

Four Porsche 963, two series: Porsche Penske Motorsport hunts for points

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14/03/2023 Porsche Penske Motorsport faces a busy schedule in Sebring on the third weekend in March. The works team heads to the US state of Florida fielding two Porsche 963 in the season-opening round of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) and another two in the second round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship.

The new hybrid prototypes from Weissach will contest the 1,000-mile FIA WEC race on Friday, 17 March. This is the first time they face their Hypercar rivals from Ferrari, Peugeot and Toyota, among others. The tradition-steeped IMSA race over twelve hours takes off the following day. In the GTE-Am (WEC), GTD-Pro and GTD (both IMSA) vehicle classes, Porsche customer teams campaign a fleet of

911 RSR and 911 GT3 R.

Under the banner “Super Sebring”, the Sebring International Raceway hosts two endurance races within two days. This puts a massive load on the Porsche Penske Motorsport team – and two works drivers: The two full-time FIA WEC drivers Dane Cameron from the USA and Michael Christensen from Denmark will first tackle the eight-hour World Endurance Championship race over 1,000 miles (about 1,600 km) on Friday, 17 March. A day later, the two works drivers will support their brand colleagues in the two other Porsche 963 at the IMSA 12-hour race. Four customer teams will field a total of six Porsche 911 RSR racers in the GTE category of the FIA WEC. In the two GTD classes of the North American IMSA championship, four private teams campaign a total of six Porsche 911 GT3 R.

“The Sebring event will be a real festival for endurance racing fans and a huge challenge for our works team,” explains Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. “Our Porsche Penske Motorsport squad will face tough competition in both racing series on two consecutive days. After the setback in Daytona, we’re eager to turn the Porsche 963’s enormous potential into the appropriate results. In the FIA WEC, we’re excited to join the great Hypercar field. At the season opener we’re back to fight for overall victory after almost 50 years: Porsche versus Ferrari – that’s simply fantastic. That’s not to say we’re forgetting the other manufacturers. In both series, numerous customer vehicles will contest the GTE-Am, GTD-Pro and GTD classes. The Porsche brand will be very well represented.”

The entire team in action

“Our global Porsche Penske Motorsport team will face a kind of stress test in Sebring,” says Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. “The team from Mannheim, Mooresville and Weissach will do everything to win the big trophies with our Porsche 963. Extremely challenging and exciting days await us in Florida – not least because this will be the first time we encounter our competition in the Hypercar class of the FIA WEC. Our crew may have an advantage: Since we’re contesting both series with the same car, we can transfer a lot of information and data. We want to make the best possible use of this to be optimally prepared for the races when it comes to setup, tyre use and strategy.”

“The ‘Super Sebring’ event is probably the only chance to see the entire Porsche Penske Motorsport team in action at such a historic venue,” states Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director. At the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June, the factory squad fields three Porsche 963, and part of the IMSA team will not be there. “All members of our operational team will be at the track for both races. In mid-February, we got the chance to test at Sebring. That should’ve given us a solid basis for both projects. What’s more, our FIA WEC crew conducted successful tests in Portimão. We share insights between both teams. This transfer of knowledge has several advantages, but such a two-way programme so early in the season also poses big challenges. Within just two days, Porsche Penske Motorsport’s two Porsche 963 have to complete a total of 20 hours of racing. That’s a huge task for a totally new team.”

The races

The two long-distance races in Sebring are considered the ultimate endurance challenge for man and machine and also the perfect preparation for the 24 Hours of Le Mans. At no other circuit on the racing calendar does the technology have to withstand such high loads. One reason: the nature of the storied racetrack on the former military airfield. About a third of the racetrack consists of concrete slabs, with the hefty bumps posing a unique challenge. Due to this special feature, the racetrack is often mentioned on social media with the hashtag #RespectTheBumps.

The 12-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship on the 6.02-kilometre Sebring International Raceway will be held for the 71st time. With 18 overall wins, Porsche is the most successful manufacturer at this long-distance classic. The last triumph for a racing car from Weissach was in 2008. Timo Bernhard from Germany and the two Frenchmen Romain Dumas and Emmanuel Collard won at the wheel of the Penske team's Porsche RS Spyder against an armada of more powerful LMP1 prototypes.

