

Porsche customer teams win the GT classes at Sebring

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21/03/2021 The Porsche customer teams WeatherTech Racing and Pfaff Motorsports have won both GT classes at the 12 Hours of Sebring.

The race

In the hotly contested GTLM category, works drivers Mathieu Jaminet from France and Matt Campbell from Australia joined forces in the Porsche 911 GT3 RSR with the American Cooper MacNeil and beat the opposition. In the GTD class for vehicle complying with the FIA GT3 regulations, works driver Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium, Porsche's development driver Lars Kern (Germany) and the Canadian Zacharie Robichon won at the wheel of the No. 9 Porsche 911 GT3 R. The Wrights Motorsport outfit rounded off the triumph for the sports car manufacturer from Stuttgart with second place in the GTD

division.

The tradition-steeped endurance race in Florida was marked by nonstop close duels and many caution phases. The decision for victory in all categories hung in the air until the final laps. After the last of eight full-course yellows, the suspense finally reached its climax. In a last dash over 20 minutes, the Porsche customer squads battled for the top places and built on the already impressive record at the 12-hour classic. This marks the fourth straight win for the Porsche 911 RSR and the second in a row for the 911 GT3 R.

In the GTLM class especially, the competition intensified in the last few laps. Jaminet headed into the final sprint running in third place. At the restart, his 911 RSR with the starting number 79 duelled wheel-to-wheel with the second-placed BMW, but he had to surrender his position – luckily. Only a few metres later, the two leading cars collided in a direct encounter. Jaminet profited and went on to cross the finish line as the winner. “That was a fantastic success at our Sebring ‘home’”, says Steffen Höllwarth, Head of GTLM Operations. “It was the fourth class win in a row for our Porsche 911 RSR. And it was very special because this was the last time the GTLM class will race at Sebring.” From 2022, the vehicle category, which is also run in the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC under the name GTE-Pro, will no longer be contested in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship.

“Unbelievable! This was only our second race in the IMSA series,” says a delighted Christian Ried, whose Proton Competition team maintains the 911 RSR for WeatherTech Racing. “Our crew and all three drivers did a perfect job. At the end of the day, we kept our cool while the works teams shunted each other out of contention. We were very lucky to score third place, but still, we deserved this win.” WeatherTech Racing founder David MacNeil adds: “Porsche is known for racing cars at a technically perfect level. That's why we decided to collaborate in the IMSA series. We've now harvested the fruits of this at only the second race. I'm very proud!”

Customer teams celebrated an even bigger success with a one-two in the GTD class. Over long stretches during the 12-hour event, the strong squads from Pfaff Motorsports and Wright Motorsports took turns at the front of the field. In the final 20-minute sprint, factory pilots Laurens Vanthoor (No. 9) and Patrick Long were driving. In a tight duel, the Belgian managed to stay ahead and took the flag just 2.112 seconds ahead of his American brand teammate. Long shared the cockpit of the No. 16 Porsche 911 GT3 R with his compatriot Trent Hindman and Belgium's Jan Heylen. “A weekend couldn't have ended better than this,” says Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. “All teams had the chance to finish on the podium. At the end of the day, there's a one-two and a strong performance from Hardpoint EBM's number 88 car.”

Hardpoint EBM, however, experienced bad luck. Katherine Legge from Great Britain, Denmark's Christina Nielsen and Ana Beatriz from Brazil were maintaining a sensational third place shortly before the finish. However, a drive-through penalty due to a collision after the final restart relegated the No. 88 Porsche 911 GT3 R back to fifth place. The No. 99 sister car had already fallen far behind during the first third of the race. First, amateur driver Rob Ferriol (USA) flew into the barriers about two hours into the race. The team managed to repair most of the damage to the front of the Porsche 911 GT3 R and

get it back into the race. Two hours later, the New Zealander Earl Bamber collided with a rival. The repairs cost the team almost 40 laps, with the team ultimately crossing the finish line in tenth place. Bamber and Ferriol shared the cockpit with Trenton Estep from the USA.

