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1968: On the road to the World Sportscar Championship

In 1968, the International Championship for Makes, as the sports car championship was billed that year, was contested by Group 6 cars – sports prototypes with up to three liters of displacement. Porsche entered its 908, which quickly proved a potential overall winner. The issue, however, was decided at Le Mans: Porsche would not win the title that year



Star team: Jo Siffert (third from left) seems impatient to get on with it. On May 19, he would drive the coupé to a record-setting lap on the Ring, and an overall win teamed with Elford (second from left). The other drivers in this line-up are (from left) Buzzetta, Scarfiotti, Stommelen, Herrmann and Mitter.

By FIA decree, as of October 1967, the 1968 International Championship for Makes was opened to Group 6 cars, the so-called sports prototypes with up to 3000cc displacement; for Group 4 cars, sports cars with up to 5000cc, and for Group 3 Grand Touring cars with unlimited displacement.

Porsche, of course, was well prepared. Lothar Boschen and Jürgen Barth, in their encyclopedic *The Porsche Book: The Definitive Illustrated History*, write that: “Previous rumors had hinted at this move, and no time had been lost; as early as July 1967, design was started on a completely new 3-liter, 8-cylinder engine (Type 908), which was to be dropped into a chassis derived from the Type 907, to become the 908 coupé ... Only four months later, the first engine was assembled. First time on the test-bed it produced 320bhp, and after four months of development it had become

sufficiently reliable to try its luck in long distance racing. In Monza – the engine’s first race – the power was up to 335bhp and in the final version the best examples developed nearly 370bhp.”

FIRST TEST OF STRENGTH AT LE MANS

The 908 was first tested ‘publicly’ in early April 1968 at a practice session for the Le Mans 24 Hours race. Porsche’s engineers carried out their first tests with the new three-liter powerplant in a converted 907 long-tail. In this practice session, the Porsche pilots were not yet giving the 908 a maximum effort workout; in particular Rolf Stommelen, who assisted in eight-cylinder testing, held back.

The new, highly controversial Ford Chicane just before the pit entrance

Picture perfect: The long-tail of Elford and Mitter cuts a fine figure at Le Mans. The duo started third on the grid, but were eventually disqualified.



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1969: Ten races, seven wins

In 1969, Porsche finally achieved its goal of winning the International Championship for Makes for sports prototypes under three liters, sports cars under five liters, and Grand Touring cars with no displacement limit

A winter's tale: Of all the times to unveil a new car, Porsche chose the coldest season of the year to roll out the new open 908 at Hockenheim. Jo Siffert (third from left) in particular appreciated the long-tail version of the Floundertail (overleaf), but at Le Mans, dropped out with transmission problems.



INTERNATIONAL F
MARKENMEISTERSCHAFT
INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
FOR MAKES
CHAMPIONNAT INTERNATIONAL
DES MARQUES

RENN TERMINE 1971

10.1.1971	1000 KM DE
ARGENTINA	BUENOS AIRES
30.1-31.1.1971	24 HOURS
USA	OF DAYTONA
20.3.1971	12 HOURS
USA	OF SEBRING
4.4.1971	BOAC 1000 KM
GREAT BRITAIN	BRANDS HATCH
25.4.1971	1000 KILOMETER
ITALIA	DI MONZA
9.5.1971	1000 KMS
BELGIQUE	DE SPA
16.5.1971	TARGA FIORIO
29.5.-30.5.1971	1000 KM
DEUTSCHLAND	NURBURGRING
12.6.-13.6.1971	LES 24 HEURES
FRANCE	DUMANS
27.6.1971	1000 KM
OSTERREICH	OSTERREICHING
24.7.1971	6 HOURS
USA	OF WATKINS GLEN
7.8.1971	1000 KM
CANADA	OF CANADA

PORSCHE

de Adamich/Henri Pescarolo is purely of statistical interest. Both of Hans-Dieter Dechent's Martini Team 908/02s dropped out with engine problems: Marko/van Lennep on lap 2, Copello/Weigel after 54 laps. The winning team's average speed was 186.220km/h (115.712mph); Siffert/Bell needed 5h 25m 25.94s to cover 165 laps. Fastest practice lap was set by Pedro Rodriguez in 1:52.70 (195.547km/h/121.508mph); fastest race lap was credited to Jo Siffert in 1:51.53 (197.598km/h/122.782mph). Of 22 starters, 12 cars were classified as finishers.

A LUCKY PORSCHE-WYER WIN

On January 30 and 31 at the 24 Hours of Daytona in Florida, after a battle of attrition, winners of the second Championship race of the season were Pedro Rodriguez and Jackie Oliver. At the beginning of the season, Ferrari concentrated on its new three-liter car; the factory no longer entered the 512S in races. As a result, in Daytona, Maranello's customer teams had to struggle against the Wyer-Gulf Porsches. One of these privately-entered Ferraris had been meticulously prepared by Roger Penske; in practice,

driven by Mark Donohue and David Hobbs, it proved even faster than the five-liter Porsches. However, it was held back by numerous pit stops, to the extent that, after 688 laps, a Gulf 917 brought home the maximum points, this time driven by Pedro Rodriguez/Jackie Oliver. The Stuttgart cars were well on their way to a successful title defense. Second and third places went to Maranello: Ronnie Bucknum/Tony Adamowicz (512S) finished ahead of Mark Donohue/David Hobbs (512M). Rodriguez/Oliver drove to an average speed of 174.725km/h (108.569mph). Fastest race lap was set by Ferrari pilot Mark Donohue in 1:41.25 (218.012km/h, 135.467mph) – a new lap record. Previously, Donohue had been fastest in practice with 1:42.42 (215.522km/h/133.919mph). Of 48 starters, 22 were classified as finishers.

