

The impressive résumé of the strongest boxer in the endurance ring

16/11/2022 After notching up 18 race wins, five world champion titles and three class victories at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Porsche has wrapped up its factory involvement with the 911 RSR in the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC. Under the banner of Porsche Penske Motorsport, the Stuttgart sports car manufacturer returns to the world's greatest endurance races with the 963 to fight for overall victories from the 2023 season.

Before writing a new chapter with the hybrid prototype, Porsche can paint a positive picture of its ten-year campaign with the 911 RSR. Over the last decade, the most powerful racing boxer from the development centre in Weissach has left an indelible mark in the notoriously competitive GTE-Pro class. In the 2013 season, Porsche AG acquired 51 percent of the Manthey operations team. The experienced squad from Germany's Eifel region was then entrusted with running the factory engagement in the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC. This new constellation immediately brought success, with class victory at the 2013 Le Mans 24 Hours.

2013 – 2016: Le Mans class win in the first year, many international successes

On the occasion of the Porsche 911's 50th birthday, Marc Lieb (Germany), Richard Lietz (Austria) and Romain Dumas (France) triumphed in the new GTE-Pro category. The sister car finished in second place. "This result left me speechless," grinned Olaf Manthey, who managed the team at that time. For the victorious driver Marc Lieb, a dream also came true: "Our team was new, and so was the car. In the first two races of the year, we still lacked a bit of pace," recalls the 2016 WEC champion. "Then came our Le Mans package. It immediately felt great. In the race, we battled our way through the pack in tricky changeable conditions. The key to our success was that, unlike our rivals, we were able to drive three stints on one set of tyres." After 24 hours, the No. 92 Porsche 911 RSR crossed the finish line first more than two minutes ahead of the sister car.

"We didn't expect to win and that's what made it so wonderful for Porsche, the team and us drivers," Lieb says. "Still, it was the saddest victory of my career." The reason: A tragic accident overshadowed the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 2013. Aston Martin driver Allan Simonsen lost his life early in the race after colliding with the guardrail at the Tertre Rouge corner. In 2007, the amiable and very popular Dane had contested Le Mans in a Porsche 911 GT3 RSR.

Based on the 991 generation, the 911 RSR from 2013 was the last of its kind to feature the classic flat-six engine in the rear. In 2014, the nine-eleven clinched class wins at Silverstone and Shanghai. A year later, another major step was taken: four victories in the GTE-Pro class at the Nürburgring, in Austin, Shanghai and Bahrain as well as the manufacturer, driver and team championship titles. In 2016, the two works cars only contested Le Mans. The following season saw the arrival of the new GTE-Pro racer from Weissach – this time based on the 991 generation with the power unit mounted in front of the rear axle for the first time. Attracting admiration from fans around the world for its incomparably brawny sound, the new concept proved extremely successful on many racetracks on both sides of the Atlantic.

2017 – 2019: New vehicle concept and an unforgettable Le Mans performance

In view of the changed weight distribution – which gave the team a wealth of new insights, especially in terms of tyre use – 2017 was considered a development year. The learning process went fast. In just the second year of competition, the FIA WEC works team made a spectacular appearance at Le Mans – in terms of performance and design. On the occasion of the Porsche brand's 70th anniversary, the two 911 RSR featured a historic look. The No. 91 car, decked out in the style of the legendary Rothmans livery, dominated the qualifying. The Italian works driver Gianmaria Bruni set a new record for GTE vehicles at Le Mans with a lap time of 3:47.504 minutes.

The No. 92 car flying the Pink Pig livery dominated the race. Kévin Estre (France), Michael Christensen (Denmark) and Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) set an unrelenting pace and had luck on their side: they won their class with a one-lap lead over the sister car shared by Gianmaria Bruni, Richard Lietz and Frédéric Makowiecki (France). “The Porsche 911 is and remains the best sports car in the world – it's a true racer. It doesn't get better than a one-two triumph in the GTE-Pro class and victory in the GTE-Am class on our 70th birthday,” said the delighted Porsche Research and Development board member Dr. Michael Steiner straight after the race.

2018 – 2022: Gewinn von WM-Titeln und ein weit2018 - 2022: World Championship titles and another class victory at Le Manserer Klassensieg in Le Mans

While the 2017-generation 911 went on to secure the GTE-Pro championship title in the 2018-2019 FIA WEC after winning its class at Le Mans, the successor was already waiting in the wings: the RSR-19 powered by a 4.2-litre six-cylinder engine – the largest boxer that Porsche had ever planted in a works-911 racer at that stage. Its debut at the Sarthe in 2019 had it all: In a class with 17 cars from six different manufacturers, the No. 91 and 93 cars achieved podium results with second and third place in the hotly contested GTE-Pro category. Another podium finish followed in 2021, with 2022 yielding the long-awaited success at the Sarthe. Richard Lietz, Gianmaria Bruni and local hero Frédéric Makowiecki added another highlight in the final year of the factory-911, winning their class at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The intention for the last season with the factory-run cars in the GTE-Pro class was to claim the world championship titles however the team narrowly missed out on this ambitious achievement at the finale in Bahrain.

“We joined the FIA WEC with a works team on the 50th anniversary year of the 911 and promptly won the 24 Hours of Le Mans. At this year's biggest endurance race, things came full circle with our third class victory,” states Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. “Le Mans is the pinnacle of endurance racing. We're particularly proud of our successes there. We fought hard for the other 15 class wins in the FIA WEC and they are the culmination of the tremendous work of our team and all the employees who worked on this project at the development centre in Weissach. We've written another chapter in the illustrious history of Porsche Motorsport.

We would've preferred to add one more title to our total of five at the final outing. Although this sadly didn't work out, we can be very happy with our great achievements after a decade of factory racing. At the same time, we are looking ahead: In 2023 we're chasing overall victories with the Porsche 963 at the world's greatest endurance races. We're very excited about this!"

The FIA WEC factory mission in numbers

Races contested:62 in twelve countries

GTE-Pro class wins:18
Pole positions (GTE-Pro):20
Podium results (GTE-Pro):67
Race kilometres covered:155,830
World championship points earned:2,240
Works drivers deployed:18
Biggest works outing: Le Mans 2018 and 2019 each with four cars
Highest top speed: 312.7 km/h (Le Mans 2022)

2023: The 911 RSR keeps racing, the new 963 arrives

Although the factory engagement comes to an end, the 911 RSR will continue to be raced in the FIA WEC: Porsche customer teams will field the popular GT racing car in the GTE-Am amateur class next year. With the new Porsche 963, the Porsche Penske Motorsport works squad is determined to fight for overall victory in the two largest endurance series in the world. Two hybrid prototypes are entered to contest both the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC and the North American IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship.

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