“We couldn’t have wished for a greater success for our fantastic customer teams,” states Pascal Zurlinden, Director Factory Motorsport. “All in all, it was a banner weekend for Porsche. In the IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge, the 718 GT4 Clubsport set pole position and finished the race in second place. At the debut of the Porsche Carrera Cup North America, 34 cars lined up on the grid, including 23 brand-new 992-generation 911 GT3 Cup cars. This race gave fans a real treat. In the end, the Sebring class victories number 75 and 76 in the IMSA race are the crowning glory.”

Round three of the 2021 IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship will be contested on 16 May at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course.

Drivers’ comments about the race

Cooper MacNeil (Porsche 911 RSR #79): “To have victory decided on the very last lap at a 12-hour race is just crazy! I’m ecstatic! Everyone in the team did a flawless job, and the Porsche 911 RSR was a real dream to drive in the race. I’m overwhelmed by this win.”

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): “We made the most of our car’s great potential. We made no mistakes, we had no incidents and a perfect strategy. The caution phases at the end made things a little more exciting than we wanted. Prior to that, we’d eked out a decent advantage. But I stayed calm at the restart and made it to the finish line.”

Patrick Long (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): “In the close duel for victory, the traffic proved decisive. I had a bit of bad luck, so it wasn’t quite enough. But a one-two for Porsche is still fantastic. I can’t really complain, because we’ve taken over the championship lead with second place.”

Katherine Legge (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): “I’m disappointed obviously because we had a good chance of scoring a podium result. Unfortunately, there was a penalty at the end. Still, I’m very proud of us women drivers and the team. The project came about at very short notice just before the Sebring race. But we’ve achieved a more than respectable result and given a strong performance.”

Result GTLM class

1. MacNeil/Campbell/Jaminet (USA/AUS/F), Porsche 911 RSR #79, 334 laps
2. Eng/de Phillippi/Spengler (A/USA/CDN), BMW #25, 333 laps
3. Edwards/Krohn/Farfus (USA/FIN/BR), BMW #24, 333 laps

Result GTD class

1. Robichon/Vanthoor/Kern (CDN/B/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9, 320 laps
2. Long/Hindman/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16, 320 laps
3. James/De Angelis/Gunn (USA/CDN/GB), Aston Martin #23, 320 laps
5. Nielsen/Legge/Beatriz (DK/GB/BR), Porsche 911 GT3 R #88, 320 laps
10. Ferriol/Bamber/Estep (USA/NZ/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #99, 280 laps

The qualifying

For tomorrow's race, he shares the cockpit of the GT3 vehicle from Weissach with the American works driver Patrick Long and his compatriot Trent Hindman. In 2020, the team from the US state of Ohio clinched a class victory at the same venue. In the GTLM class, Cooper MacNeil from America secured the fifth grid spot with the Porsche 911 RSR fielded by the WeatherTech Racing squad. The experienced amateur racer shares the number 79 vehicle with works drivers Matt Campbell from Australia and Mathieu Jaminet from France.

The GTD qualifying, in which amateurs and professionals share driving duties in the cockpits, was held for the first time following a new, two-part procedure. In the first 15 minutes, the gentlemen drivers went for grid positions, with professional drivers hunting for points in the second session. In the faster GTLM category, the starting positions and points were determined in one session.

Pfaff Motorsports experienced bad luck in the first part of the qualifying. During his first attempt at securing a top grid spot, the Canadian Zacharie Robichon made a braking error in Turn 10 and was unable to improve due to deteriorating tyres. Although the No. 9 car takes up the race from P13 in the GTD class, it still scored the most points of all Porsche customer teams in the second qualifying segment. Works driver Laurens Vanthoor posted the second quickest lap time and thus earned 32 precious points towards the championship. The two Porsche 911 GT3 R fielded by the Hardpoint EBM squad take up the endurance race in Florida from positions ten and eleven.

The twelve-hour race at Sebring gets underway on Saturday, 20 March, at 10:10am local time (3:10pm CET). The entire race can be viewed live outside the USA and Canada on www.imsa.com. Live timing is available at scoring.imsa.com.

Qualifying quotes

Sebastian Golz (Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R): "Jan Heylen in Wright Motorsports car and our works driver Laurens Vanthoor at the wheel of Pfaff Motorsports' vehicle put in outstanding drives. The pair made the most of the Porsche 911 GT3 R's potential and achieved a great starting position as well as critical points. All in all, we're heading into the race day feeling very optimistic. The preparations for

the long-distance classic ran very cleanly and systematically during the practice sessions. We expect a strong performance from our customer cars."

