



Japanese rookie Taichi Watarai dominates opening round of Porsche Carrera Cup Middle East in Bahrain

10/11/2025 The 2025/26 Porsche Carrera Cup Middle East began its third season and the 17th season of one-make Porsche racing in the Middle East as the major support event to the final round of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC).

Porsche Carrera Cup Middle East continues its tradition of unlocking new talent with 21-year old Japanese newcomer Taichi Watarai fending off stiff competition during the opening round of the 2025 / 26 season to take two dominant wins at the Bahrain International Circuit.

Like Janne Stiak, the young German who won the championship last season, Watarai is a star of the future, rubbing panels with Australian Caleb Sumich in Race One to take a 6.2 second win over his Seven X Seven team mate and Pro-Am class winner, Bankcy in second. Another Australian, Sam Shahin

racing for Team GP Elite, finished in third.

Sumich fought back to finish fourth in the red and yellow DHL car that carried Stiak to his championship victory last year. GT Sports Technology's Petr Brecka enjoyed a good start to his season with a win in the Masters class and ninth outright.

Last season's Pro Am championship-winning team, Saudi Racing has stepped up to the Pro class for this season and it was Khaled Alahmadi who led his team mate Saud Al Saud home for fifth and sixth after Al Saud endured intense pressure from France's Cedric Chassang beating him across the line by just 24 thousandths of a second.

While Race One was held under lights on Friday evening, the second 12-lap race of the weekend presented differing conditions under the Sakhir sun on Saturday morning, but again it was Watarai who started from Pole for a second time and showed his class by once again building a gap over the rest of a tightly-packed field.

With all cars now running Traction Control and ABS anti-lock brakes, in line with Carrera Cup racing around the world from 2026, the Middle East opening round provided a few unknowns as drivers coped with the driver aids for the first time around the 5.412km, F1-grade race track.

Sumich's tough weekend only got worse, starting from the rear of grid in Race Two, he made contact with Al Saud and was forced to retire the DHL car. In contrast, Bulgaria's Alexandra Vateva improved from her first race retirement and battled with Shahin for third place. Six tenths of a second covered second, third and fourth after 30 minutes of racing at the chequered flag with Watari 17 seconds clear from the pack of Chassang, Alahmadi, Vateva and Shahin all fighting for the final podium positions.

Mtech Competition's Krister Andero, Brecka and Mark J. Thomas racing for the M3L Team were having a similar fight for the Masters Class win, finishing 10th, 11th and 12th, as they tried to chase down Banky in ninth.

"The Bahrain International Circuit is a great track that continually breeds close racing," said Series Head and Promoter Robert Lechner.

"We saw great racing, a cool line up of drivers, young drivers and a new winner in Taichi Watari with plenty of excitement right through the field."

The 2025 / 26 Porsche Carrera Cup Middle East comprises 12 races at the region's biggest motorsport events as the major support races for the Formula One Grands Prix in Qatar, Bahrain and Jeddah in addition to headlining events at the Dubai Autodrome and the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi.

Drivers compete in identical Porsche 911 (992) GT3 Cup cars developing 520bhp, driven through a six-speed transmission which are divided into Pro, Pro Am, Masters and GCC Classes.

After the opening two races of Round One, Watarai leads outright as well as the Pro class with a perfect 50 points, ahead of Chassang, who is tied with Alahmadi, Sam Shahin and Bankcy on 29 points.

Chassang, Shahin and Bankcy are also joint leaders in Pro Am classification, while Petr Brecka leads the Masters Class from Andero and Mark J. Thomas on 12, 11 and 8 points respectively.

Round Two will be at the Lusail Circuit in Qatar on November 28 to 30 as the main support category for the 23rd round of the FIA Formula One World Championship, the F1 Qatar Grand Prix.

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