnar Jeannette and the Italian Matteo Cairoli. The yellow Iron Lynx car and the Iron Dames pink contender will add even more of a colour splash to the grid lineup. The all-female trio Michelle Gatting (Denmark), Sarah Bovy (Belgium) and Rahel Frey (Switzerland) again share the No. 85 Iron Dames Porsche. Dempsey-Proton Racing and GR Racing will campaign two identical racing cars.

Drivers' comments before the race

Michael Christensen (Porsche 963 #5):"The break after the Monza race was quite long. I'm really looking forward to the next race in the Porsche 963. I'm hoping that we can make further progress in Japan and be more competitive. We have to close the gap to the top and fine-tune our processes as a team. We're still a young outfit and are constantly learning. We want to underline that in Fuji. I always enjoy racing there because the Japanese fans, the culture and the whole country are extremely interesting."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6):"Japan is one of my absolute favourite countries. I'm very eager to travel there again. We were consistently strong in Fuji with the 911 RSR. Whether that will also be the case with the Porsche 963 is too early to tell, since we've never tested there. Our engineers have intensively analysed the data from Monza to fine-tune some aspects and squeeze every last ounce of performance out of the car. I'd like us to have an upper hand on our rivals in Japan."

Yifei Ye (Porsche 963 #38):"The first seven months of the year were very labour-intensive, so I really enjoyed the rest period after Monza. I relaxed, but also trained a lot and intensively prepared myself physically and mentally for the last two races of the year. Our team has evaluated the data from Monza. We have concrete ideas about what we want to try out in Fuji to become even more competitive. I'm looking forward to Japan because I used to race karts there when I was ten and eleven years old. As a Porsche Motorsport Asia-Pacific selected driver, it's obviously close to my heart to put in a particularly strong performance on an Asian track."

Neel Jani (Porsche 963 #99):"We used the long break after the last race in Monza to analyse our initial experiences with the Porsche 963. In Fuji, we are competing with a completely new car, as the car from Monza will be fielded in the American IMSA series. I'm very familiar with the Fuji racetrack from my races in the FIA WEC. The fans in Japan are always extremely enthusiastic. I'm looking forward to the atmosphere there. On the sporting side, we're giving everything, as always. But we're still a fledgling team so every lap counts. Our learning curve remains steep."

Overview of teams and drivers

Hypercar class (Porsche 963):
Porsche Penske Motorsport (#5): Dane Cameron (USA), Michael Christensen (DK), Frédéric Makowiecki (F)
Porsche Penske Motorsport (#6): Kévin Estre (F), André Lotterer (D), Laurens Vanthoor (B)
Hertz Team Jota (#38): António Félix da Costa (P), Will Stevens (UK), Yifei Ye (CHN)
Proton Competition (#99): Gianmaria Bruni (I), Harry Tincknell (UK), Neel Jani (CH)

GTE-Am class (Porsche 911 RSR):
Project1 – AO (#56): PJ Hyett (USA), Gunnar Jeannette (USA), Matteo Cairoli (I)

Iron Lynx (#60): Claudio Schiavoni (I), Matteo Cressoni (I), Alessio Picariello (B)
Dempsey-Proton Racing (#77): Christian Ried (D), Mikkel Pedersen (DK), Julien Andlauer (F)
Iron Dames (#85): Sarah Bovy (B), Michelle Gatting (DK), Rahel Frey (CH)
GR Racing (#86): Michael Wainwright (UK), Riccardo Pera (I), Ben Barker (UK)

The schedule (local time, CEST +7 hours)

Friday, 8 September
11:00 am – 12:30 pm: Free practice 1
3:30 pm – 5:00 pm: Free practice 2

Saturday, 9 September
10:00 am – 10:12 am: Circuit Safari
10:20 am – 11:20 am: Free practice 3
2:40 pm – 2:55 pm: Qualifying GTE
3:30 pm – 3:45 pm: Qualifying Hypercars

Sunday, 10 September
11:00 pm – 5:00 pm: Race

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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Image Sublines

Path: Best qualifying for the Porsche 963 since its FIA WEC debut/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Porsche 963, Porsche Penske Motorsport (#5), Dane Cameron (USA), Michael Christensen (DK), Frederic Makowiecki (F), FIA WEC, Fuji, race, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Porsche 963 (#5)

Path: Best qualifying for the Porsche 963 since its FIA WEC debut/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh, Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport, l-r, FIA WEC, Fuji, race, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Urs Kuratle (l) and Jonathan Diuguid (r)

Path: Best qualifying for the Porsche 963 since its FIA WEC debut/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Porsche 911 RSR, Iron Dames (#80), Sarah Bovy (B), Rahel Frey (CH), Michelle Gatting (DK), FIA WEC, Fuji, race, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Porsche 911 RSR (#80)

Path: Best qualifying for the Porsche 963 since its FIA WEC debut/Images/img_6.jpg
Title: Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Motorsport, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Thomas Laudenbach

Path: Best qualifying for the Porsche 963 since its FIA WEC debut/Images/img_7.jpg
Title: Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Urs Kuratle

Path: Best qualifying for the Porsche 963 since its FIA WEC debut/Images/img_8.jpg
Title: Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Jonathan Diuguid

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