



Three Porsche 963 take on Spa-Francorchamps for the first time

26/04/2023 Porsche Penske Motorsport travels to round three of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC feeling confident. At the Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps, the works team is determined to build on its successful outing in Portugal's Portimão, where the LMDh-compliant Porsche secured its first podium result in the WEC.

Preview

Three "Made in Flacht" hybrid prototypes will contest the Hypercar class: In addition to the two factory cars, the customer outfit Hertz Team JOTA fields a 963 for the first time. In the GTE-Am class, five other Porsche customer teams fight for victory with six 911 RSR from Weissach.

This coming weekend, Spa-Francorchamps will host the FIA World Endurance Championship. In preparation for the third WEC round, Porsche Penske Motorsport conducted several days of testing on the 7.004-kilometre racetrack at the end of March. Consequently, the factory squad feels well-

positioned to tackle the six-hour race with the Porsche 963. Moreover, third place in round two of the season in Portimão gives the WEC team extra motivation. The Mannheim-based works outfit is once again eager to finish on the podium in Belgium. The so-called "Ardennes rollercoaster" is one of the most demanding circuits on the season and serves as the stage for the final preparations heading to the 24 Hours of Le Mans. This year, the endurance classic celebrates its 100th anniversary on 10-11 June.

"Our victory in the IMSA race at Long Beach and the podium result at the FIA WEC race in Portimão has given the whole team an extra boost. We aim to make the most of this at Spa-Francorchamps and continue our strong form," explains Thomas Laudenbach, Vice President Porsche Motorsport. "The race in Belgium serves as the final rehearsal for the big highlight at Le Mans. This makes it all the more important to further improve the car's performance and the processes within the team. I'm also looking forward to seeing a Porsche 963 in customer hands at Spa-Francorchamps for the first time. I'm sure that the learning curve for Hertz Team JOTA will be steep and it won't take them long to reach the top level."

"Third place in Portimão was a wonderful reward for the team and it underlined that hard work pays off. Now we want to take the next step at Spa-Francorchamps," says Urs Kuratle, outlining his expectations. The Director Factory Motorsport LMDh adds: "We're anticipating a thrilling competition in the Ardennes. Vehicle performance in Spa is not the only decisive factor – equally as critical are the changing weather conditions, driving performance, strategy and teamwork. It's terrific that the LMDh fleet "Made in Flach" includes three cars. I'm very curious about the debut of our JOTA customer team with its Porsche 963."

Premiere: First privateer team fields a Porsche 963

In mid-April, Porsche delivered the first 963 customer race car to Hertz Team JOTA. The British squad co-owned by David Clark and Sam Hignett is the reigning FIA World Endurance Champion in the LMP2 category. Over the last nine years, the team has finished on the podium at the 24 Hours of Le Mans ten times. This season, the squad tackles the Hypercar class and fields a hybrid prototype for the first time at Spa-Francorchamps. As support, Porsche Motorsport provides its LMDh customer team with consultants at all WEC races.

Making their debut in the cockpit of the first privately-run Porsche 963 is the works driver António Félix da Costa from Portugal, Will Stevens from the UK and Yifei Ye. The Chinese racing driver is the selected driver from Porsche Motorsport Asia Pacific. "Our first race as a Hypercar entrant is a really special time for everyone connected with JOTA, Hertz, Singer and Brady," states JOTA co-owner Sam Hignett. "Alongside Porsche, we've worked extremely hard to get the car ready to make its debut and its looking great. With our unique livery and strong driver line up we can't wait to get going."

The WEC race

The Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps lies in the east of Belgium not far from the German border. The racetrack, which opened in 1921, measures 7.004 kilometres – the longest permanent circuit on the FIA WEC calendar. Featuring 21 corners and several relatively long straights, the storied racetrack rolls uphill and down dale through the Walloon countryside – hence its nickname the “Ardennes rollercoaster”. Recent renovations have improved the run-off areas in the legendary Eau Rouge – Raidillon corner combination. Additional grandstands have been constructed here and at other points along the track. The basic layout, however, is unchanged. The six-hour race has been a regular fixture on the calendar from the very first FIA WEC season.

Porsche teams and drivers

In the FIA WEC, the Porsche Penske Motorsport factory squad fields two LMDh prototypes in the hypercar class. Following the current Balance of Performance (BoP), the power output reaches 516 kW (702 PS). Kévin Estre (France), André Lotterer (Germany) and Laurens Vanthoor (Belgium) share the No. 6 car. At the previous world championship round in Portimão, the trio achieved third place. The cockpit of the No. 5 sister car is occupied by Dane Cameron from the USA, Frenchman Frédéric Makowiecki and Michael Christensen from Denmark. The No. 38 Porsche 963 fielded by Porsche's customer team Hertz Team JOTA is driven by António Félix da Costa, Will Stevens and Yifei Ye.

