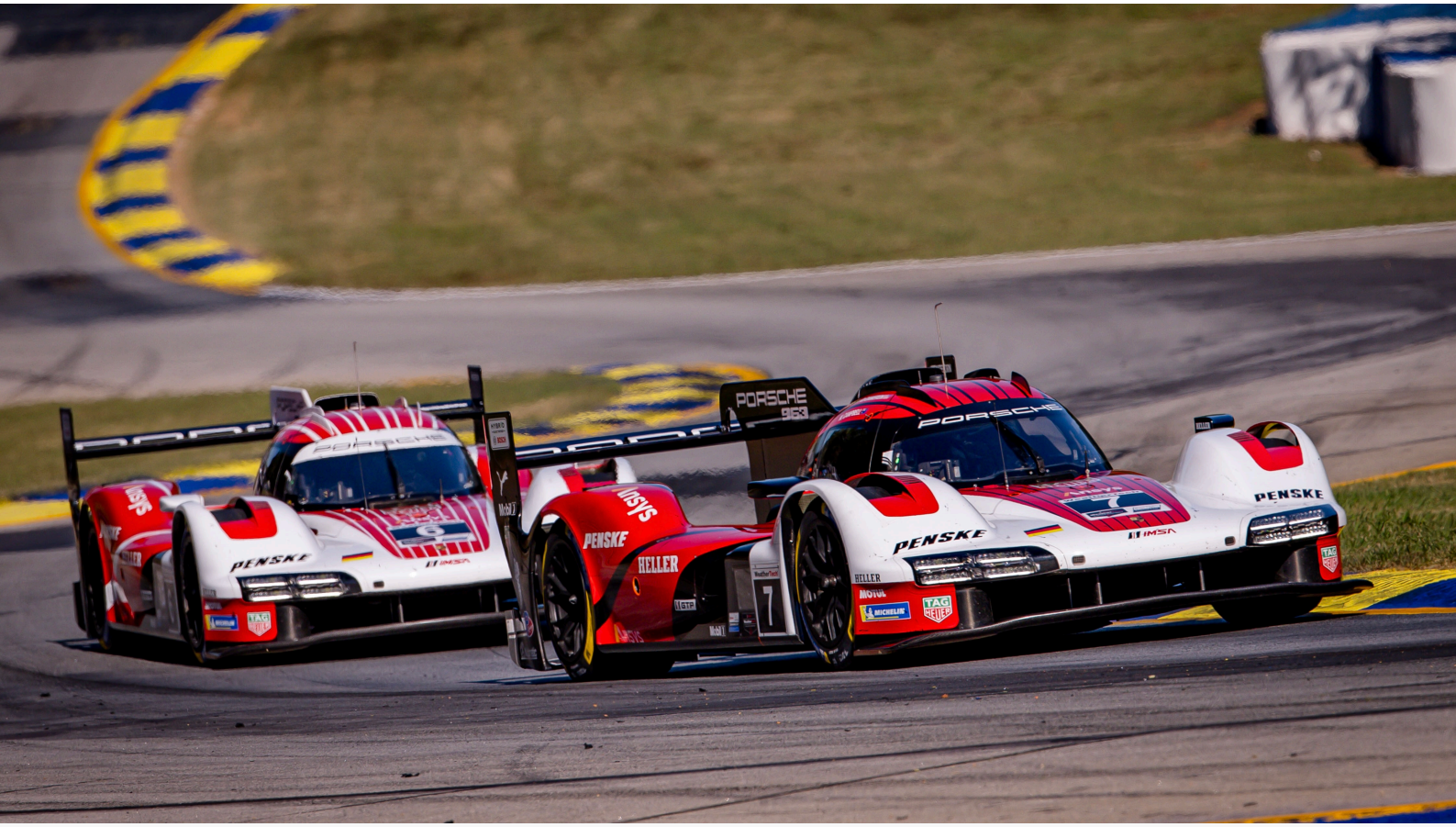

Porsche goes on a title hunt from the first grid row at Road Atlanta

12/10/2024 The No. 7 Porsche 963 has all but claimed the drivers' championship crown in the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship.

