70 Years Porsche in Australia: Carrera Cup

10/08/2021 As an integral part of Porsche's motorsport history in Australia, Porsche Carrera Cup Australia is approaching its 20th anniversary season. Since 2003 it has redefined what was possible for a one-make championship in Australia. It continued the careers of legends, created new ones and stands as one of the nation's most competitive, prestigious and must-win racing categories.

Carrera Cup Australia came into being in 2003, led by a consortium that included racer/businessman Tony Quinn, former Touring Car team manager and owner Jamie Blaikie and then-Porsche Cars Australia CEO, Michael Winkler.

The category launched in style, nearly 30 of the now iconic 996 generation 911 GT3 Cup cars arriving in Australia to be driven by the likes of Peter Fitzgerald, Marcus Marshall, Tim Leahey, Andrew Miedecke and, of course, Jim Richards.

Already legendary in Porsche circles, the seven-time Bathurst 1000 champion entered Carrera Cup off the back of multiple title wins in GT Racing and his form would continue into the one-make championship; Richards winning six of the eight rounds to dominate the inaugural championship.

2003-2008

Fresh from two seasons chasing the international dream in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup, Alex Davison won season two, edging out Richards and a young Fabian Coulthard in an arm-wrestle for the title over the nine rounds.

Coulthard's rise to prominence mirrored Carrera Cup's growing stature as a high-profile, high-competition place for young drivers to make their mark as they searched for a professional career in the sport. The young Kiwi proved that fact by edging out Richards, who was second again, to the 2005 crown.

That year saw names like Jonathan Webb, Luke Youlden, David Reynolds, Ian Dyk and other rising stars come to the fore. But for one exception, those young stars would hardly get a look in at championship success as the next season brought to the grid a name that would define Carrera Cup for much of the next decade.

Craig Baird had been something of a journeyman to that point in his life, though a phenomenally successful one, with stints in Supercars, the British Touring Car Championship, Super Touring and a title victory in New Zealand's Porsche GT3 Cup Championship.

His arrival to the Australian scene changed the game: He won his first three straight rounds as a full time Carrera Cup driver and though competition between he, Alex Davison and David Reynolds intensified as the season progressed, they would not catch the Kiwi as he won his first title.

That triumvirate would go at it again the following year, only this time it was Reynolds who narrowly came out on top; the young Victorian a surefire graduate to the world of Supercars racing off the back of his successful campaign.

Dramatic events prior to the start of the 2008 championship saw the then-category management collapse moments before the start of the season, a last-minute deal seeing TV celebrity and motorsport fan Glenn Ridge's company take over at the eleventh hour.

Through it all came Baird, who claimed his second crown in three seasons and became the first to win multiple Carrera Cup titles. He would have to wait for his third, however, as a late call prior to the 2009 season saw the championship put on hold to be refreshed and rebooted for a future return.

That came in 2011 with the introduction of the 911 GT3 Cup (type 997.2) race car. Now administered in-house by Porsche Cars Australia, the championship looked refreshed and had plenty of different names throughout the field — but the same one out in front.

Baird didn't have it easy on the way to title number three, however: a season-long battle between he and fellow Kiwi's Johnny Reid and Daniel Gaunt saw all three potential contenders heading into the Sydney finale.

Though some would come close, this would be the Craig Baird era. He again beat Reid to claim the 2012 crown and then did the same to an up-and-coming young star by the name of Nick Percat to win in 2013, his fifth and ultimately final title.

Percat's appearance in Carrera Cup came at an awkward time for the South Australian, already a Bathurst 1000 winner but without a Supercars seat for the 2013 season. His competitive, combative run to runner-up in Carrera Cup reinforced his credentials, however, and did the same for his career.

2013-2014

Though still a factor, the Baird era ended in 2014 as Steven Richards held out Warren Luff to claim his first Porsche championship, 10 years after his father had won the first one contested. It wasn't as dramatic as the 2015 season though, Richards' looking set to defend his crown when he won five of the first six races. At the other end of the table, open-wheel graduate Nick Foster was struggling, non-finishes in his first four races and minor scores in the next pair seeing him languishing outside the top 10.

Things turned at round three, however, as Foster and his Sonic team went on a tear: He won eight of the

next 10 races, was in the top three in 14 of the last 15 and romped home to the title in remarkable style in what remains the biggest comeback in Carrera Cup history. It was the first title win for Sonic's Bob Jane T-Marts team since young gun Reynolds in 2007.

2016-2017

2015 was also notable for the young Queenslander who, as if like flicking a switch, came alive mid-season and dominated. Matt Campbell's rush to third in the championship came thanks to wins in the last four-straight races. It would set the tone for the 2016 season where he won 14 times, claimed the title and booked himself a ticket to the Porsche Shootout in Europe ... which he won. The rest, as they say, is history, with Campbell going on to become a factory Porsche driver and claiming Porsche it's first major victory at Mount Panorama with a dramatic win for Earl Bamber Motorsport in the 2019 Bathurst 12 Hour.

A 20-point margin was all that split David Wall and Andre Heimgartner at the end of the 2017 championship as the Sydneysider finally claimed his long-awaited maiden title.

Jaxon Evans, a Matt Campbell contemporary, won the 2018 championship and mirrored his friend's pathway: Win the title for McElrea Racing, book passage to Europe, win the Porrsche Shootout and progress to Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup. He did all of that successfully, and more since.

2018-2019

Racing with the same livery, team and number as Nick Foster, Jordan Love's remarkable pathway to his 2019 title came with similar hardship as his teammate: a mid-season accident saw him break his wrist. He sat out two races, but strung together six-straight wins across the final three rounds, including surviving a dramatic Gold Coast finale, to beat team-mate Dale Wood to the title by just 18 points. David Wall was third, 30 from the lead in the category's closest-ever season.

While the 2020 season was curtailed following the Coronavirus pandemic, Carrera Cup's place in the Australian motorsport landscape is assured. It is as much a home for legendary figures as it is for young, would-be heroes. It is a place for the amateur racers doing it for fun, those keeping sharp for Bathurst co-drives and everything in between.

Most of all, it is fiercely competitive, high profile, challenging, outstanding racing of the highest level; a running theme for Australia's top one-make championship as much now as it was when it began with a Jim Richards' win way back in 2003.

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