In the GTE-Am category, Porsche's customer teams campaign six of the 911 RSR racers. The No. 56 Porsche 911 RSR fielded by Project 1 – AO is helmed by PJ Hyett and Gunnar Jeannette (both USA) as well as Matteo Cairoli from Italy. In GR Racing's No. 86 cockpit, Michael Wainwright and Ben Barker from the UK form the driver trio together with Riccardo Pera from Italy.

Sharing driving duties in the No. 60 car of the Iron Lynx squad are Italians Claudio Schiavoni and Matteo Cressoni as well as Alessio Picariello from Belgium. The only all-female crew in the WEC consisting of local star Sarah Bovy from Belgium, Michelle Gatting from Denmark and Rahel Frey from Switzerland helms Iron Dames' pink No. 85 sister car.

In Dempsey-Proton Racing's No. 77 entry, team owner Christian Ried from Germany joins forces with Mikkel Pedersen from Denmark and the former Porsche-Junior Julien Andlauer from France. In the No. 88 Porsche 911, Proton Competition puts its trust in Ryan Hardwick from the USA, Canadian Zacharie Robichon and UK driver Harry Tincknell.

Overview of the teams and drivers

Hypercar class (Porsche 963):

Porsche Penske Motorsport (#5): Dane Cameron (USA), Michael Christensen (DK), Frédéric Makowiecki

(F)

Porsche Penske Motorsport (#6): Kévin Estre (F), André Lotterer (D), Laurens Vanthoor (B)

Hertz Team JOTA (#38): António Félix da Costa (P), William Stevens (UK), Yifei Ye (CHN)

GTE-Am class (Porsche 911 RSR):

Project1 – AO (#56): Matteo Cairoli (I), PJ Hyett (USA), Gunnar Jeanette (USA)

Iron Lynx (#60): Claudio Schiavoni (I), Matteo Cressoni (I), Alessio Picariello (B)

Dempsey-Proton Racing (#77): Christian Ried (D), Mikkel Pedersen (DK), Julien Andlauer (F)

Iron Dames (#85): Sarah Bovy (B), Michelle Gattling (DK), Rahel Frey (CH)

GR Racing (#86): Michael Wainwright (UK), Riccardo Pera (I), Ben Barker (UK)

Proton Competition (#88): Ryan Hardwick (USA), Zacharie Robichon (CDN), Harry Tincknell (UK)

The schedule (CEST)

Thursday, 27 April

11:30 am – 1:00 pm: Free practice 1

4:20 pm – 5:50 pm: Free practice 2

Friday, 28 April

11:00 am – noon: Free practice 3

5:00 pm – 5:15 pm: Qualifying GTE-Am

5:50 pm – 6:05 pm: Qualifying Hypercar

Saturday, 29 April

12:45 pm – 6:45 pm: Race

Drivers' comments ahead of the race

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 963 #6): "I'm looking forward to my home race in the WEC. I live about an hour away from the track – and perhaps I can sleep one more night at home. It's been a long time since a Belgian contested the top class in the endurance top class. Jacky Ickx was the last successful driver. It's an honour for me to follow in such famous footsteps. I like the Spa circuit. It has some interesting facets, which make it popular with many racing drivers. All of the 963 drivers in our team know the track well and some have gained experience and enjoyed success in GT racing there. I think we're excellently positioned."

Dane Cameron (Porsche 963 #5): "The Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps is one of the European racetracks that I know best. And it's one of my favourites. We're making constant progress in the development of the Porsche 963 and we're improving a little every weekend. The race in Belgium is the last WEC event before the 24 Hours of Le Mans. This gives us another chance to tick a few more items off our list so that we can head to France optimally prepared."

Alessio Picariello (Porsche 911 RSR #60): "I expect a lot of visitors will come to Belgium this time because of the Hypercar hype. I always love competing in my home country – especially in a world championship like the WEC. It's a lot of fun driving the 911 RSR on this circuit. I'm looking forward to one of my favourite racetracks."

Sarah Bovy (Porsche 911 RSR #85): "This is my first '6 Hours of Spa' in the WEC. I've often watched this race as a spectator. I went there as a fan, looked at all the cars on the grid and witnessed what happened on this track in really crazy weather. I said to myself at that time, it would be very cool to contest this race myself. Now I can hardly wait to drive the Porsche 911 RSR there. We want to deliver for the many people who support us and cheer us on. It takes only around 30 minutes to drive from my parent's house to the track. I feel at home in Spa, it's like my backyard. It's easy to get lost in the paddock but I know all the shortcuts. I'm also very familiar with the track layout."

Ben Barker (Porsche 911 RSR #86): "Spa-Francorchamps. Eau Rouge. Full throttle in the 911 RSR. Awesome! The nine-eleven is very strong. Our pace last year was good despite the adverse conditions. The Porsche drives well in the dry and the wet. As a driver, you always get the necessary feedback from the car. We might encounter changing weather conditions again this year but we're confident and well prepared. Last year we finished sixth, so a podium result this time would be very nice."

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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