Matt Campbell from Australia planted the hybrid prototype from Weissach on the second grid spot in qualifying and earned 32 points for his team. This result increased the lead over Cadillac, which ranks third overall. Cadillac's drivers now have virtually no chance of taking home the 2024 drivers' trophy. The decision for this accolade will go down to the wire on Saturday between the two Porsche works crews. Nick Tandy qualified the No. 6 car on P8. In the GTD Pro class, Laurin Heinrich set pole position at the wheel of AO Racing's Porsche 911 GT3 R. With this, the German boosted his advantage in the class standings as he heads to the season finale at Road Atlanta.

Qualifying

In bright sunshine and 22-degree Celsius air temperatures, the qualifying conditions for teams in the

top GTP class were perfect. For Matt Campbell in the No. 7 Porsche 963, the outlook seemed equally as sunny: by qualifying the prototype in ninth place or better, the preliminary decision in the drivers' championship falls in favour of the Porsche works team. The Australian left no doubt about the might of the hybrid racing car. In the first four laps on the 4.088-kilometre circuit, the 2024 Daytona winner steadily picked up his pace, and was pipped at the post in the battle for pole position by just 0.070 seconds. Nick Tandy could not quite match the pace of his Porsche colleague and qualified eighth, about half a second behind.

"Starting from second is a great grid position for the race. Thanks to this, we've taken another step towards securing the title. Now we only need to start tomorrow's race and we earn points. Then it's up to our drivers to battle among themselves for championship honours," states Urs Kuratle. Looking ahead to Saturday's ten-hour season finale, the Director Factory Motorsport LMDh adds: "The temperatures during the day and the bright sunshine are not particularly advantageous for us. We perform better in cooler temperatures, for instance when it gets dark at the end of the race. We experienced this during Thursday's night practice. So, I'm confident that we'll achieve another strong result."

"We're delighted. Matt turned a blistering lap in our number 7 car. The sum of his sector best times would even have been enough for pole position," explains Jonathan Diuguid, Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport. "Our cars are looking great. Ten hours is a long time to race, and a lot can happen – especially in the heavy traffic at Petit Le Mans with over 50 vehicles on the relatively short Road Atlanta circuit. Our goal is very clear: we want to scoop the title pool!"

Based on the qualifying results of the two works Porsche 963 entries, the battle for the drivers' and teams' championship has more or less been decided: if they start the formation laps, the fight for the title will be between the two Porsche crews. With 2,682 points to their credit, Felipe Nasr and Dane Cameron tackle the final race of the season as the clear favourites. The duo shares the No. 7 cockpit with Matt Campbell. Their teammates Nick Tandy and Mathieu Jaminet sit 133 points behind. The pair receive reinforcement for the Petit Le Mans event from the Frenchman Kévin Estre. In the manufacturers' classification, Porsche will take home the title as soon as one of the four Porsche 963 starts the race and earns points. For this, just turning the two formation laps on race day is enough.

Phil Hanson delivered a strong performance at the wheel of the Porsche 963 fielded by the customer team DC-Miller MotorSports: The British racer planted the No. 85 car on the sixth grid spot. Proton Competition's identical hybrid prototype heads into the final IMSA round of the year from P10.

GT classes: Laurin Heinrich puts "Rexy" on pole

In the GTD Pro category, Laurin Heinrich has made his intentions to clinch the title in his first year in the IMSA series crystal clear. The former Porsche Junior set pole position for himself and his team AO Racing at the wheel of the 911 GT3 R fondly dubbed "Rexy". In a time of 1:17.881 minutes, the German was 0.160 seconds faster than his arch-rival Ross Gunn in third. With this, Heinrich extended his lead

over the British Aston Martin driver to 104 points. Finishing the race sixth in the GTD Pro class is enough for the 23-year-old to secure the drivers' and team championships and the manufacturers' title for Porsche. In the GTD class, the two identical 911 vehicles from Wright Motorsports and MDK Motorsports will tackle the race from positions 13 and 16, respectively.

