

Race to the road: Introducing the Porsche 963 RSP

06/06/2025 One-of-one project pays homage to Count Rossi 917 in 50th anniversary year.

Le Mans. As Porsche prepares for the 24 Hours of Le Mans, a sister to the 963 Hypercar has been revealed – named the 963 RSP. An extreme one-off based on the IMSA championship and WEC championship winning machine, the car closely follows the design direction taken by a very special 917 50 years ago. Fittingly, it made its debut today on the streets near the Circuit de la Sarthe alongside the car that inspired its creation.

The work of a team from Porsche AG, Porsche Penske Motorsport and Porsche Cars North America in partnership with motorsport legend Roger Penske, whose initials form the name of the car, the 963 RSP was influenced by the trailblazing 917 and an audacious drive that took place half a century ago.

In April 1975, a 917 (chassis 30) – the most advanced endurance race car at that time – made an extraordinary journey, not on the track, but on public roads. From the factory in Zuffenhausen, it traveled to Paris - at the wheel was its enigmatic owner, who insisted on as few changes as possible to

the car, which remains in France, and on the road, to this day.

“This really started out as a “what if?” – a passion project by a small team of enthusiasts at Penske and at Porsche who together imagined a version of the 963 that really resembled as closely as possible the spirit and appearance of the Count Rossi 917,” said Porsche Cars North America President and CEO Timo Resch, who conceived of the original idea. “The 917 from the story was every inch a race car – albeit one driven on the road – and we took the same approach with the 963 RSP. It uses beautiful materials of the best quality available, but is still every bit a race car underneath.”

The 963 RSP features significant changes over the car on which it is based. Unlike the competition racecars, which are wrapped in different colors, the 963 RSP is the first of its kind to be painted; a unique challenge due to the nature of the carbon fiber and Kevlar® bodywork which is ultra-thin in places to save weight. In a nod to the Count Rossi 917, the 963 RSP is finished in Martini Silver and features uniquely altered bodywork and a bespoke tan leather and Alcantara interior inspired by the trim choices made by Count Rossi 50 years ago. A dedicated mechanical and electronic setup were configured for its debut on the streets near Le Mans – including a raised ride height and softened dampers, as well as a reprogrammed control unit to allow for the headlights and taillights to operate closer to those of a road car. These changes along with modified bodywork to cover the wheel arches, the use of Michelin wet weather compound tires and even the fitment of a horn meant the car met the necessary criteria to be allowed to drive on the road and wear license plates under special permission from the French authorities and with the enthusiastic support of the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO), which runs the 24 Hours of Le Mans race.

“That was an experience that will stay with me for a lifetime,” said Timo Bernhard, who was at the wheel of the 963 RSP for its first miles on the road. “Driving down a public road with a 917 beside me – it felt unreal. The car behaved perfectly – it felt a little friendlier and more forgiving than the normal 963 – and felt super special and a lot more comfortable, especially as I was not needing all my safety gear.”

“We have enjoyed a terrific relationship with Porsche dating back to 1972. The Porsche 917/30, in particular, was one of the greatest eras in Team Penske history with numerous wins and championships, along with the closed-course speed record set by Mark Donohue in 1975,” said Roger Penske, Chairman of the Penske Corporation. “With such a remarkable partnership continuing to this day, we felt it was time to create the most exciting car we could imagine. Just like the 917, I wanted this car to be authentic to its origin and have as few changes to it as possible. When we got into the project, the differences in the two generations of race cars provided a great challenge. What emerged is a car that has lost none of its edge and is exciting whether on the track or on the road.”

The 963 RSP will go on public display at the Circuit de la Sarthe during the 24 Hours of Le Mans before it returns to Stuttgart to be shown at the Porsche Museum. In July the car will appear alongside the 917 at the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

The 963 project in detail:

The concept originated during a trackside meeting between Timo Resch, President and CEO of Porsche Cars North America, Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President, Porsche Motorsport, and Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Racing LMDh at Road Atlanta. Inspired by the 917, they imagined repeating the feat with a 963. This small group took the basic premise of the project to Roger Penske and Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director of Porsche Penske Motorsport – both of whom encouraged and developed the idea further. Roger Penske was nominated as the customer for the car, with the 963 being named in his honor.

Design process – exterior:

With the concept established, the Sonderwunsch team in Zuffenhausen began translating the idea to reality in cooperation with the Sonderwunsch colleagues at Porsche Classic in Atlanta – a standalone facility opened in 2023. Drawing on the changes selected by Count Rossi in 1975, Grant Larson, Director of Special Projects at Style Porsche, and his designers envisioned a 963 that would stay as close as possible to the original car with a silver and black color pallet on the outside, and a tan leather and Alcantara mix for the interior. This extended to the decision to paint the car – as was the case with the 917 – rather than wrapping it, as is the norm with current race cars, and a significant challenge due to the Kevlar® and carbon fiber body construction. The paint to sample color – 'Martini Silver' – was verified from the records held by the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, with a triple-layer lacquer applied. Minor components such as hinges and wing connectors are all finished in satin black with a unique 3D printed '963 RSP' created and applied to the rear of the car.

To closer align the 963 to the form of the 917, bodywork changes were made to the 963 RSP. These include the creation of unique fender vents – where otherwise the front and rear fender vents would be open. A collaboration between Sonderwunsch and Porsche Penske Motorsport, the vents were digitally rendered first before applied to the car, with the new design allowing air within the wheel wells to escape. Additionally, the carbon fiber blanking plates that sit within the rear wing – a requirement on the race car – were able to be removed for the 963 RSP.

Added to the nose of the car – replacing the graphic that is applied to all conventional 963s – was an enamel Porsche badge, a detailed shared with the 917.

A small detail change was the addition of 1970s-era Michelin logos for the tire walls, and rain-spec 18-inch tires over forged OZ racing wheels. Finally – and in another first – mounting points for front and rear license plates were added ahead of the car being driven on public roads to mark the 50th anniversary of the first street drive of the 917.

Design process – interior:

Possibly the greatest departure from the 963 race car occurs inside the 963 RSP. Following the lead of the handcrafted and completely bespoke interior of the 917 (which remains unrestored to this day) the 963 RSP features a mix of soft tan leather and Alcantara. Whereas the race car features very few comfort features, the 963 RSP is more accommodating – with the single piece carbon seat trimmed in leather with soft cushioning placed down the center and a fixed headrest mounted on the carbon fiber bulkhead. The seats are – in common with the race version – air conditioned. The leg cushions in the footwell as well as the roof lining and pillars have been retrimmed in light Alcantara while the steering wheel – where the majority of the vehicle's functions are located – has been finished in leather. A light-hearted addition is a detachable 3D-printed cup holder capable of securely holding a Porsche travel mug.

Next to the driver, a new trimmed panel provides a location for the car's Peltor headset and steering wheel when not in use as well as a platform for the laptop that starts and assists in the operation of the car and Roger Penske's custom carbon crash helmet.

While the color of design of the interior are obvious references to the 917, more subtle design elements can be found – among them bespoke end plates for the ventilation system which mimic the styling of the fan on top of the 917's flat-12 engine.

The doors are finished in leather and Alcantara, with a small alloy plaque set into one of them denoting the chassis number and the date and location of construction.

Mechanical changes:

The ride height of the car was raised to its maximum available setting to accommodate road use, while the adjustable Multimatic DSSV dampers designed for racing prototypes are in their softest setting to create a more compliant ride.

The control unit was modified to allow the car to operate turn signals and allow the headlights to be adjusted for road. The hybrid V8 powertrain with a lithium-ion battery – capable of being run on electrical power only – remains in standard race tune in the 963 RSP, but power delivery from the MGU has been remapped to provide smooth delivery more appropriate for road use versus race competition The powertrain was also re-mapped to be capable of running on pump gas – a significant undertaking for the team.

Finishing touches:

Accompanying the 963 RSP are a custom fitted carbon crash helmet with Martini Silver accents to

match the car, and a bespoke Snap On toolset with a chest bearing accents in the same color, a plaque commemorating the project and its namesake, and handles wrapped in the same leather used in the interior of the car. The drawers also feature custom foam inserts to carry tools and special equipment necessary to start, service and operate the car.

While capable of being driven on the road under special circumstances and in accordance with local requirements (the modifications to the car allowed it to use French 'W' or manufacturer license plates for its debut), the 963 RSP is not a homologated addition to the Porsche model line-up and is intended to remain a very special one-off.

The powertrain of the 963:

The 963 is powered by a 4.6 liter twin-turbocharged V8 making up to approximately 680 hp that has its origins in the RS Spyder race program operated by Penske which claimed all titles in the LMP2 class of the American Le Mans Series from 2006 to 2008. The engine was enlarged from 3.4 to 4.6 liters and then used in the limited-production 918 Spyder road car, which debuted in 2013. The flat crankshaft and short stroke of the engine allow for a low mounting point, helping to optimize the center of gravity of the car. While the 918 Spyder used the engine in naturally aspirated form, the 963 pairs it with two turbochargers provided by the Dutch manufacturer Van der Lee. These turbochargers generate very moderate boost pressure and are mounted on the hot side of the engine, optimizing throttle response. Overall, around 80 percent of the engine components in the 963 are shared with the 918 Spyder, which was already designed to work together with a hybrid system.

The standardized components of the electric boost system are supplied by Bosch (motor generator unit, electronics and software) and Williams Advanced Engineering (high-voltage battery). The motor generator unit (MGU), which is responsible for the power output and recuperation under braking at the rear axle, works in direct interaction with the sequential seven-speed gearbox from Xtrac. The MGU sits in the bell housing between the combustion engine and the gearbox.

The hybrid's entire electrical system produces up to 800 volts. The uniform battery has an energy capacity of 1.35 kWh, which can be mobilized at any time under acceleration. An output of 30 to 50 kW is available in short bursts but does not change the overall output of the powertrain. When the thrust of the MGU kicks in, the power of the combustion engine, which can reach over 8,000 rpm (depending on the BoP), automatically decreases.

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