

Porsche tackles season finale with emotions and goals high

09/11/2020 Porsche has a clear goal for the final round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship in Sebring (USA) on 14 November: The North American operations team Core Autosport is eager to wrap up the season with another victory on the Florida racetrack.

The preview

The works campaign with the two Porsche 911 RSR in the GTLM class comes to an end after seven very successful years. As a special treat for the many fans and loyal partners in North America, Porsche sends the two works cars to contest the race on the Sebring International Raceway decked out in striking designs. The special livery of the two 911 RSR will be unveiled on Tuesday before the race. The driver line-up for the season finale is also new: The Swiss works driver Neel Jani supports the regular IMSA drivers at the event in Florida. The traditional twelve-hour event on the former airfield close to the city of Orlando was originally planned for mid-March but had to be postponed by eight months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The last factory outing with the Porsche 911 RSR in the North American IMSA series brings up many emotions," states Fritz Enzinger, Vice President Motorsport. "In the fierce competition against top-class rivals in the GTLM class, we've won the manufacturer's title three times in seven years, among other accolades. We're enormously proud of that. The North American market is very important for Porsche. That's why I'm particularly pleased that our racing cars will be represented in big numbers at the IMSA events in 2021: the interest from customers to field the 911 GT3 R in the GTD class is huge, and we'll be launching the new Porsche Carrera Cup North America next year as part of the support programme."

"We're keen to close a great chapter in the IMSA series with another success," declares Pascal Zurlinden, Director Factory Motorsport. "Sebring has always been good turf for Porsche. In the last two years, our Porsche 911 RSR won the GTLM class at the twelve-hour race in Florida. Over the past weeks, our factory squad won at Road Atlanta and Laguna Seca. We're heading to the big finale in top form. I'm sure we'll be among the frontrunners in Sebring, as well."

The Sebring International Raceway throws major challenges at man and machine. About a third of the 6.02-kilometre racetrack consists of concrete slabs, which were previously part of the runway at the former Hendricks Army Airfield. These slabs cause hefty vibrations. Due to this special feature, the racetrack located about 100 kilometres south of Orlando is often mentioned on social media with the hashtag #RespectTheBumps. For the engineers of the works team, the emphasis is on finding a suitable setup for the kinematics of the 911 RSR. Porsche is the most successful manufacturer on the storied circuit, which has regularly hosted endurance races since 1950. So far, the Stuttgart marque

has netted 18 outright wins and 72 class victories at Sebring. In the last two years, the Porsche 911 RSR has dominated the GTLM class at the hugely popular endurance races in Florida. In addition to the Daytona 24-hour classic and the two races at Road Atlanta, this final round of the season counts towards the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup.

The Porsche GT Team drivers

The regular drivers Nick Tandy from Great Britain and Frenchman Frédéric Makowiecki share driving duties in the No. 911 Porsche 911 RSR. The pair was part of the winning crew at Sebring in 2018 and 2019. Porsche has announced Earl Bamber from New Zealand as the third driver. The two reigning GTLM driver champions Earl Bamber and Belgium's Laurens Vanthoor join forces with Neel Jani in the cockpit of the identical No. 912 sister car. The 36-year-old WEC champion and 2016 Le Mans makes his race debut at the wheel of the 911 RSR after many kilometres of testing. Bamber and Vanthoor recently won the Laguna Seca race. The pair ranks sixth in the drivers' classification, one position behind Tandy and Makowiecki. In the manufacturer's championship, Porsche heads to the final round of the season in third place. In the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup – a special classification which includes the four longest races of the season – the Porsche GT Team currently ranks second and has good chances of winning the title.

The customer team

In the GTD class, a category for racing cars complying with the FIA GT3 regulations, Wright Motorsports fields a Porsche 911 GT3 R. The American works driver Patrick Long joins forces with his compatriot Ryan Hardwick and Belgium's Jan Heylen in the cockpit of the No. 16 car. The squad from the US state of Ohio is still in the running to claim the GTD-class title. Wright Motorsports travels to the final round ranking second in the team classification, seven points shy of the leader.

Successes of the Porsche 911 RSR in the IMSA championship

Since the start of the factory campaign with the Porsche 911 RSR in the hotly contested GTLM class of the IMSA series in 2014, the sports car manufacturer from Weissach has won the manufacturer's title three times and the team championship twice. From 74 races over seven years, Porsche has achieved 20 wins, 20 pole positions and 55 podium finishes. The greatest highlight is the overall victory of the 911 RSR at the 2015 Petit Le Mans: In a spectacular race in the rain at Road Atlanta, the works drivers Nick Tandy, Patrick Pilet and Richard Lietz outpaced the entire field, including the faster prototypes. Britain's Nick Tandy tops the list of statistics as the most successful driver in the North American Porsche factory squad. With nine pole positions to his credit, the outright Le Mans winner from 2015 has set a record in the IMSA series.

More comments prior to the race

Steffen Höllwarth (Head of Operations IMSA Championship): "We're returning to the venue where we've enjoyed many successes. Once again, our goal this year is clear: we want to win. Unfortunately, we don't have our regular third drivers for this year's 12-hour race because of overlapping dates with other series on the same race weekend. However, with Neel Jani, an extremely experienced driver joins the team. We aim to go for broke one last time with him and the entire squad. Unfortunately, we're out contention for the IMSA title, but we are eager to clinch the IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup."

Nick Tandy (Porsche 911 RSR #911): "We're returning to Sebring as the winners of the last two years. To clinch two straight victories in this twelve-hour race is quite an achievement. It would be awesome to finish the series with a hat trick! As such, our aim is very clear: We want maximum success again for our last joint outing as a works team. The farewell doesn't play a major role for me until the chequered flag falls. I think it's much more important that we prepare meticulously and systematically for this last race."

Frédéric Makowiecki (Porsche 911 RSR #911): "Nick and I have very fond memories of Sebring. We won the endurance classic in the last two years and we'd now like to wrap up the factory campaign with a third victory. The race is usually contested in spring. Now, in mid-November, we'll be spending more time driving in the dark. We have to keep this in mind when finding an optimal setup. Those who drive fast and consistently in the night have the best chances in the fierce competition of the GTLM class."

Earl Bamber (Porsche 911 RSR #912): "For me personally, the end of the season is particularly significant because I have a very close relationship with the IMSA series. My career began as a Porsche works driver in North America in 2015. Since then, I've contested over 50 races in the championship, I've met some great people there and I've celebrated some fantastic wins. The undisputed highlight was our title win last year. I'd like to close this chapter with a win at Sebring."

Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 RSR #912): "It'll be an emotional finale in Florida. Over the years, we've experienced a lot, we've worked a lot and we've celebrated a lot with our fabulous team. We're travelling to Sebring in high spirits after our win at Laguna Seca. We still have some unfinished business at the twelve-hour race. I've finished on the podium but I've never won there. It's the perfect time to settle that score this coming weekend. I promise one thing: There'll be some cool burnouts to farewell the fans."

Neel Jani (Porsche 911 RSR #912): "I've done several days of testing in the Porsche 911 RSR, but it'll still be diving in the deep end. I've never contested a GT race before. I'll have a lot to learn in a very short time at the Sebring weekend. Most notably, from the perspective of a GT driver, I'm not familiar with driving in traffic. Still, I know the track well, I've driven prototypes there multiple times and I climbed the podium in 2013. Four years later, I scored pole position in an LMP2 car – beating all DPi vehicles. I'm looking forward to this big challenge and I'd like to help my teammates, Earl and Laurens, as much as possible to finish as far up the GTLM field as possible."

Live streaming of the race

The Sebring 12-hour race of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship takes off on Saturday, 14 November, at 10:10 a.m. local time (16:10 p.m. CET). The race can be viewed outside the USA and Canada on www.imsa.com.

The schedule (local time, CET: -6 hours)

Thursday, 12 November

10:05 – 11:05 am: Free practice 1

2:35 – 3:50 pm: Free practice 2

6:15 – 7:45 pm: Free practice 3

Friday, 13 November

10:15 – 10:30 am: Qualifying GTD

10:40 – 10:55 am: Qualifying GTLM

Saturday, 14 November

8:00 – 8:20 am: Warm-up

10:10 am – 10:10 pm: Race

This is the IMSA SportsCar Championship

The IMSA SportsCar Championship was founded in the USA and Canada in 2013 after the merger of the American Le Mans Series and the Grand-Am Series. A year later the new sports car race series, which is organised by the International Motor Sports Association (IMSA), was contested for the first time. Sports prototypes and sports cars start in four different classes: GTLM (GT Le Mans), GTD (GT Daytona), Dpi (Daytona Prototype international) and LMP2 (Le Mans Prototype 2). The new Porsche 911 RSR is fielded in the GTLM class, and the Porsche 911 GT3 R contests the GTD class.

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