Jan Heylen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "Second on the grid is good, but I'm still a little disappointed. I was at the top of the timesheet for a long time. Ultimately, I was just 0.067 seconds off pole position in our class – so close and yet so far. More would definitely have been possible but I didn't get the chance during practice to get used to the fresh tyres. I lacked the experience. Still, that's complaining at the highest level. Now we're looking forward to the race."

Cooper MacNeil (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "That was a clean qualifying for me. I found a nice gap out on the track and managed to turn my laps without any traffic. Our focus during the practice sessions was solely on preparing for the race. The speed over a flying lap doesn't matter at all over twelve hours. We're well prepared for the big race and tackle the Sebring classic with great confidence."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "My teammate Zach had brake problems twice during his qualifying laps. Before I went out in the second segment, we reset the car in the hope that everything would work again. And that was the case. I could really push the limit on my laps and score important points with second place. It doesn't matter that we start the race from the back of the grid. In a race over twelve hours, the world looks completely different again."

The results

Result GTLM class
1. Garcia/Taylor/Catsburg (E/USA/NL), Corvette #3, 1:54.910 minutes
2. Milner/Tandy/Sims (USA/GB/GB), Corvette #4, 1:54.944 minutes
3. Eng/de Phillippi/Spengler (A/USA/CDN), BMW #25, 1:55.062 minutes
5. MacNeil/Campbell/Jaminet (USA/AUS/F), Porsche 911 RSR #79, 1:56.119 minutes

Result GTD class
1. Simpson/Perrera/Zimmermann (ZA/F/D), Lamborghini #19, 2:00.010 minutes
2. Long/Hindman/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #16, 2:00.077 minutes
3. Telitz/Hawksworth/Kirkwood (USA/GB/USA), Lexus #14, 2:00.504 minutes
10. Nielsen/Legge/Beatriz (DK/GB/BR), Porsche 911 GT3 R #88, 2:02.613 minutes
11. Ferriol/Bamber/Estep (USA/NZ/USA), Porsche 911 GT3 R #99, 2:03.144 minutes
13. Robichon/Vanthoor/Kern (CDN/B/D), Porsche 911 GT3 R #9, 2:29.063 minutes

Full results and championship standings at imsa.alkamelsystems.com.

The preview

Porsche's customer teams head into round two of the IMSA WeatherTech Sportscar Championship

with high expectations. This year marks the 69th running of the tradition-steeped twelve-hour race in Florida. In 2020, Porsche racing cars won both GT classes. Now, the teams aim to repeat this achievement. In the GTLM division, WeatherTech Racing fields one Porsche 911 RSR. In the GTD category for racing vehicles complying with FIA GT3 regulations, three customer squads campaign a total of four 911 GT3 R.

The Sebring International Raceway throws major challenges at man and machine. About a third of the 6.02-kilometre racetrack consists of concrete slabs, which were previously part of the runway at the former Hendricks Army Airfield. The racetrack is known for its hefty washboards – especially on these sections. Due to this special feature, the racetrack located about 100 kilometres south of Orlando is often mentioned on social media with the hashtag #RespectTheBumps.

“We used the time after the season opener at Daytona to tweak some of the processes within the team,’ explains Steffen Höllwarth, Head of GTLM Operations. “We tested at Sebring and we’ll be well-prepared for the race there.” The focus for the engineers of the customer teams will be on setting up the kinematics of the 911 RSR and the four 911 GT3 R. “The track has character – there is no such thing as smooth and gentle at Sebring,” says Sebastian Golz, Project Manager Porsche 911 GT3 R. “For twelve long hours, the bumpy track surface gives drivers and the entire technology a good shakeup. In the race, each of the 911 GT3 R will cover a distance of around 1,900 kilometres, averaging a good 178 km/h. That’s not easy for the driver or car. But when Wright Motorsports won in 2020, we saw that our vehicle is perfectly prepared for such tasks.”