The 1,000-mile race of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC marks the start of the 2023 season. The teams and drivers prepared for the upcoming challenges with tests in Sebring as part of the two-day prologue. In the FIA WEC, the two Porsche 963 fielded by Porsche Penske Motorsport will target overall victory in the “Hypercar” class, and in the so-called GTP top class of the IMSA series.

The Porsche teams and drivers

Six works drivers will tackle the FIA WEC for the Porsche Penske Motorsport factory squad at the wheel of two Porsche 963. In the No. 5 cockpit, American Dane Cameron, Frenchman Frédéric Makowiecki and Michael Christensen from Denmark share driving duties. Helming the No. 6 sister car are Kévin Estre (France), André Lotterer (Germany) and Laurens Vanthoor from Belgium. The former Porsche Juniors Matteo Cairoli from Italy and Julien Andlauer from France as well as the experienced British drivers Harry Tincknell and Ben Barker, among others, compete for customer teams in the Porsche 911 RSR.

Nick Tandy from the UK and Frenchman Mathieu Jaminet are the permanent drivers in the No. 6 car fielded by the IMSA works team. At the endurance event in Sebring, Dane Cameron will once again join the two specialists as the third driver. The Australian Matt Campbell and Felipe Nasr from Brazil alternate in the No. 7 sister car for the 2023 season. Like at the Daytona season opener, Michael Christensen will support the pair at the Sebring 12-hour race. In the GTD-Pro class, Pfaff Motorsports relies on Austria's Klaus Bachler and Frenchman Patrick Pilet in the No. 9 Porsche 911 GT3 R. The third person is works driver Laurens Vanthoor, who also drives the 963 for the Porsche Penske Motorsport in the World Endurance Championship at the 'Super Sebring' weekend. In the GTD class, the former Porsche Juniors Julien Andlauer from France and Jaxon Evans from New Zealand compete in the 911 GT3 R campaigned by customer teams.

An overview of the drivers and teams

FIA WEC Hypercar class (Porsche 963):
Porsche Penske Motorsport (#5): Dane Cameron (USA), Michael Christensen (DK), Fréderic Makowiecki (F)
Porsche Penske Motorsport (#6): Kévin Estre (F), André Lotterer (D), Laurens Vanthoor (B)

FIA WEC 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)
Proton Competition (#88): Harry Tincknell (UK), Ryan Hardwick (USA), Zacharie Robichon (CDN)

IMSA GTP class (Porsche 963):
Porsche Penske Motorsport (#6): Dane Cameron (USA), Mathieu Jaminet (F), Nick Tandy (UK)
Porsche Penske Motorsport (#7): Matt Campbell (AUS), Michael Christensen (DK), Felipe Nasr (BR)

IMSA GTD-Pro class (Porsche 911 GT3 R):
Pfaff Motorsports (#9): Klaus Bachler (A), Patrick Pilet (F), Laurens Vanthoor (B)

IMSA GTD class (Porsche 911 GT3 R):
Wright Motorsports (#16): Ryan Hardwick (USA), Jan Heylen (B), Zacharie Robichon (CDN)
Wright Motorsports (#77): Alan Brynjolfsson (USA), Trent Hindman (USA), Max Root (USA)
AO Racing (#80): PJ Hyett (USA), Gunnar Jeannette (USA), Sebastian Priaulx (UK)
Kellymoss with Riley (#91): Kay van Berlo (NL), Jaxon Evans (NZ), Alan Metni (USA)
Kellymoss with Riley (#92): David Brule (USA), Alec Udel (USA), Julien Andlauer (F)

The schedule (local time, CET -5 hours)

Wednesday, 15 March
10:55 am – 11:55 am: FIA WEC free practice 1
4:35 pm – 5:35 pm: FIA WEC free practice 2

Thursday, 16 March
10:10 am – 11:40 am: IMSA free practice 1
11:55 am – 12:55 pm: FIA WEC free practice 3
3:50 pm – 5:20 pm: IMSA free practice 2
6:30 pm – 6:45 pm: FIA WEC qualifying GTE-Am
7:20 pm – 7:35 pm: FIA WEC qualifying Hypercar

7:45 pm to 9:15 pm: IMSA free practice 3

Friday, 17 March
8:55 am – 9:05 am: IMSA free practice 4
9:15 am – 9:30 am: IMSA qualifying GTD-Pro/GTD
10:05 am – 10:25 am: IMSA qualifying GTP
12 noon – 8:00 pm: FIA WEC race

Saturday, 18 March
8:00 am – 8:20 am: IMSA warmup
10:10 am – 22:10 pm: IMSA race

Porsche's outright victories at the 12 Hours of Sebring

1960 – Gendebien/Herrmann (Porsche RS-60)
1968 – Siffert/Herrmann (Porsche 907)
1971 – Elford/Larrousse (Porsche 917 K)
1973 – Haywood/Gregg/Helmick (Porsche Carrera RSR)
1976 – Holbert/Keyser (Porsche Carrera RSR)
1977 – Dyer/Frisselle (Porsche Carrera RSR)
1978 – Redman/Mendez/Garretson (Porsche 935)
1979 – Akin/McFarlin/Woods (Porsche 935)
1980 – Fitzpatrick/Barbour (Porsche 935 K3)
1981 – Leven/Haywood/Holbert (Porsche 935/80)
1982 – Paul Sr./Paul Jr. (Porsche 935 JLP-3)
1983 – Baker/Mullen/Nierop (Porsche 934)
1984 – Heyer/de Narvaéz/Johansson (Porsche 935 J)
1985 – Wollek/Foyt (Porsche 962)
1986 – Akin/Stuck/Gartner (Porsche 962)
1987 – Rahal/Mass (Porsche 962)
1988 – Ludwig/Stuck (Porsche 962)
2008 – Bernhard/Dumas/Collard (Porsche RS Spyder)

Drivers' comments before the race

Michael Christensen (FIA WEC Porsche 963 #5, IMSA Porsche 963 #7): "I'm really looking forward to our team's first race in the FIA WEC. Motivation is at an all-time high. We want to fight among the frontrunners. On the same weekend, I'll be competing in my second IMSA race of the year. I think we've made good progress after the season opener in Daytona. For me, 'Super Sebring' will be super demanding. I have to plan everything carefully so that I have enough time after each practice session to talk to the engineers and my teammates. I'm also expecting it to be a huge physical challenge.

Hopefully, the weather in Sebring doesn't turn out to be too hot."

Laurens Vanthoor (FIA WEC Porsche 963 #6, IMSA Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "I've been looking forward to the event at Sebring for ages. Now it's finally here. We've spent months preparing for the FIA WEC event with the Porsche 963 and have done everything we can to be well-sorted for the season opener. Hopefully, we'll be able to show this in Sebring. I've got a very intense week ahead of me because I'm also competing in the IMSA series. First and foremost, my attention is on the World Endurance Championship. It's not until Saturday morning that I'll climb into Pfaff Motorsport's Porsche 911 GT3 R for the first time to warm up, followed immediately by the race. I think my schedule there is really cool!"

Mathieu Jaminet (IMSA Porsche 963 #6): "Our start to the season in Daytona was somewhat painful, so we want to come back even stronger at Sebring. Our goal is to score maximum points so that we don't lose ground in the championship. We tested at Sebring several times and everything ran smoothly there. Still, we're facing a journey into the unknown because so far, we don't yet know how our rivals will perform on this track. A decent result would be enormously important to give the whole team an extra boost. We definitely want to take home trophies."

Matt Campbell (IMSA Porsche 963 #7): "Sebring is one of the toughest, and in my view, one of the most beautiful racetracks in North America. Even though we only race there for twelve hours, the bumpy potholed circuit is extremely demanding. It pushes drivers and vehicles to their limits. At the same time, the track always makes for exciting and super fun racing. I'm really looking forward to that. Hopefully, we can achieve a good result and improve our position in the championship."

Patrick Pilet (IMSA Porsche 911 GT3 R #9): "Sebring again at last! I was last there in 2019 and took pole position in the GTLM class that year. With its hard bumps, the track is truly unique in the USA. I really like it. After our disappointment in Daytona at the start of the season, I'm now firmly convinced that we'll at least be on a similar level to the competition at Sebring. However, that's not entirely in our hands. Overall, I'm super excited about the event – and I have just one wish: good weather. When it rains at Sebring, it's often a recipe for chaos."

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



Holger Eckhardt

Spokesperson Motorsports LMDh, GT, Customer Racing
+49 (0) 170 / 911 4982
holger.eckhardt@porsche.de

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart