

Porsche on top at Pikes Peak

01/09/2020 Class wins and class acts at the infamous Colorado hill climb.

The narrow, twisting 12.5-mile, two-lane road that makes up the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb comprises no fewer than 156 turns, climbing to a finish line some 14,115-feet above sea level. The so-called Race to the Clouds has been an essential part of North American motorsport tradition for almost a century, with Porsche a pivotal player for many decades.

Sunday's 98th staging of this infamous high-altitude hill climb proved especially engaging for Porsche fans, with three heavyweights from the current stable of Weissach thoroughbreds going head to head in the factory standard 'Time Attack 1' class.

The headline act for many was the 935 belonging to Bob Ingram and driven by Jeff Zwart, a multiple class winner at Pikes Peak making his 17th start last weekend. Alongside him were two 911 GT2 RS Clubsport cars, which share the same twin-turbocharged flat-six powertrain as the 935, mated to a bespoke eight-speed PDK transmission.

Jeff Zwart and the 935

The first GT2 RS was driven by David Donohue, son of legendary Porsche racer Mark and himself a multiple Pikes Peak winner and highly accomplished endurance racer. The second GT2 RS was in the hands of a Pikes Peak past master, three-time overall winner and, like Zwart, a Hall of Famer – David Donner. His 911 had garnered extra attention in the run up to the race due to its art car livery, created by the team at '000 Magazine' as a stunning visual homage to Porsche's most iconic paint colours.

During an intensive week of pre-race prep and free practice, it was Donohue who consistently appeared the fastest, and he delivered the goods during Friday's qualifying with an untouchable time. With the weekend weather set fair and the car performing perfectly, it was Donohue's race to lose

But as is so often the case at Pikes Peak, the mountain was rewriting the script. Plunging temperatures on the Saturday night saw the upper sections of the course covered in ice by early the following morning. The start was delayed by several hours for safety reasons, but even then the fully paved road to the summit remained slippery in sections and was to prove a serious challenge for the starting drivers.

David Donohue and the 911 GT2 RS Clubsport

Donohue was the first Time Attack Porsche to take the flag, and despite putting in two faster sectors than the eventual winner, he briefly left the asphalt on a sharp corner, collecting a puncture that put an end to his race before the finish line.

Donner went next, also finding the conditions very challenging as he hustled his GT2 RS to the summit in drying but still imperfect conditions. "It was typical 'race day' conditions on Pikes Peak: very slippery or loose with gravel from the previous night's rain," Donner explained at the summit. "I hadn't been crossed up during any testing or practice but race day saw full corrections and excitement for the entire run."

Zwart followed in the 935 shortly afterwards, by his own admission demonstrating uncharacteristic caution at the start. "It was an incredible week driving the 935 but race day is a different thing. You have to lay it on the line. I knew I hadn't driven the first sector committed enough. I knew I had lost quite a bit of time so I kept pushing harder. The car kept feeling better and better. At the top, I pushed super, super hard and we set the fastest overall time on the day in the final sector. We came up short on time but we got a podium and top-five overall. It was a special day to have two Porsche in the top-five."

David Donner and the 911 GT2 RS Clubsport

In the end it was Donner who would come out on top with a stunning time of 9:36.559, not only

winning the Time Attack class but also placing third overall. The local favourite's time, which only eclipsed Zwart by some seven seconds, was doubly impressive for being a mere second behind the overall winner – an open wheel Pikes Peak special.

Further down the order, Porsche was enjoying yet more success in the 'Porsche Pikes Peak Trophy by Yokohama' class. Here, each participant was racing variants of the Cayman GT4 Clubsport, coached by none other than Jeff Zwart during the weeks prior to the event. Bilko Williams put in a fastest time of 10:52.622. He was closely followed by George Hess III and Kathryn Mead, the only woman in the race this year, who came in ahead of rookie Chas Wirken.

The 98th Pikes Peak International Hill Climb was another resounding success for Porsche, with an unforgettable debut for the 935 and a class win for its equally eye-catching sister car. That the '000' entry took the win is particularly impressive since, as Donner explains, it came together in so short a time: "This program was established less than three weeks ago and we won from good old fashion experience and professionalism with all involved. How remarkable is it to take a stock racing Porsche and run it up Pikes Peak and finish with such a fast time? Wow!"

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