Porsche is by far the most successful manufacturer at this event on the storied circuit, which has regularly hosted the endurance race since 1950. To date, the Stuttgart marque has netted 18 outright wins and 74 class victories at Sebring. In the last three years, the Porsche 911 RSR has won the GTLM class at the twelve-hour race in Florida – an extremely popular event among fans. In 2020, the Wright Motorsports customer team won the hotly contested GTD category. In addition to the 24-hour highlight at Daytona and the races at Road Atlanta and Watkins Glen, round two of the season counts towards the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup.

The Porsche drivers and customer teams

The works drivers Mathieu Jaminet from France and Matt Campbell from Australia team up with American amateur driver Cooper MacNeil in the cockpit of the No. 79 Porsche 911 RSR fielded by the WeatherTech Racing customer squad. The outfit is supported by Proton Competition from Germany. This is its second GTLM-class appearance in Sebring and the vehicle is the winning car from the 2020 season finale held at the same venue.

In the GTD class, the Wright Motorsports customer team lines up on the grid with a Porsche 911 GT3 R as last year’s winners. In the No. 16 car, the American factory pilot Patrick Long (USA) joins forces with his compatriot Ryan Hardwick and Belgium’s Jan Heylen. The Canadian team Pfaff Motorsports runs the number 9 car with works driver Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium, Canadian Zacharie Robichon and

Porsche development driver Lars Kern from Germany. Earl Bamber (New Zealand), Americans Rob Ferriol and Trenton Estep as well as Christina Nielsen (Denmark), Katherine Legge (Great Britain) and Ana Beatriz from Brazil share driving duties in the identical 911 GT3 R fielded by EBM Hardpoint.

Drivers' comments before the race

Matt Campbell (Porsche 911 RSR #79): "I love the Sebring circuit. I've raced there with the WEC and I've tested there often. Despite the rough bumps, the track is great fun – especially at the wheel of the Porsche 911 RSR. I'm really looking forward to my first race with WeatherTech Racing. Mathieu and I share the car with Cooper MacNeil at Sebring. For the following shorter races we take turns. I can gain a lot of extra experience and hopefully achieve decent results."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "It's great that the long break after the opening round will be over soon. We put in a strong drive at Daytona, but an incident hampered us from yielding the deserved result. All in all, we gave a strong performance at our first joint outing as a team. We now want to build on that and fight for class victory at Sebring. I think that's a realistic goal."

Patrick Long (Porsche 911 GT3 R #16): "Sebring is a racetrack with soul. It's one of the greatest challenges in motor racing and it really puts man and machine to the test. It's an event that I always very much look forward to. The fact that we won the GTD class there last year is great, however our focus is on this season. In terms of the championship, it's important to earn maximum points at every round. That's our goal for the upcoming race."

Earl Bamber (Porsche 911 GT3 R #88): "At the Daytona season opener, we had a really fast car, but we couldn't harvest the just rewards. That should change at Sebring. As a team, we've gained a lot of insights and thanks to meticulous analyses, we've drawn the appropriate conclusions for the upcoming events. Trenton Estep rounds off our driver lineup at Sebring. He's a former champion of the Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge. So, my two teammates come from top-class Porsche Cups. I'm particularly thrilled because it underlines the opportunities for advancement and it's a great indication for the drivers who are starting the debut season of the Porsche Carrera Cup North America at Sebring."

Christina Nielsen (Porsche 911 GT3 R #89): "Our car ran really well at round one in Daytona, so I have high expectations for the upcoming race. Within the team, we reshuffled the cockpit crew. That'll be interesting. Sebring suits me really well. I've scored some big successes there in recent years. The bumps are typical for the track. They get worse from year to year, which makes the race extremely exhausting."

Live streaming of the race

The twelve-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship at Sebring gets underway on Saturday, 20 March, at 10:10am local time (4:10pm CET). The entire race can be viewed live outside

the USA and Canada on www.imsa.com. Live timing of all sessions is available at scoring.imsa.com.

The schedule (local time, CET -6 hours)

Thursday, 18 March
9:05 – 10:05 am: Free practice 1
1:55 – 3:10 pm: Free practice 2
7:30 – 9:00 pm: Free practice 3

Friday, 19 March
11:15 – 11:55 am: Qualifying GT

Saturday, 20 March
8:00 – 8:20 am: Warmup
10:10 am – 10:10 pm: Race

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