

Porsche Rennsport Reunion – Steward of history

14/07/2023 “It is important for the future to keep these memories alive.” - Hans Herrman

Atlanta. Like Porsche itself, Rennsport Reunion was founded to bring reality to a dream. Rennsport, which translates to “Race Sport” in German, is a celebration of Porsche motorsport past, present and future. In six previous iterations, the world's largest gathering of Porsche enthusiasts has grown in popularity and stature from humble beginnings predating the inaugural event to the upcoming Porsche Rennsport Reunion 7. The September 28 – October 1 event at WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, California is a living history of the German sports car maker. With race and road car models on location dating from the company's founding 75 years ago through today with hints of the company's performance future. The event itself is a steward of the history of the brand, a competition museum that refuses to stand still.

The original

Every legend needs a proper origin story. Porsche Rennsport Reunion is no exception. The seed was

planted three years before the first official "Rennsport" when motorsport legend Brian Redman organized the Porsche 50th Anniversary Reunion held at Watkins Glen International in 1999. The gathering was so well received that Bob Carlson, then head of Public Relations of Porsche Cars North America (PCNA), and Redman announced a fully Porsche supported reunion would take place in 2001.

The RSVP list was an impressive collection of Porsche royalty. Roger Penske, Hurley Haywood, George Follmer, Derek Bell, Vic Elford, Paul Newman, Chip Robinson, Rob Dyson, Joe Buzetta, Tony Adamowicz, Davy Jones, Jacky Ickx and Redman were on hand. The petrol-powered legends were museum caliber as well. Porsche RSK, 935s, 956/962s, 908 and 917s all were on display. Penske himself strapped into the 1000 hp 917/30 to lap Lime Rock with veteran Motorsport journalist Chris Econmaki hanging on beside him.

The pairing worked to bring Porsche race cars and race drivers from all over the world to the small, but historic Lime Rock Park race course in Connecticut. Entering the July 27-29, 2001 weekend, no one knew if the Porsche Rennsport Reunion was going to be one-and-done or the first of many. With over 15,000 spectators streaming through the gates of the small road course and legends from behind the wheel of legendary machines reveling in the moment, Porsche recognized a celebration of the competition heart of the brand was something everyone wanted. By the end of the weekend, then PCNA president and CEO Fred Schwab announced that this would be only the first of many Rennsport Reunions to come.

Posters from previous Rennsport Reunions

High expectations and high banks

The venue needed to increase along with demand for the second Porsche Rennsport Reunion, and grow it did. Announced in December of 2003, Rennsport Reunion II would be held at one of the world's most famous – and largest – motorsport venues, Daytona International Speedway. As the record holder for Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona overall (22) and class (80) victories, Porsche is no stranger to the high banks and twisting infield road course of the Florida track. As fans began to pour through the gates, the April 23–25 event upheld the promise of three years before and would start the cadence of future gatherings.

"Porsche and Daytona International Speedway enjoy reputations steeped in tradition," offered Jim France, Chief Executive Officer of International Speedway Corporation in the Porsche press release announcing the event. "With that, it's only natural that the two would come together for such an exciting event as the Porsche Rennsport Reunion II. We're thrilled to have Porsche and its many owners and fans visit 'The World Center of Racing'".

With the golden anniversaries of the Porsche 356 and Porsche 550 Spyder to celebrate in addition to the 40th Anniversary of the iconic Porsche 911, there was much to observe in the Florida spring.

Described as “overwhelming” by media of the time, the second gathering drew an even larger number of Porsche race cars. In fact, it was one of the largest fields of Porsche's most successful prototype race cars, the 962, to date with 50 of the Porsche monocoque racer and its sibling, the 956, on hand. The cars which found so much success at Daytona in the 1980s were joined by a growing selection of the anniversary celebrants on display and on the track in Porsche Club of America (PCA) race groups. A total of more that 600 Porsche cars were on location. Not to be outshone by their four wheeled rides, the Porsche legends lined up for the fans as well. Vic Elford was celebrated for his part in the first Porsche overall 24-hour win (at Daytona in 1968) while Bell, Haywood, Ickx and Redman were back joined by Bill Adam, John Andretti, Kevin Buckler, Doc Bundy, David Donohue, Reinhold Joest, John Paul Jr., Milt Minter, Bobby Rahal, Elliott Forbes-Robinson and so many more of the great names from Porsche history. Rennsport II was dedicated to the memory of Bob Akin. The driver/owner, so familiar to Porsche fans for his Coca-Cola backed race machines, had passed away in May of 2002.

The Florida sunshine would draw Rennsport back to the coastal community a second time. Announced during Porsche's annual Night of Champions in December of 2006, Porsche Rennsport Reunion III would return to Daytona at the end of 2007 to celebrate the Porsche 917 and the 25th Anniversary of the racing debut of the Porsche 956/962.

At the time, then PCNA president and CEO Peter Schwarzenbauer offered this reason for returning: "Given the tremendous response to our last event there, Daytona International Speedway is the logical choice as the site for Porsche Rennsport Reunion III. It is filled with Porsche racing history and is one of the few tracks in America capable of conducting an event of this magnitude."

Co-Grand Marshals Schwarzenbauer and then *Porsche Panorama* Editor, Betty Jo Turner, were announced to lead the November 2 – 4 happening. A Concours d'Sport was held on Saturday afternoon judged by Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance Founder Bill Warner on Daytona's pit lane. It was the first time a concours had been held exclusively for race cars. Impressive by any measurement, on display were Porsche 917s, 956/962s, 550 Spyders, RS61s, 904s, 910s and everything in between as well as production-based race cars. The driver lineup also continued to build with the legends adding to a growing roster of newer drivers including Jörg Bergmeister and future Rennsport Reunion 7 co-grand marshal, Patrick Long.

A unique addition near and dear to co-founder Carlson's heart, a model car contest for a variety of scales and categories, was also included on the schedule. It was an appropriate send-off to Carlson. The veteran Porsche Cars North America PR legend would pass away after long battle with cancer in December 2008.

The 2007 iteration was destined to become a classic gathering. But it would be the last scheduled in Daytona.

Corkscrew

In an effort to widen the reach of Rennsport, Porsche Cars North America announced a seismic shift to the west coast for Rennsport Reunion IV in 2011. Ultimately, each meeting since has also taken place at WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, California. The move was immediately impactful with over 300 Porsche race cars on track and dozens of more in the paddock display area. The October 14 – 16 weekend and its west coast vibe were a huge success with the usual impressive cast of drivers, VIPs and Porsche race cars on display. Much like the upcoming Rennsport Reunion 7, the weekend was highlighted with on-track competition with the Porsche 911 GT3 Cup cars of the time. An announced attendance of 35,000 guests also supported the value in the move to the Monterey Peninsula.

Perhaps the greatest impression of Rennsport Reunion IV was the U.S. introduction of the Type 991 Porsche 911 to the fans. Like the move to California, the move to wider, longer and more aggressive 991 was a familiar but clearly new direction for the German marque.

In 2015, Rennsport Reunion was officially recognized as the single largest gathering of Porsche race cars, drivers and fans in the world. The fifth edition of the tradition was again held at Laguna Seca in the fall, September 25 – 27. The count of cars and drivers grew, drawing over 320 of Germany's best race cars and 75 Legends graced the event. Among those in attendance were several familiar faces and several new ones. Richard Attwood, the first driver to win Le Mans overall in a Porsche, Vic Elford, George Follmer, Jurgen Barth, Jim Busby,Porsche pioneer Hans Hermann, Jochen Mass and James Weaver were present mingling Alwin Springer and Patrick Long as well as engineering wiz Norbert Singer. These were but a few to attend alongside factory drivers such as Nick Tandy and Patrick Pilet. Proving the popularity of Porsche race cars, Rennsport Reunion V drew nearly double (60,000) the fans than Rennsport V! It even sparked the creation of a special model, the 911 Carrera GTS Rennsport Reunion Edition. Based on the 430 hp 911 Carrera GTS of the time, the limited-production version painted in Fashion Grey and sporting a seven-speed manual transmission was limited to 25 units and exclusive to the North American market.

Rennsport Reunion VI would set a new standard for automotive enthusiast events. Unrivaled by any international pilgrimage to celebrate a single car brand, the 2018 experience shattered attendance expectations by drawing over 80,000 people to Laguna Seca. Those in attendance were not disappointed. With the introduction of a new track-only tribute to the Porsche 935 and a string of iconic and rare Porsche race cars owned by privateers and Porsche itself, North America was again the epicenter for Porsche eyes. From the sleek 1939 Porsche Type 64 – a car that predates the company's official founding in 1948 – to the first-ever 356 (the aluminum bodied 356/1) to its race-prepared Porsche 356 and 550 brethren into the prototype era of the 910 (1967) and 908 (1969), editions of the 917 ranging from the K to the 917/10 and 917/30 and the most iconic of Porsche road and race machines, the 911 through multiple decades of success. Included were the popular Porsche 911 GT1-98 and the most recent racer, the Porsche 911 RSR-19. Those attending were staggered to see the elegantly brutal speed of the Porsche 919 Hybrid Evo lapping the sand-swept asphalt of Laguna Seca

as well. Even the first Porsche all-wheel drive racer, the Dakar Rally 953, shared track time with the last Porsche Indy car, the 90P. But, amidst the massive crowd and storm of legendary figures, was also the introduction of the first Porsche Tractor race. An event that became an immediate cult classic.

From the tapping of the keg on September 27 by then PCNA CEO Klaus Zellmer through to the closing checkered flag on September 30, the sixth Rennsport Reunion set a new standard for the brand. That is, until Porsche Rennsport Reunion 7, scheduled to return to WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca, September 28 – October 1.

Rennsport Reunion 7 Ticket Information

Tickets are available for pre-event purchase through WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca.

When it was last held in 2018, Rennsport Reunion drew over 80,000 guests to the famous race course on the Monterey Peninsula.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



Frank Wiesmann

Manager, Product Communications, Motorsport and Brand Heritage
Porsche Cars North America
404-539-5031
frank.wiesmann@porsche.us

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