

On your marques: Porsche at Le Mans Classic

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06/07/2022 The Le Mans Classic makes a welcome return, with Porsche front and centre at the historic home of endurance racing.

Postponed by COVID-19, the bi-annual Le Mans Classic returned after a four-year hiatus, and the sense of anticipation was palpable among the 200,000 spectators who had travelled from across Europe and beyond to the Circuit de La Sarthe in north-west France.

Porsche, once again, was a pivotal part of this 10th staging of the popular historic motorsport event, with the 50th anniversary of the 911 Carrera RS 2.7 the perfect excuse to send five generations of track-focussed RS models from the Porsche Museum to form a central display for the brand.

Also making star turns at the Porsche Experience Centre, situated at the heart of the action at Maison

Blanche, was the new 911 Sport Classic, the second project created as part of Porsche's Heritage Design programme. With its 3.7-litre flat-six delivering 550 PS () to the rear wheels via a seven-speed manual transmission, the limited-edition Sport Classic, which itself wears a ducktail rear spoiler in homage to the original Carrera RS 2.7, is the most powerful manual 911 currently on sale.

Another draw for the thousands of Porsche fans who visited the PEC over the weekend was the surprise arrival of the 963, Porsche's all-new endurance racer, which only recently enjoyed its international debut at the Goodwood Festival of Speed. The 680 PS prototype racer, which features a fixed hybrid drive system mated to Porsche's own twin-turbocharged V8, will be campaigned simultaneously by Team Porsche Penske in both the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and the World Endurance Championship, allowing Porsche to compete for outright victory in both of the world's most prestigious endurance racing series. For spectators at the Le Mans Classic, this first appearance at the circuit served as a tantalising reminder that a Porsche works team will be competing once again for top honours at the 24 Hours in less than 12 months.

In the meantime, the crowds were treated to a series of spectacular on-track displays, including the ever-popular Porsche Parade and the Porsche Classic Race. The latter saw a variety of classic Porsche works and customer racing cars, spanning well over half a century of competition, lap the famously fast and demanding 13.6-kilometre circuit. Numerous classic 911 models were flanked by examples of the 904 Carrera GTS, the rare late 1960s 910 prototype and several turbocharged 935 cars and early 911 RSR examples. Under cloudless summer skies, packed grandstands echoed to the unmistakable sound of the air-cooled flat-six, the whistle and chatter of turbos in their wake as dozens of cherished creations from Porsche's rich racing past returned to one of its most familiar and fruitful hunting grounds.

Separate rounds for Group C racers also saw the return of several privateer 956 and 962 prototypes to Le Mans, 40 years after the introduction of the advanced new racing class. Porsche would win Le Mans at its first attempt in 1982 with the newly minted 956 before going on to dominate the Group C era around the world for the best part of a decade. Last weekend, the unmistakable silhouette of Norbert Singer's revolutionary closed cockpit ground effect car looked as fresh and fit for purpose as it did four decades ago.

What made the 10th Le Mans Classic so special

Beyond the wealth of cars, what made the 10th Le Mans Classic so special was the dedication and enthusiasm of the fans who flocked to the famous French circuit in their thousands, often in classic cars of their own. For 2022, Porsche Clubs France, the official organisation for Porsche owners across the country, helped organise a special gathering of its members at the circuit, with more than 2,000 privately owned classic Porsche models of almost every type and specification parked up in long and colourful lines that drew almost as much attention as the on-track activities nearby.

Meanwhile, mixing with owners and enthusiasts across the weekend were famous faces from Porsche's

racing past and present, with local hero and Le Mans veteran Gérard Larrousse meeting fans and signing autographs. Also sharing his own racing experiences was Norwegian amateur Egidio Perfetti, who perfectly encapsulates the Porsche customer journey as a graduate of Carrera Cup and Supercup who would go on to win the GTE-Am Class at Le Mans in 2019.

Wherever you looked, Porsche was a huge presence at the 2022 Le Mans Classic, with road cars and racers from its earliest endeavours sharing the limelight with the cutting-edge machinery of today and tomorrow. And with the event scheduled to return a year early to mark the centenary of the 24 Hours, there is even more to look forward to in 2023.

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