

Porsche heads to WEC race in Italy's Imola with wind in the sails

16/04/2025 Porsche Penske Motorsport heads to the second round of this year's FIA World Endurance Championship WEC in Imola with one goal: to make good progress after the disappointing performance at the season opener in Qatar.

The famous racetrack in the Italian region ofEmilia-Romagna hosts the World Endurance Championship for the second time from 18 to 20 April. After clinching tenth and eleventh places at the opening round in Qatar, the Porsche Penske Motorsport factory team is now determined to secure its first top result this season. French drivers Julien Andlauer and Mathieu Jaminet will share driving duties in the No. 5 Porsche 963 with Michael Christensen of Denmark. The cockpit of the No. 6 sister car is helmed by the defending world endurance champions Kévin Estre from France and Belgium's Laurens Vanthoor as well as Australian Matt Campbell. Porsche Penske Motorsport went testing in Imola in early March to prepare for the second race of the season.

"After the bitter disappointment in Qatar, we want to even the score in Imola," explains Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President of Porsche Motorsport. "Last year, we finished on the podium with both

factory cars. The Porsche 963 and the Formula 1 circuit in Imola are a great match. After our successes in the North American IMSA Championship with victories at the Daytona and Sebring classics, as well as the sprint event in Long Beach, team spirits are high. Now we're eager to make our first clear statement of the year in the FIA WEC."

"We're heading to Imola with fond memories from last year, many valuable insights, and new impressions from the test runs," explains Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh. "Our team is well prepared and systematically pursuing a major goal: We want to bring home our first world championship victory of the year in the increasingly tough competition between the Hypercar manufacturers. The three IMSA victories certainly put wind in our sails. The Porsche 963 has been the most successful LMDh racing car since the regulations were introduced in 2023 – and we aim to keep it that way!"

"The level of competition in the WEC continues to intensify," states Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. "To be successful and fight for podiums, the entire operation must run without mistakes. We missed the mark slightly in the opening round in Qatar, but the team have had a strong test period over the past months and feel well-prepared. Imola is a circuit that brings uncertainty, there is always a chance of rain. We finished second and third in the race in 2024 and were battling for the lead at the end. That's the goal again, only this time finishing one position higher with both cars."

Porsche Penske Motorsport's No. 5 cockpit is shared by Michael Christensen from Denmark, Frenchman Mathieu Jaminet and his compatriot Julien Andlauer, who was promoted to the factory driver squad for the 2025 season. The trio sharing the No. 6 car is reigning endurance world champions Kévin Estre of France and Laurens Vanthoor of Belgium, along with Australian Matt Campbell. Vanthoor was part of the winning Porsche Penske Motorsport lineup at the two IMSA endurance classics in Daytona and Sebring in January and March. Most recently, he also secured a GTD class victory with AO Racing's 'Rexy' 911 GT3 R at the IMSA sprint race in Long Beach.

Eighteen cars from eight different brands will compete for world championship points and overall victories in the top category of this year's FIA WEC. Porsche is one of only two manufacturers to open the door to a customer team to compete with a hybrid prototype. Proton Competition from Germany will field a Porsche 963 with drivers Neel Jani from Switzerland, Nico Pino from Chile and Nico Varrone from Argentina.

Two Porsche 911 GT3 R will go up against the competition in the LMGT3 class. Factory driver Richard Lietz from Austria will share driving duties with American Ryan Hardwick and Riccardo Pera from Italy at the wheel of the No. 92 car from Manthey 1st Phorm. Manthey also runs the 911 of Iron Dames. 2025 marks the first year that the all-female squad collaborates closely with Porsche Motorsport on the successful initiative to promote girls and women in motorsport. The No. 85 car will be shared by former DTM driver Rahel Frey from Switzerland, Frenchwoman Célia Martin and Michelle Gatting from Denmark.