MARTINI & ROSSI CUSTOMER SUPPORT AT SEBRING

The third race in the International Championship for Makes took place on the abandoned military airfield outside Sebring, Florida, an 8.36km (5.20 mile) circuit. On March 20, a Porsche 917 again won. This time, 908s were not present; the works 908/03 was intended only for the 'Ring and Targa. Both John Wyer Gulf 917s were unable to figure decisively in the race, because leader Jo Siffert dropped out with mechanical problems and Pedro Rodriguez was involved in a collision with Donohue's Penske Ferrari. The Martini & Rossi Team arrived in Sebring with just one car, a 917K, but one was all it needed: after twelve hours, drivers Vic Elford and his French team-mate, Gérard Larrousse, were the clear winners ahead of numerically superior opposition from Wyer-Porsche, Ferrari and Alfa Romeo. In their drive to victory, Elford/Larrousse circulated 260 times, improving on the 1970 distance record of 248 laps. Rolf Stommelen/Nanni Galli placed their Alfa Romeo Tipo 33/3 in second, ahead of team-mates Andrea de Adamich/Henri Pescarolo. This boosted Alfa Romeo to second in Championship points, ahead of Ferrari.

The average speed of the winning team of Vic Elford/Gérard Larrousse was 181.052km/h (112.501mph); fastest race lap went to Jo Siffert in his Porsche 917 in 2:30.46 (200.232km/h/124.419mph). Siffert/Bell finished fifth behind Rodriguez/Oliver (Porsche 917). Fastest practice lap was set by Mark Donohue (Ferrari 512M) in 2:31.65 (198.661km/h/123.443mph). Of 57 starters, 24 were classified as finishers.

ALFA ROMEO AHEAD OF FERRARI AND PORSCHE

On April 4, 1971, the 4.26km (2.647 mile) Brands Hatch course hosted the BOAC 1000 Kilometers, the fourth race in the International Championship of Makes calendar. On that day, the tradition-steeped Italian Alfa Romeo team finally achieved its first-ever victory in the World Sportscar Championship since the series was created in 1953. Alfa's good showing at Sebring and earlier outstanding placings served notice that, sooner or later, it would be a winner, and now was the time: Andrea de Adamich and Henri Pescarolo piloted the winning Milanese works car, a V8-powered 33/3, to victory, followed by Clay Regazzoni/Jacky Ickz (Ferrari 312P) and Jo Siffert/Derek Bell (Porsche 917). Fourth, fifth, and sixth were Herbert Müller/René Herzog, David Hobbs/José Juncadella (both in Ferrari 512Ms), and the Porsche 917K of Reinhold Joest/Willi Kauhsen. The 908/02 entered by Aachen-based Willi Kauhsen was driven by Hans-

one of the other two long-tail coupés; both cars left the track. The car was completely demolished. Schütz can consider himself lucky as he was thrown clear of the car and suffered only minor injuries. He claimed that Larrousse drove into the side of his tail, but there were no traces of such contact on Larrousse's car, and the exact cause was never determined. Back home in Selters, Schütz resolved to quit racing.

Gerhard Mitter's life came to a tragic end only a few weeks later. In practice for the German Grand Prix on the Nürburgring, his Formula 2 BMW apparently left the course due to a mechanical defect, just before the Schwedenkreuz, one of the fastest sections of the track. Mitter succumbed to his severe injuries.

HANS HERRMANN

When Hans Herrmann (born February 23, 1928) and the Porsche 908 are mentioned, it is almost always in connection with one particular event: the 1969 Le Mans race that witnessed the closest finish between two different marques ever seen after 24 hours of racing on the Sarthe circuit. After 22 hours, the Herrmann/Larrousse Porsche was the sole survivor of the six entered Type 908 and 917 works cars, only yards away from a racing legend – the Gulf blue-and-orange-painted Ford GT40 of Jacky Ickx and Jackie Oliver, the very same car that had won the race a year earlier.

The antagonists: Hans Herrmann, a racing veteran at 41 years of age and senior driver in the Porsche works team, had driven his first Le Mans race in 1953; and Jacky Ickx, the youngest Belgian Formula 1 driver. The cars: Porsche 908 long-tail coupé, a thoroughbred sports prototype, eight cylinders, three liters' displacement, 350hp, 680kg; versus Ford GT40, a sports car powered by a production-based V8 engine, five liters, 450hp, 1075kg.

The 24 hour endurance race became a real sprint for the finish. The Porsche's engine was not exactly daisy-fresh anymore, and Swabian driver Herrmann was further handicapped by worn brake pads, whose worrisome condition had long been announced by a warning lamp on his instrument panel.

Hans Herrmann recalls that "Jacky Ickx and I used every drafting trick in the book. Either one of us could be pulled along, could pull ahead, but then would be passed again. On the straights, at top speed, we sometimes drove side-by-side and looked over at one another, like a couple of casual bicycle riders." After countless lead changes and tactical maneuvering into the final lap and 24 hours of racing, the Ford was just 100 meters ahead of the Porsche; a closer finish would be difficult to imagine. A year later, Hans Herrmann was rewarded in a 917 with the Stuttgart carmaker's long-awaited first overall win at Le Mans. Herrmann turned that triumph into a brilliant retirement from the world stage of motorsport.

GÉRARD LARROUSSE

Like Vic Elford, Gérard Larrousse (born May 23, 1940) began his racing career in rallying. Hired by Porsche in late 1968, he experienced Porsche's first works effort at the Monte Carlo Rally in January 1969, where he finished second behind team-mate Björn Waldegaard. He had his first Porsche 908 drive at the Targa Florio.

His second race was Le Mans, where he teamed with Hans Herrmann for that famous event in which the final laps were a fight for the overall win.



HANS HERRMANN

GÉRARD LARROUSSE