The eleventh and final round of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship season at Road Atlanta in the US state of Georgia gets underway on Saturday, 12 October at 12:10 pm local time (18:10 CEST). Outside the USA and Canada, the Petit Le Mans race will be broadcast live over the full ten-hour distance in a free stream on imsa.tv.

Drivers' post-qualifying quotes

Matt Campbell (Porsche 963 #7):"I'm pleased with my flying lap. In the end, the battle for pole position was super close. We were just over fifty milliseconds off pole position. We're heading into the race from the front grid row – that's a great position considering our title ambitions."

Nick Tandy (Porsche 963 #6):"The Porsche's setup is good, and it felt great in qualifying too. Unfortunately, I couldn't convert that into a decent lap time. Others were simply a bit better today."

Phil Hanson (Porsche 963 #85):"Unlike all the other teams, we didn't pit after one lap to mount a fresh set of tyres. I immediately chased top times. I had a relatively clear run and felt super comfortable in the Porsche 963. I think even in these few laps we gained some important insights for the race. I'm confident we'll be ready tomorrow to fight at the front when it gets dark at the end of the Petit Le Mans."

Laurin Heinrich (Porsche 911 GT3 R #77): "My lap was fantastic and half a second faster than in the practice sessions. When I noticed that, I immediately knew I'd qualify well ahead. It was even good enough for pole position – incredible! The team put a blisteringly fast Porsche 911 GT3 R on the track for me today. Thank you so much for that! Now we're in a perfect position to tackle the last race of the season. The points earned from qualifying have slightly increased the gap to our rivals. It couldn't have gone any better!"

Qualifying result

GTP class:

1. Derani/Aitken/Blomqvist (BR/UK/UK), Cadillac #31, 1:09.639 minutes
2. Cameron/Nasr/Campbell (USA/BR/AUS), Porsche 963 #7, 1:06.709 minutes
3. De Phillippi/Yelloly/Martin (USA/UK/B), BMW #25, 1:09.929 minutes
6. Van der Helm/Westbrook/Hanson (NL/UK/UK), Porsche 963 #85, 1:10.103 minutes
8. Tandy/Jaminet/Estre (UK/F/F), Porsche 963 #6, 1:10.212 minutes
10. Bruni/Viscaal/Picariello (I/NL/B), Porsche 963 #5, 1:10.636 minutes

GTD-Pro class:
1. Heinrich/Christensen/Andlauer (D/DK/F), Porsche 911 GT3 R #77, 1:17.881 minutes
2. Milner/Catsburg/Bamber (USA/NL/NZL), Corvette #4, 1:17.933 minutes
3. Gunn/Riberas/de Angelis (UK/E/CDN), Aston Martin #23, 1:18.041 minutes

GTD class:
1. Yoluc/Andrade/Andrews (TR/ANG/AUS), Mercedes-AMG #80, 1:18.281 minutes
2. Foley/Gallagher/Walker (USA/USA/USA), BMW #96, 1:18.539 minutes
3. Ward/Ellis/Dontje (USA/UK/NL), Mercedes-AMG #57, 1:18.751 minutes
13. Adelson/Skeer/Heylen (USA/USA/B), Porsche 911 GT3 R #120, 1:20.246 minutes
16. Fjordbach/Li/Bachler (DK/CHN/A), Porsche 911 GT3 R #86, 1:21.481 minutes

Full results and championship standings at https://imsa.alkamelsystems.com.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Holger Eckhardt

Spokesperson Motorsports LMDh, GT, Customer Racing
+49 (0) 170 / 911 4982
holger.eckhardt@porsche.de

Video

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Subline: Urs Kuratle (Director Factory Motorsport LMDh)

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Subline: Jonathan Diuguid (Managing Director Porsche Penske Motorsport)

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart