Strong 24 car grid for 2021 Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia season opener

16/03/2021 Competitive drivers in equal machinery doing battle always results in some intense and unpredictable motorsport that takes place at a high level of competition and performance. And then there's the 2021 Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia, which could elevate the cause even further.
When the field rolls out at Sandown International Raceway in South East Melbourne for the first round of the new season, it will have been 53 weeks, almost to the day, that Australia's pinnacle of one-make racing series last went into battle at the ill-fated Australian Grand Prix.

Since that time, teams have plotted, planned and prepared for a racing return and have subsequently delivered what is – and you'll struggle to argue against this point – perhaps the strongest field in the 17-year history of Carrera Cup Australia.

At least on paper, no season between Australian motorsport legend Jim Richards claiming the inaugural crown in 2003 to Jordan Love dramatically outplaying his then-teammate Dale Wood on the Gold Coast in 2019, has delivered this kind of potential.

It's not just the twelve months away from the track: The strongest ever Mobil Pro class is matched with a feisty, deep Morris Finance Pro-Am battle and a bumper grid of 24 cars – that could grow as the year goes on – that leaves us with an enormous amount of anticipation for the year ahead.

It's set to be a suitable farewell from the premier class to the Gen-II 991 GT3 Cup Car, which has served the championship so well for the last four years.

If this year lives up to expectation, 992 is going to have a lot to live up to. Before we look ahead to a captivating season, its best we cast our minds back twelve months or further to remind ourselves of where things left off, before the world pushed pause…

2020 season recap

The 2020 Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia season delivered just the four races; but there was no shortage of ultra-competitive racing across three sprints in Adelaide and one longer race at Albert Park in Melbourne, before the world stopped.

Michelin Junior Cooper Murray swept the field in Adelaide, backing up the potential he had shown in the back-half of the 2019 season, where he set the pace as Jordan Love and Dale Wood focused on their

title battle.

Murray then finished third in the Enduro Cup race at the Grand Prix in what was a serious show of intent for arguably the-then championship favourite.

Behind him, former champion David Wall racked-up podium finishes with the relentless consistency that saw him take the 2016 crown, while teenager Aaron Love – a Porsche Michelin Sprint Challenge graduate – impressed as he stepped up into the big series and immediately charged to the podium.

In Morris Finance Pro-Am, Stephen Grove was targeting a record fourth championship and was leading the way when the music stopped.

2021 Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia calendar

The 2021 Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia Series will again follow the Repco Supercars Championship around Australia this year with a series of sprint races paired with the longer, always-compelling Enduro Cup events throughout the year.

Starting at Sandown Raceway in Melbourne, the series then heads to The Bend Motorsport Park in South Australia for Round 2 in early May. The Bend is yet to deliver a quiet Carrera Cup race, the fast and flowing nature of the circuit suiting the GT3 Cup Cars to the ground. Might have something to do with the fact the circuit owner races them.

A break for Winter is next before the series chases the sunshine by heading North to Queensland for the Townsville street race in July – the same event where in 2019 Roger Lago stunned the world by becoming the first Morris Finance Pro-Am driver in series history to score an outright pole position.

A run down the coast takes the series to Sydney Motorsport Park in New South Wales next for a second go at night racing – Carrera Cup Australia and Asia joined forces at the venue in 2017 for the first race after dark at the venue.

A long-awaited return to the Wild West comes next, the series set to make its first visit to Barbagallo Raceway near Perth in early September. The series hasn't been to that side of the nation since 2012.

The annual pilgrimage to Mount Panorama will be the scene for Round 6 of the championship during October's second weekend, while the seventh round is currently on the 'TBA' list, with details to be finalized as the global Covid-19 situation evolves.

The incredible streets of Surfers Paradise will again host the season finale; though this time the seaside event will be in early December – making the 2021 season the longest staged since the championship returned in 2011.

Put your money on both Mobil Pro and Morris Finance Pro-Am going down to the wire on the

Queensland streets.

Here's why...

Mobil Pro – the incredible outright battle

This year 14 Porsche 911 GT3 Cup cars make-up the Mobil Pro Class of the 2021 Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia series, which is larger than entire field of some catagories.

It's not just the number that makes the class so good, either – it's the broad spectrum of drivers hailing from diverse backgrounds and with broad levels of experience and prior success that make it so tantalizing.

Sure, there's 16 round victories, 51 race wins and 25 Carrera Cup pole positions between the lot – but there's also eight Bathurst 1000s, more than 120 Supercars victories, 12-hour victories and that's before you get to the Michelin Junior fleet.

We'll start with the rookies: 2021 Toyota Racing Series champion Matthew Payne fronts as the recipient of the Porsche New Zealand scholarship, and will race for Team Porsche New Zealand under the guidance of the Earl Bamber Motorsport team this year.

In the rookie class, he's joined by Porsche Michelin Sprint Challenge graduate Christian Pancione, who will dovetail a title tilt in the second-tier series with a five-round Carrera Cup Australia campaign this year.

He'll be joined by another PMSC graduate in former champion Simon Fallon; who makes a racing return after two years on the sidelines following his 2018 championship triumph in that series. The man he beat that year was Cooper Murray.

Fallon is back in one of the Bob Jane T-Marts entries run by the championship-winning Sonic Motor Racing team.

Queensland teen Jackson Walls joins the fray this year, switching from open-wheel racing to tin-tops and returning the Objective Racing brand to the series – his dad, Tony, was a Morris Finance Pro-Am class contender for several seasons.

The next group of drivers will consider themselves title contenders: Harri Jones (McElrea) and Aaron Love (Sonic) both stepped up from Sprint Challenge in 2020 but instantly proved themselves competitive. Cooper Murray is well proven as a winner across 2019 and the shortened 2020 campaign and though it's hard to pick a title favourite, he and the McElrea team are arguably the form outfit.

Cameron Hill, meanwhile, has elevated his Canberra-based privateer squad into regular contenders across the last two seasons and won the most recent Carrera Cup points race contested, last year in

Melbourne.

Both with 50 rounds of experience in their backgrounds, Nick McBride (Porsche Centre Melbourne) and Michael Almond (Sonic Motor Racing) are always at or very near the pointy-end of the field, while a change of scenery for Dale Wood – who shifts from Sonic to Ashley Seward Motorsport this year – might see fortunes changing for the Victorian; who in two seasons has always been a title contender but has been denied on both occasions.

David Russell is a proven winner and returns to share the Lago Racing #23 entry with Roger Lago this year, while Luke Youlden is an experienced and fascinating addition to the grid on a full-time basis as part of the brand-new TekworX Motorsport squad he's helped established with Sprint Challenge racer, Rob Woods.

David Wall is the only former champion on the grid, however the Sydneysiders ability to continue to contend year in, year out remains one of the great Carrera Cup stories.

Wall's Paynter Dixon teammate is none other than multiple Bathurst 1000 winner, Craig Lowndes, who will drive a second Wall Racing entry in at least the first two rounds of the 2021 series. Lowndes made his Carrera Cup Australia debut at the Grand Prix last year and was keen to return for a more expansive tilt and if it goes even half as well as his remarkable track record suggests it could, do not bet on there being more rounds added to the program as the season goes on.

Within the Mobil Pro class fight, watch for the Michelin Juniors to have their own inter-series battle: Walls, Jones, Payne, Murray, Pancione, Love, Hill and Fallon will all be battling for the Junior trophy, which comes with significant support from series tyre partner and long-time supporter, Michelin.

Morris Finance Pro-Am – class war with outright designs

Two very fast newcomers with proven track records could upset the establishment as the Morris Finance Pro-Am class battle steps up another notch in 2021.

The addition of Geoff Emery and Ben Stack to the grid add even more depth to an already competitive fight brewing between a group of ultra-competitive drivers who as well as fighting for their own trophies, love nothing more than mixing it up with the Mobil Pro competitors and, on more than one occasion, beating them as well.

Emery is perhaps the most qualified Pro-Am 'Rookie' in series history; a five-time Commodore Cup champion, he's also been at the front in Michelin Sprint Challenge races, has won Australian GT Championships and, simply, been fast in everything he's raced.

Emery will line up in a Force Accessories-backed car run by Ashley Seward's Melbourne team.

Ben Stack, another second-generation driver, originally from Adelaide, is another to have proved his

performance potential in other categories in the past. He'll line up aboard a GT3 Cup Car entered by Duttons EMA Motorsport this year.

Beyond the rookies, the remaining contenders are all battle-hardened in the art of winning Morris Finance Pro-Am races. Three-time class champion Stephen Grove will be out to make it a record-breaking fourth this year, as he splits Carrera Cup duties with GT World Challenge Australia hopes aboard the brand-new Grove Racing 911 GT3R. The Grove Group driver won't be short on seat time in 2021.

Tim Miles returns for another tilt with McElrea Racing with three round and eight race victories to his credit, while Adrian Flack and Sam Shahin are both multiple race and round winners; between them they split the last two rounds of the 2019 season, while Shahin recently grabbed a podium in the opening round of Michelin Sprint Challenge as he embarks on duel campaigns this year.

Porsche Carrera Cup Australia's most experienced driver, Marc Cini, returns aboard the Hallmarc / Porsche Centre Melbourne #9 car, the Victorian now well into his second century of round starts. Scott Taylor (STM) and Rentcorp Racing's Indiran Padayachee will also continue to show their improvement as they each return for another year.

Former Champions

Year	Pro	Pro-Am
2003	Jim Richards	-
2004	Alex Davison	Dean Grant
2005	Fabian Coulthard	Dean Grant
2006	Craig Baird	Rodney Jane
2007	David Reynolds	Rodney Jane
2008	Craig Baird	James Koundouris
2011	Craig Baird	Max Twigg
2012	Craig Baird	Max Twigg
2013	Craig Baird	Max Twigg
2014	Steven Richards	Stephen Grove
2015	Nick Foster	Shane Smollen
2016	Matt Campbell	Tony Bates
2017	David Wall	Stephen Grove
2018	Jaxon Evans	Stephen Grove
2019	Jordan Love	Liam Talbot

ENTRY LIST: Round 1, Sandown

CAR #	Name	Surname	SPONSOR NAME	CLASS
4	Stephen	Grove	Grove Group	Morris Finance Pro-Am
7	Tim	Miles	No Second Chance	Morris Finance Pro-Am
8	Nick	McBride	Porsche Centre Melbourne	Mobil Pro
9	Marc	Cini	Hallmarc	Morris Finance Pro-Am
11	Jackson	Walls	Objective Racing	Mobil Pro
12	Harri	Jones	Helimods	Mobil Pro
13	Sam	Shahin	The Bend Motorsport Park/HTFU	Morris Finance Pro-Am
20	Adrian	Flack	AGAS National	Morris Finance Pro-Am
21	Matthew	Payne	Team Porsche New Zealand	Mobil Pro
23	David	Russell	Lago Racing	Mobil Pro
28	Luke	Youlden	TekworkX Motorsport	Mobil Pro
35	Indiran	Padayachee	RentCorp Hyundai Forklifts	Morris Finance Pro-Am
36	Cooper	Murray	Lodge Brothers	Mobil Pro

38	David	Wall	Paynter Dixon / Shannons insurance	Mobil Pro
48	Geoff	Emery	Force Accessories	Morris Finance Pro-Am
74	Ben	Stack	Duttons EMA Motorsport	Morris Finance Pro-Am
76	Christian	Pancione	VCM Performance	Mobil Pro
77	Michael	Almond	Sonic / Bob Jane T Marts / PSA	Mobil Pro
78	Aaron	Love	Sonic	Mobil Pro
100	Dale	Wood	Timken / ASM	Mobil Pro
111	Cameron	Hill	CHE Racing Team	Mobil Pro
222	Scott	Taylor	Scott Taylor Motorsport	Morris Finance Pro-Am
338	Craig	Lowndes	Paynter Dixon / Shannons	Mobil Pro
777	Simon	Fallon	Sonic / Bob Jane T-Marts	Mobil Pro

BROADCAST SCHEDULE: Round 1, Sandown

Every race of the 2021 Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia Championship will be broadcast live on Fox Sports and Kayo sports this year, with selected races on the free-to- air Seven Network.

For more Porsche Paynter Dixon Carrera Cup Australia news and content follow the Porsche Motorsport Australia social pages: Instagram - @PorscheMotorsportAU / Twitter - @PorscheMspAU / Facebook.com/ PorscheMotorsportAU

Saturday 20th March 2021

Practice 1 08:50-9:10 20mins

Practice 2 10:30-10:50 20mins

Qualifying 12:40-13:00 20mins

Race 1 15:35-16:00 18 laps

Sunday 21st March 2021

Race 2 12:15-13:00 30 laps

Race 3 15:20-15:45 18 laps

Image Sublines

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Subline: Craig Lowndes will partner with Wall Racing this season

Path: media/Images/img_2.jpg
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Subline: Three-time Morris Finance Pro-Am champion Stephen Grove will be out to make 2021 his fourth class title this year

Path: media/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: 038A7067 resize.jpg
Subline: Dale Wood will carry backing from Timken again in 2021 but switch to the ASM team

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