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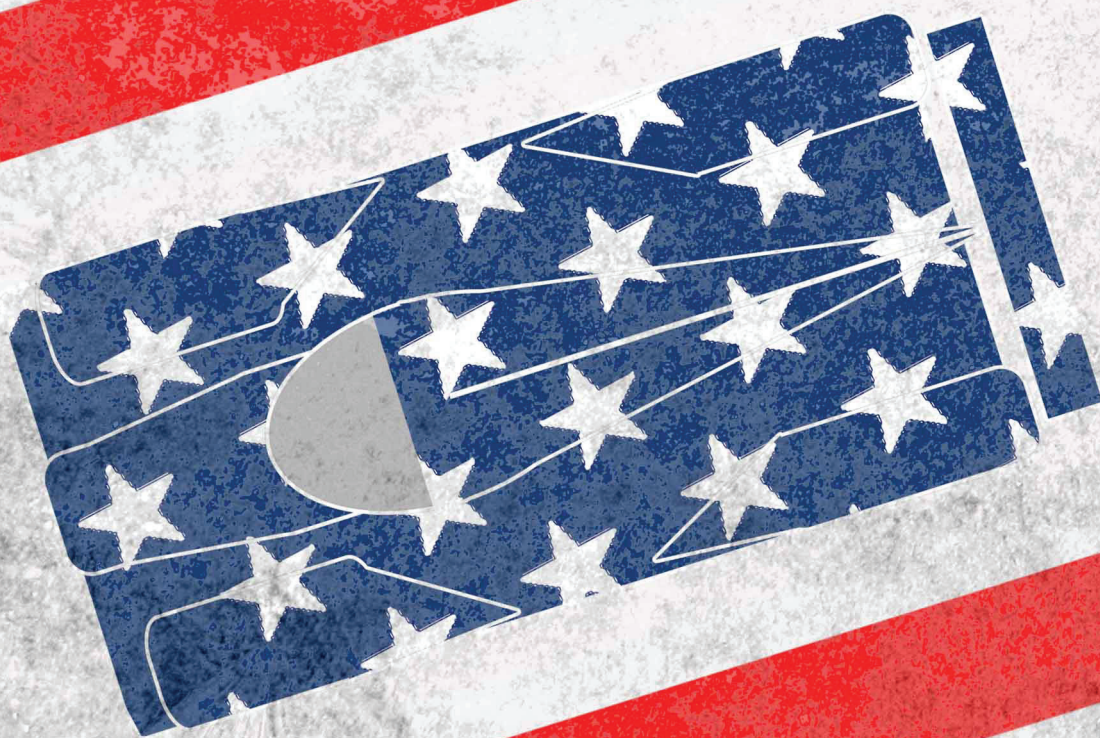
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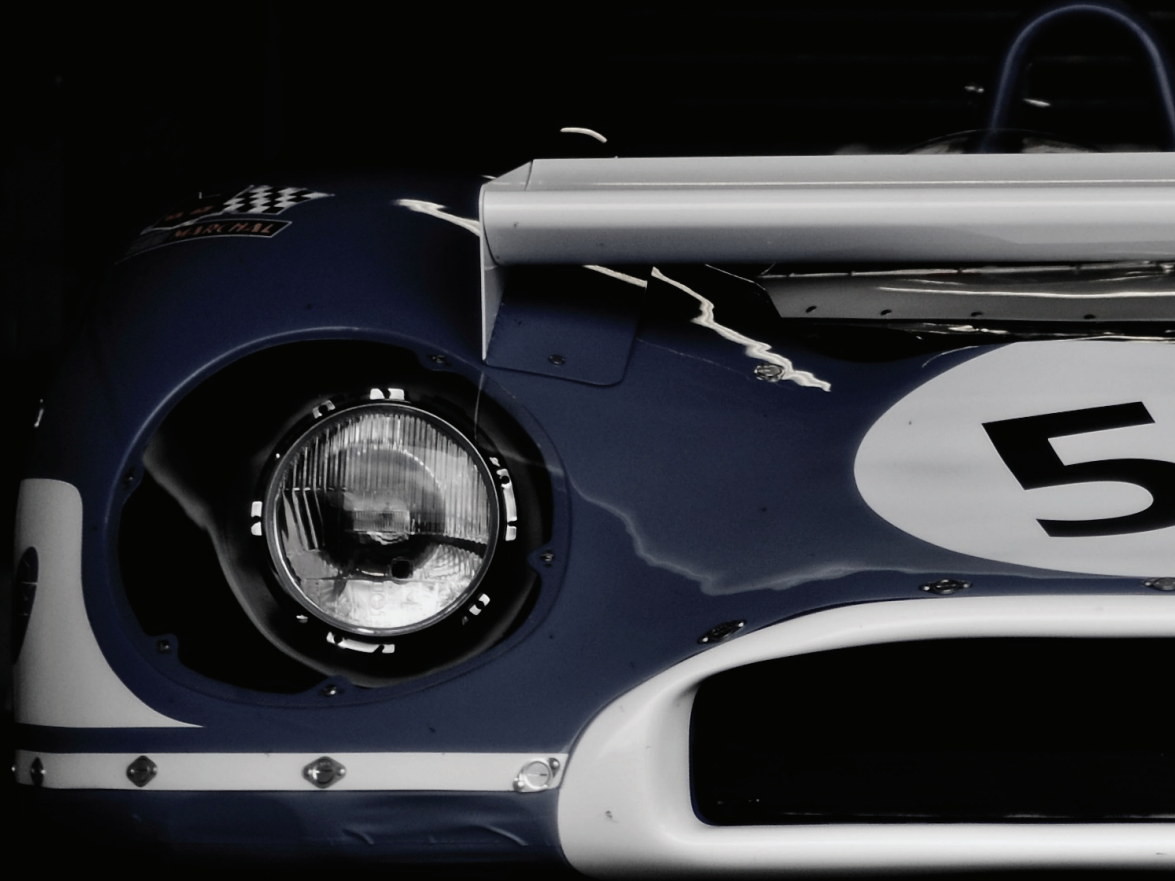
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essential