The race

The six-hour event in Imola is considered the home race of a Porsche rival – as underlined by the name of the permanent racetrack: Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari. Opened in 1953, the 4.909-kilometre circuit with its 17 corners has hosted 30 Formula 1 Grands Prix. Imola is famous for passages like "Tamburello", "Tosa" and "Rivazza".

Due to the nature of the asphalt, the teams expect significantly higher tyre wear during the race in Italy compared to the season opener in Qatar. The storied circuit also features an interesting mix of fast corners and narrow chicanes, some of which are edged by high curbs. As an old-school racetrack with small run-off areas and many deep gravel beds, Imola leaves little room for error.

Drivers' comments ahead of the race

Michael Christensen (Porsche 963 #5): "I anticipate a tough race at Imola. We saw last year that changeable April weather plays a major role there. We also encountered inconsistent conditions during our recent track test there. We're ready for anything. The Formula 1 circuit is unforgiving. Even the smallest slip-up can have major consequences. We drivers know this and are preparing accordingly. Overtaking is considered difficult at Imola, which makes strategy even more important. We must always keep our cool, in heavy slower traffic too."

Kévin Estre (Porsche 963 #6): "The 6 Hours of Imola draws big crowds and has a great atmosphere – that's why it's become one of my favourite races since its WEC debut last year. Plus, it's always great to race on such an old-school circuit: high curbs, many gravel traps, slippery grass verges and barriers close to the track. Great fun! After the difficult season opener in Qatar, we're determined to return to the top."

Neel Jani (Porsche 963 #99):"Finally, a race in Europe that I can reach in my own car. I'm very familiar with Imola from racing there in many different series. We had bad luck last season and suffered our only retirement of the year. Since then, we've succeeded in significantly improving the car's setup. Let's see if it's a good match for the Imola course. Earning world championship points is our clear goal!"

Rahel Frey (Porsche 911 GT3 R #85):"I really like the Imola racetrack and have fond memories from our class win in the Porsche at last year's European Le Mans Series there. It was very emotional. That makes me even more excited to return to this track with the 911 GT3 R as part of the FIA WEC. However, I also expect big challenges. But we love difficult tasks and are ready to face any obstacle."

Richard Lietz (Porsche 911 GT3 R #92):"After a difficult season opener in Qatar, we're hoping for better chances in Imola. Riccardo Pera is part of our crew and as an Italian, he knows the track very well. Ryan Hardwick and I have also raced there, so we're on familiar turf. We recently completed a successful test in Spa. The balance of our Porsche 911 GT3 R was great so I hope it'll be the same in

Imola. I'm cautiously optimistic about the upcoming race."

Porsche racing cars and drivers in Imola

Hypercar class (Porsche 963):
Porsche Penske Motorsport #5: Julien Andlauer (FRA), Michael Christensen (DNK), Mathieu Jaminet (FRA)
Porsche Penske Motorsport #6: Matt Campbell (AUS), Kévin Estre (FRA), Laurens Vanthoor (BEL)
Proton Competition #99: Neel Jani (SUI), Nico Pino (CHL), Nico Varrone (ARG)

LMGT3 class (Porsche 911 GT3 R):
Iron Dames #85: Rahel Frey (SUI), Michelle Gatting (DNK), Célia Martin (FRA)
Manthey 1st Phorm #92: Ryan Hardwick (USA), Richard Lietz (AUT), Riccardo Pera (ITA)

The schedule (all times CEST)

Friday, 18 April
11:15 – 12:45 hrs: Free practice 1
16:00 – 17:30 hrs: Free practice 2

Saturday, 19 April
10:40 – 11:40 hrs: Free practice 3
14:30 – 14:42 hrs: Qualifying LMGT3
14:50 – 15:00 hrs: Hyperpole LMGT3
15:10 – 15:22 hrs: Qualifying Hypercar
15:30 – 15:40 hrs: Hyperpole Hypercar

Sunday, 20 April
13:00 – 19:00 hrs: "6 Hours of Imola" race

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