20 times from Stuttgart to Le Mans and back

17/03/2024 On the way to its racing debut, the Porsche 963 completed an intensive testing and development programme.

It is Friday, 14 January 2022, and pretty chilly on the test track at the Porsche Development Centre in Weissach. But even the icy wind hardly disturbs the group of people in their thick winter jackets. Their attention is focused on the race car with the mysterious camouflage car wrap, for which the complex preparations prior to the test run have already started. They realise this is something special. And then, the moment the V8 engine starts up with a fierce snarl and works driver Frédéric Makowiecki eases the Porsche 963 onto the track as the first LMDh race car ever, it has begun: a new era of endurance racing. Fans and drivers, teams and manufacturers alike have yearned for this moment.

The "roll-out" of the hybrid race car was a key milestone for the prototype project, but not its starting point. A long time before all this, the sports car manufacturer had already started developing key components for the 963 in compliance with strict regulations and testing them extensively on test benches. The 4.6-litre V8 twin turbo, for instance, is required to unleash its power of up to 529 kW

(720 PS) and its enormous torque in line with strict specifications – the regulations define a narrow corridor for power delivery. These characteristic curves and many other factors, such as torsional stiffness and vibration properties, were dealt with meticulously in advance by Porsche Motorsport experts using high-tech tools.

The chassis was designed and built by Multimatic. The Canadian company is one of only four approved suppliers allowed to offer this basic framework for race cars in the LMDh category. At the end of 2021, technicians at the Motorsport Centre Flacht put all the components together: the V8 engine, the standard hybrid system and the complex electronics, in addition to all the suspension, body and cockpit components – a mega-sized puzzle with more than 16,700 parts. An important step on the way to the first major highlight: the roll-out in Weissach.

"That was the birth of the car, so to speak. A moment like that is emotional, exciting and at the same time a rewarding experience for everyone involved," explains Urs Kuratle, Director Factory Motorsport LMDh, and the man responsible for the new Le Mans prototype.

For Team Porsche Penske Motorsport, however, 14 January 2022 also marked the beginning of an intensive and strenuous testing and development phase on both sides of the Atlantic. As early as February, the 963 covered more than 2,000 kilometres on the Formula 1 track in Barcelona. More development laps followed in Aragon, Spain, on the Belgian Ardennes circuit in Spa-Francorchamps, in Monza, Italy, as well as on the US race tracks of Daytona, Sebring and Homestead Miami. "The most important step, however, came in September during the endurance test at Sebring," emphasises Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. "We were able to complete 1,218 laps there and cover 7,331 kilometres in just over 36 hours."

To date, the Porsche 963 has racked up more than 31,000 test kilometres, corresponding to the distance from Stuttgart to Le Mans and back again about 20 times...

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