

Porsche GT4 e-Performance impresses racing fans at Watkins Glen

21/07/2023 As part of the Porsche GT4 e-Performance World Tour, the all-electric test vehicle electrifies spectators at two show runs on the legendary high-speed track in New York state.

Thick clouds hang over Watkins Glen as the practice session for the IMSA Michelin Pilot challenge wraps up. Mechanics have just unplugged the charging cable from the 800 kW (1,088 PS) Porsche GT4 e-Performance. The 80 kWh battery is fully charged: more than ample for the brief time window of 20 minutes. The all-electric test vehicle is ready to roll. The only thing missing? The driver. Jörg Bergmeister was scheduled to do the demonstration laps, but the towering driver from Langenfeld, Germany, has yet to arrive in the US, the flight of the long-time works driver having been delayed due to inclement weather in the Düsseldorf region.

“So I had the unexpected good fortune of doing the first drives,” Klaus Bachler recalls later, with a smile. Now, the Austrian driver, a regular in the Porsche 911 GT3 R with Pfaff Motorsports in the IMSA series,

is waiting in the wings. He gleefully hops into the cockpit of the GT4 e-Performance, buckles up, and sets off around the 5.472-kilometre, former Formula One circuit. The sizeable crowd is transfixed by the powerful whistling sound as the electric racing car tears down the start-finish straight, meanwhile at turn five (the Outer Loop) the marshals raptly wait for the car to make its first pass, having been notified of the imminent spectacle by a Porsche Motorsport employee.

“That thing has more than 1,000 PS?” asks one, incredulously. “That’s unbelievable!” His colleague pulls a stopwatch out of his coat pocket with an excited grin: “Let’s see what this baby can do …”

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Bachler rips through the chicane before turn five, flying past the engrossed marshals in his Blue-Black GT4 e-Performance for the first time. “Amazing” say six mouths in unison; the stopwatch is counting. First lap: one minute 49 seconds. The Austrian racing pro is feeling his way towards the limit.

The Michelin tyres, comprised of 63 per cent recycled materials, are building up more and more heat, and therefore traction. After four laps, the time is down to 1:47. General amazement ensues. And not only among the marshals. “That’s the race speed of a GT3 car,” says Bachler effusively. “And that’s from a standstill. We had no time at all to adapt the set-up. That’s absolutely stunning. My seven laps were an absolute blast.”

The GT4 e-Performance is guided back into its protective tent after the show run and falls into a well-earned charging slumber. Until, that is, it is re-awoken for its second demonstration drive on Sunday between the warm-up and the race. By now, Bergmeister is also on hand. As are even more fans, cheering on the prospect of a potential one-make series in the offing.

“A total of eight laps at Watkins Glen. It was awesome,” says Bergmeister afterwards. “My fastest lap was 1:47.7. But that was far from the limit. It can go even faster,” says the Porsche brand ambassador matter-of-factly. In terms of capabilities, the GT4 e-Performance is roughly on a par with the current generation of Cup cars. Jackpot! The fastest Porsche 911 GT3 Cup in the Porsche Carrera Cup North America, the very same weekend at Watkins Glen, posts a qualifying lap of 1:47.695. With lots of practice and set-up work in the run-up.

Porsche GT4 e-Performance on a world tour

“This alone shows that we’re fully on-track with the project,” says a delighted Oliver Schwab, Project Manager for the Porsche GT4 e-Performance World Tour, later on. “The fans’ enthusiasm was clear, and the interest of series organisers, teams and media was huge. The demo drives in Watkins Glen were a success!”

And the show goes on: in August, the car will take part in the Concours d’Elegance at Pebble Beach. The

following months, the GT4 e-Performance will be one of the stars at the Rennsport Reunion in Laguna Seca. A second car that appeared at Hockenheim, among other places, as part of the festivities marking 75 Years of Porsche Sports Cars, will simultaneously travel to Asia and finally on to Australia. Schwab can hardly wait: "I'm already looking forward to seeing what kind of performance we will put in on our planned show runs on the legendary Bathurst circuit."

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Subline: Klaus Bachler

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Subline: Jörg Bergmeister

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