Spa Francorchamps

As part of an occasional series, let us introduce you to some of the world's great tracks, venturing into the forests of the Ardennes, with Belgium's great gem.

Words: *Stephen Errity*
Photos: *Jake Yorath*

Spa-Francorchamps is everything a great motor-racing circuit should be. It's as simple as that. It has sweeping elevation changes, legendary corners, breathtaking background scenery and the richest of historical traditions. Almost every discipline of the sport, from single-seaters to touring cars to sportscars, considers this place hallowed ground. With that in mind, can you truly call yourself a motor-racing fan if you've never been here? Fortunately, there's no shortage of events to attend in 2012 if you've yet to tick this particular box on your motorsport bucket list.

It all kicks off with the first European round of the World Endurance Championship on 4-5

May. Yes, Peugeot have pulled out of the series, but there's still a lot to get excited about. Audi's R18 turns hybrid for 2012, and faces a new challenge in the form of Toyota's TS030, with some familiar faces behind the wheel. We'll also get to see the unlikely return of the Aston Martin AMR-ONE, which has been rescued from under the dust cover by the indomitable Henri Pescarolo. Not content with resurrecting one supposedly defunct prototype, the French institution has teamed up with Japanese constructor Dome in an attempt to finally realise the potential of the sublime S102.

Both Pescarolo entries, along with the works Toyota, will be making their first competitive appearances at the Spa WEC round, having skipped the WEC's season opener in Sebring, so it's very much a case of 'the season starts here'. Also joining the fray in LMP1 will be British privateers JRM and Strakka Racing, running the advanced HPD ARX-03a, and 2011's leading petrol outfit Rebellion Racing, with two examples of the latest iteration of Lola's familiar LMP coupé. Add to the mix a now fiercely competitive LMP2 field, and the usual spectacular and varied selection of GT cars, and you have a weekend not

to be missed.

Taking place smack bang in the middle of summer, the long-established 24 Hours of Spa (28-29 July) is the jewel in the circuit's crown. The history of this event stretches back almost as far as its more celebrated counterpart in Le Mans, but for much of its existence it catered solely to touring cars and thus was off the radar of dedicated sportscar nuts. The past several years have seen the race grow in stature, and for 2012 it once again serves as the blue-riband event of the Blancpain Endurance Series, a championship that already has a 50-car grid for its opening round at Monza in April. Spa is by no means compact, but it is more manageable than the sprawling Circuit de la Sarthe - it's possible to walk the entire perimeter on foot, and we'd definitely recommend you do this either as the sun sets or rises during the 24 Hours. Drink in the atmosphere - circuit racing doesn't get any better than this.

If WEC and Blancpain leave you still wanting more, there's always the more relaxed vibe of the Spa Six Hours on 21-23 September, the perfect antidote for those end-of-summer blues. Fans of the Silverstone Classic will find much to like here, including



Can you
truly call
yourself a
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never been
here?

the highest possible standard of historic racing cars, a massive entry list and a magical endurance race going from daylight into dusk. Unlike the Classic though, there is little in the way of off-track distractions like trade villages and pop music concerts - it's all about the racing.

And if you just can't get enough of Spa's sweeping curves and intoxicating atmosphere, there are a number of lower-profile events taking place in 2012, including a 12-hour race for the silhouette machinery of the Belgian Touring Car Series on 9-10 June, a 25-hour VW Fun Cup event on 7-8 July, the Superstars Series on 14-15 July, and for the truly hardcore, the Citroen 2CV 24-hour race on October 27-28.

Where's the best place to spectate from at Spa? The simple answer is everywhere, but there are a few key points you shouldn't miss on any trip. Eau Rouge is the obvious candidate - it takes a few minutes to process just how steep the ascent here is the first time you see it, and the exit of the corner at the top of the hill can play host to some very hairy moments. Further around the lap, the extremely fast double-apex left-hander at Pouhon and even faster left-hand kink at Blanchimont are great places

to observe exactly which drivers are pushing the hardest and whose car is working best, as they demand ultimate grip and downforce.

Whatever event you choose to go to, it's worth mentioning a couple of things about Spa. First off, it's very easy to get to, particularly for those based in the South of England. A couple of hours on the motorway from the Eurotunnel terminal at Coquelles will see you there, making quick weekend getaways to this racing holy grail very easy. And for those coming from further afield, it's not far from either Brussels or Charleroi airports.

The second thing to remember about Spa is something all too familiar to regular visitors: the weather. Spa is more spread out than most racetracks, and its location in the undulating valleys of the Ardennes forest makes it particularly susceptible to changeable weather conditions. So no matter how clear the sky looks before you head off on your trek up to Les Combes, bring some wetgear! It gets rather steep in parts, too, so comfortable walking shoes are highly recommended. Finally, don't leave the confines of the circuit until you've consumed at least one paper cone of frites with mayonaise - don't knock it!





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Watch Out

We're expanding our Blancpain Endurance series coverage in 2012, starting in Monza on April 14th. Look out for live text, interviews, galleries and features throughout the season.

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invincible



Audi's new R18 E-Tron Quattro was launched to much fanfare at the end of February. Can anyone stop it claiming victory in June?



Words: *Jake Yorath*
Photos: Audi

Let's get this out of the way now: Audi are the strongest team ever to compete at the Le Mans 24 Hours. The team was built specifically to win Le Mans, and has done just that - ten times. That they have achieved that number in just a dozen outings, tells you all you need to know about the team and their machines. In 2006, they moved their own goalposts by releasing the R10 TDI, and in 2012 they've done it again.

e-tron quattro, they've called it, and boy, it's got a legacy to look up to. The car is largely similar to the standard diesel R18, the third generation diesel prototype from Ingolstadt, with the same 3.7 litre turbo V6. The car is solid (particularly in a crash...) and won Le Mans last year, though it has to be said there were problems. Audi have not rested on their laurels and progression has been swift and sweeping.

The main difference in the e-tron is that it is (and whisper it) a hybrid. This car is quite a distance away from Steve McQueen's Le Mans, and even some distance from the R8 LMP that

started it all in 1999. It's the first properly serious hybrid - let's be fair, the Hope Oreca wasn't ever going to win Le Mans, but E-Tron has a genuine advantage, should the technology be reliable.

Firstly, in performance. The electric motors power the front wheels (though only above 120kph) which will be a real stand out in terms of grip, and particularly in the rain - something Audi's Le Mans prototypes have already been very good at in the past. Just look back at Tom Kristensen's seminal overnight performance in 2008, where the Audi was able to lap considerably faster than its Peugeot rivals, an advantage that has often repeated itself in changeable conditions. Adding extra front drive to that mix will only strengthen their play.

Secondly, in economy. Used correctly (and if any combination of drivers, engineers and crew chiefs can do it, this one can) the hybrid would be worth a considerable fuel advantage over the course of a stint. Though the ACO have cut the fuel tanks for the hybrids, it's by a



negligible amount - just a two litre difference between their tank (58 litres) and the standard diesel tank (60 litres). It should mean that the car is on track longer, and probably will save a pitstop - possibly multiple pitstops. Add to that the extra nudge forward the system could give when it kicks in, especially in traffic, and this system could be deadly.

Before the e-tron even debuts, however, the car has undertaken a big development program. The R18 Ultra, e-tron's non hybrid cousin, is reportedly rather evolved under the skin, with an all carbon gear case (a first for sportscar racing, according to Mike Fuller of mulsannescorner.com) and subtly tweaked aero dynamics headlining the changes. That gearbox is a continuing attempt to address the issue of getting weight balance toward the larger front tyres now common on LMP1 machines, notoriously difficult to bring up to temperature. By making the rear end lighter, they can bring the distribution of mass forwards. Alongside this, the team had to face up to the fact that the car was simply too hard to see



E-Tron (right) is joined by Ultra version of the R18 (diesel only, no hybrid power). Three Ultras will take the start at Sebring and the E-Tron will debut at Spa.

out of. The revised version is said to have sorted this, which will help the drivers to avoid the niggling clashes that slowed them down in 2011, as well as the sizeable accidents at Le Mans - both of which could have been put down to visibility.

And let's not forget, these cars aren't just going to be developed and handed out to any Johnny Nobber who fancies his chances at the world's greatest race. No, these cars are run by the best team in the world: Audi Sport Team Joest. The same Team Joest that won back to back Le Mans with the same chassis twice, in 1984-1985 with Porsche 956 and in 1996-1997 with TWR-Porsche WSC95. In total, Joest have won Le Mans 11 times, more than any other team in history and, in combination with the factory support Audi Sport bring, are as close to the perfect team as it is possible to be.

Don't look to the driving squads for a weakness, either. Between their 12 pilots, there are 19 overall Le Mans wins, including the master himself,

McNish had something of a down year in 2011, with a number of clashes (arguably thanks to over driving) marring his season, but don't for a moment expect that to continue. Number 1 will be carried by last year's crown jewel winning crew, billed by many as the 'future' of endurance racing: Marcel Fässler, André Lotterer and Benoît Tréluyer. A few onlookers pegged Fässler as a 'weak' link in the car at the 24 Hours last year - don't believe a word of it. The Swiss will hold his own in the car alongside two of the fastest sportscar crewmen around. These two cars are full season WEC entries, both will be hybrids at Le Mans, but only one will be hybrid after Le Mans (if all goes to plan).

The third car, which races at Sebring and Le Mans only and will not feature a hybrid system, features 2010 winners Romain Dumas and Timo Bernhard (neither short of talent), who are joined by Sebring '11 winner Loïc Duval. Duval is a superb signing for the team and is another star very much on the rise.

Finally the 4 car, whose main aim is Le Mans, will be steered by a youthful crew. Marco Bonanomi (reserve driver in 2011) and Oliver Jarvis (DTM and ex Kolles Le Mans) are joined by '10 Le Mans winner and full time DTM convert Mike Rockenfeller.

With Toyota barely toeing the water in 2012 and no works program from Honda, it certainly seems an easier year for the four rings than 2011. That said,

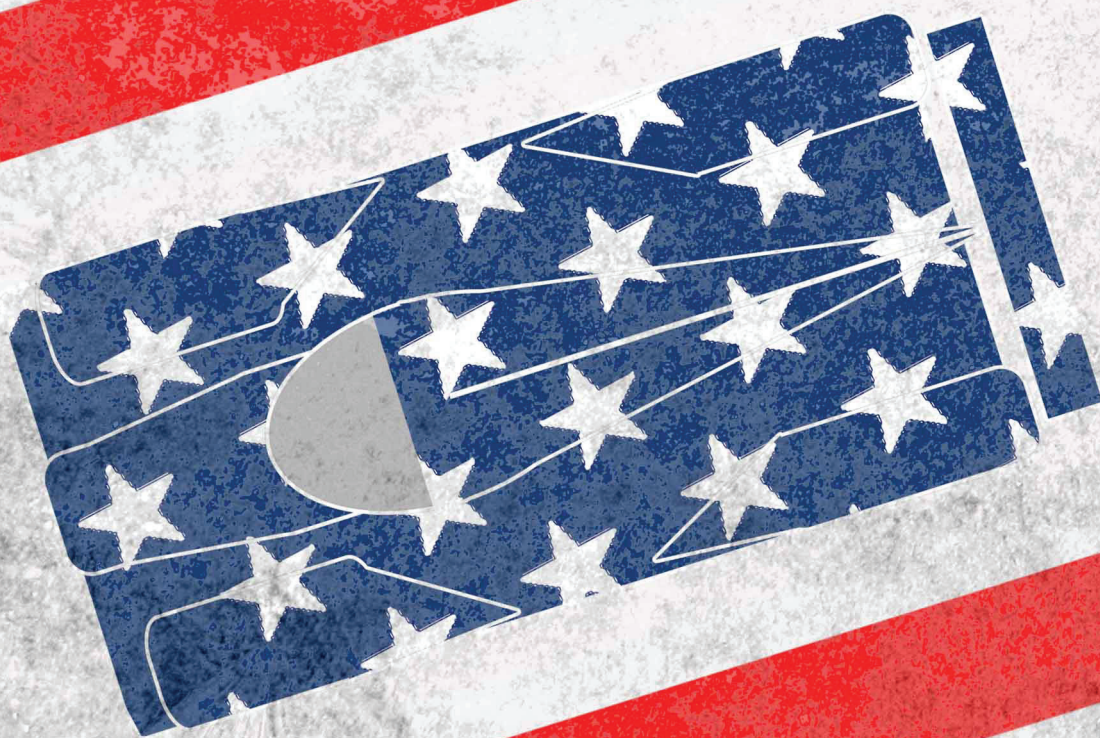
the new works hybrids from Japan are unlikely to be slow or fragile - give that combination good driving squads, as Toyota have done, and the results could be impressive. HPD, too, showed great promise with their one outing in 2011 and with excitingly crewed full season WEC entries for both JRM (GT1 World Champions) and Strakka Racing, this season could be a lot closer than some people expect.

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Facing page:
The car has a stunning new livery evoking Quattrros past (and Star Wars' X-Wing)

Tom Kristensen. The great Dane has eight successes at La Sarthe to his name (an unequalled feat), including six in a row between 2000-2005. His team mates are, in comparison, average - three time Le Mans winner Rinaldo 'Dindo' Capello and twice winner Allan McNish. Together, they crew car number 2 before Le Mans, with McNish confirmed for the full season. It is fair to say that Scot





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HOW THE MIGHTY

Stephen Errity takes a look into how the Le Mans giant, Peugeot, appeared from nowhere - then fell apart.

Championship series come and go, but the Le Mans 24 Hours is a constant. That's why the big race is so special, and why victories there are particularly sweet. But its lofty status can also diminish very significant efforts and achievements that take place away from the Circuit de le Sarthe. It means that those looking back at Peugeot's 908 sportscar programme, either now or in years to come, might fail to appreciate just how successful and competitive this venture was if they only consider its Le Mans results. With that in mind, we've taken a broader look at this highly significant car's genesis, evolution and competition record.

FALL



Photo: Peugeot Sport

Peugeot's previous sportscar effort, the 905, arrived in the twilight of the Group C era. In 1991, its first full year of competition, the original model was thoroughly outclassed by the Jaguar XJR-14 over the first half of the season, which led to the development of a heavily revised 905B version. This car finished first and second at the Magny-Cours and Mexican rounds of that year's World Sportscar Championship, helping to secure second place in the team standings for Peugeot, ahead of Sauber Mercedes in third. Peugeot then swept all before it in 1992, but

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With corporate pride on the line, beating Audi would be the only acceptable outcome.

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at this point, most of the opposition had deserted the series. Toyota was only starting to develop its TS010 and was therefore not able to mount a strong challenge to the 905. It would be going too far to call the 905B's Le Mans wins in 1992 and 1993 'hollow victories', but there have certainly been much more competitive Grands Prix de L'Endurance over the years. Nonetheless, this was a solid legacy to build on in years to come.

After forays into F1 (far from a happy hunting ground) and rallying (an old Peugeot favourite, and it showed), Peugeot once more set its sights on endurance racing in the mid-noughties. But this time there could be no charges of taking

HOW IT



Photo: Peugeot Sport

BEGAN

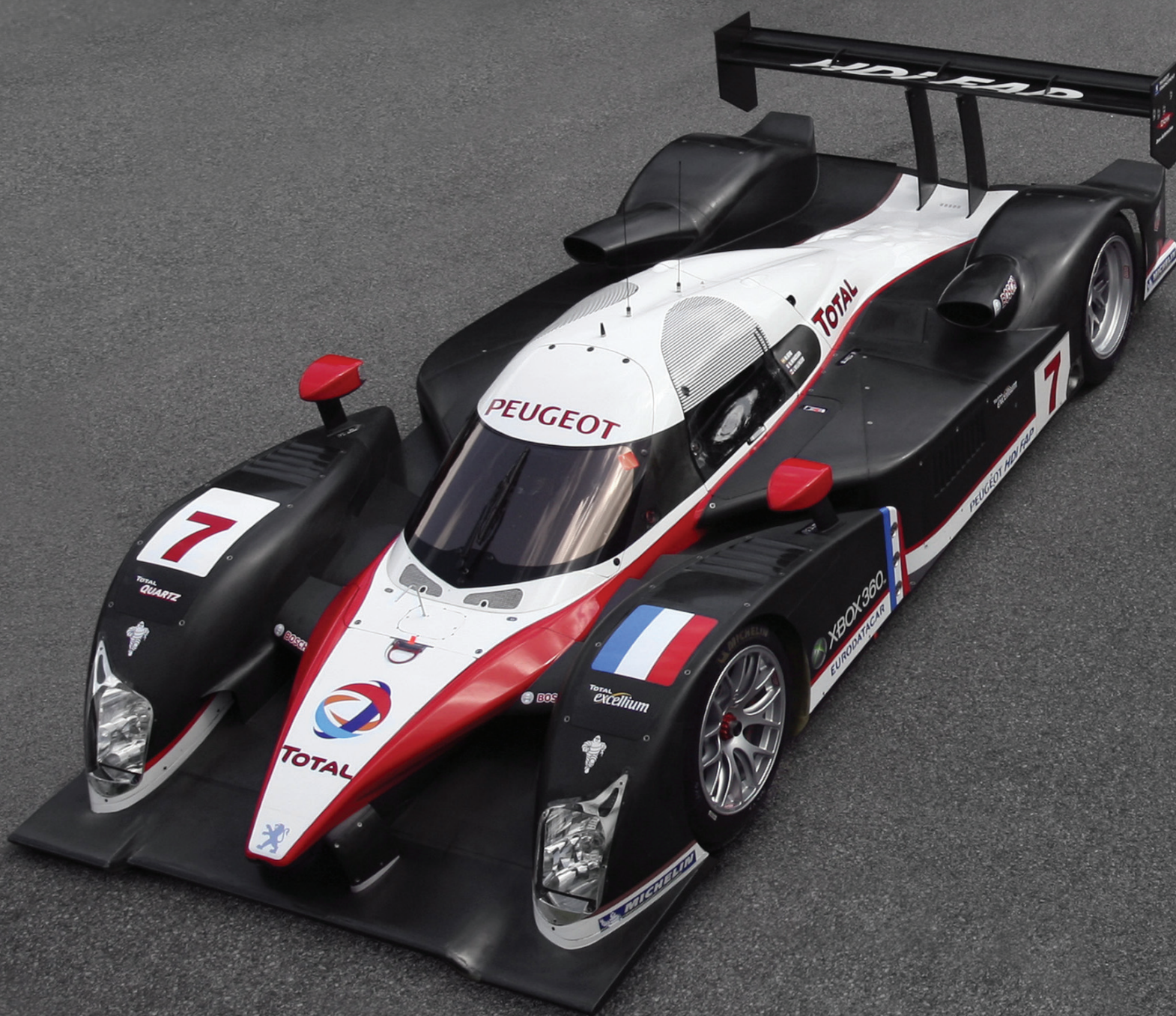
on unconvincing opposition. Audi had won six of the seven Le Mans preceding Peugeot's arrival in 2007, a level of dominance not seen since the 'Porsche years' of 1982-87. Audi's strategic prowess, quick and fuel-efficient cars, lightning-fast pitwork and very strong reliability seemed an unbeatable combination, but with Peugeot's corporate pride (and money) on the line, beating Audi would be the only acceptable outcome.

During the 908's development, Peugeot decided to both design and produce its new Le Mans car in-house, and also elected to go with a closed-roof chassis, in contrast to the ultra-successful open-top Audis. An open car was considered, however Peugeot did not go as far as building and racing both types, as Audi had done back in 1999. An early concept for the 908 was shown at the Paris Motor Show in September 2006, but this ended up bearing only a rudimentary resemblance to the finished article, which was unveiled in early January of the following year.

Evaluating the 908's design, the British designer of the Audi R8C and Bentley EXP Speed 8, Peter Elleray, called it 'a refreshingly independent approach' that was tailored to the limit of the ACO's regulations and showed no signs of slavishly copying Audi cues. There was a nod to the 905 in the form of the very small cockpit doors that did not encroach on the sidepods: vital for the significant cooling requirements of the 908's V12 diesel engine. In many ways, this motor was the star of the show. Peugeot's initial announcement of the programme at the 2006 24 Hours focused more on the advanced common-rail 100-degree vee engine than the chassis it would be fitted to. It featured twin Garrett turbochargers, displaced the maximum allowable 5.5 litres and produced an estimated 700bhp, plus a titanic 1200Nm of torque, sent to the wheels through a Ricardo six-speed transmission.

There was no doubting that Peugeot meant business.







UNDERSTANDING THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

The 908 had an easy start to its competitive life: the 2007 Le Mans Series. It faced no works opposition there, as Audi was still concentrating its whole-season efforts on the American Le Mans Series. The #7 and #8 cars (driven by Nicolas Minassian/Marc Gené and Stéphane Sarrazin/Pedro Lamy respectively) clinched three wins apiece, with Sarrazin and Lamy's more consistent scoring in their other races helping them take the driver's title. But there were warning signs of poor reliability, and the petrol-powered Pescarolo car was still in outside contention for the title until the final round in Brazil. Peugeot's prodigious speed advantage over its privateer competition meant it could afford the odd extended pit stop in these races, but going up against Audi would afford no such luxury.

And so it proved. At Le Mans that year, the 908 went head-to-head with the R10 for the first time - and lost. Joining the full-season drivers were Sebastien Bourdais (#8) and Jacques Villeneuve (#7). Bourdais was in the final year of his imperious four-year domination of the US Champ Car series, but Villeneuve was a stranger choice, having ignominiously ended his Formula 1 career with BMW

Sauber midway through the previous season. In the end, only one Peugeot finished, well down on the winning Audi of Marco Werner/Emnaule Pirro/Frank Biela. In qualifying, the 908 was untouchable for single-lap place, but once it got down to the remorseless grind of the 24 hours, it was unable to match the Audi R10's ability to run close to the limit for hours on end.

2008 opened with the 908's first Stateside jaunt, to take part in the Sebring 12 Hours, another race that had been an exclusive Audi benefit going back to 2000. As it happened,

neither Peugeot nor Audi would take victory this time around, the spoils instead going to Roger Penske's LMP2-class Porsche RS Spyder - the first time in 24 years that the race had been won by a car outside the top class. Back in Europe, the Le Mans Series opener at Catalunya was an important milestone for the 908, as it took on and beat a works Audi R10 for the first time. That momentum carried in to qualifying at Le Mans, where once again the 908s comprehensively outpaced the Audis. For the first half of the race, everything seemed under control, but then the heavens opened and the R10s immediately began reeling in the hapless Peugeots. Another Le Mans Series title might have soothed the blow, but a disastrous final race of the season at Silverstone saw Audi's Alex Premat and Mike Rockenfeller snatch the title from under Peugeot's nose, despite not having won an LMS race all year. Nic Minassian crashed at high speed on the Hangar Straight, before Sarrazin was forced to pit for repairs after tangling with eventual race winner Dindo Capello's Audi. Heading into 2009, Peugeot Sport was left licking its wounds and with a lot of thinking to do, both on the strategic and technical fronts.

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The 908 went head-to-head with the R10 for the first time – and lost.
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Photo: Peugeot Sport







Photo: Peugeot Sport

VICTORY AT LAST



The first big change ahead of 2009 came at the top. Peugeot Sport director Michel Barge stepped aside in favour of Olivier Quesnel, who would now head up Peugeot's endurance racing activities while continuing to oversee sister brand Citroen's wildly successful World Rally Championship campaign. On the technical front, the 908's aero package was updated, and Peugeot also expended more effort trying to match Audi's slick pitwork and general operational excellence. The renewal would take a little longer to bear fruit, however, as the new Audi R15 TDI, piloted by the reliable crew of Capello, Kristensen and McNish, repeated the R8 and R10's achievement of winning on their debut at Sebring. Peugeot had pushed Audi hard, though, only losing the chance of victory with three hours left to run when Bourdais dropped out of a close second position due to a puncture. Remarkably, with the exception of Le Mans 2010 and 2011, that would be the last time Audi would beat Peugeot - the French Lion was about

to get into its stride. Neither Peugeot nor Audi ran full-season campaigns in the ALMS or LMS in 2009, choosing instead to concentrate on the big enduros at Sebring, Le Mans and Road Atlanta (although Peugeot did enter the Spa 1000km as a warm-up for Le Mans). Everything was falling into place now - qualifying at La Sarthe was a Peugeot whitewash, and the R15s had no answer for the 908s' pace during the race. There was an early scare when Lamy's car was released from a pit stop into the path of the 908 being run by Pescarolo, but as Audi hit problems of its own, the only real competition was between the Peugeots themselves. To the undoubted enormous relief of the board and management, David Brabham, Marc Gené and Alex Wurz eventually took the chequered flag, winning Le Mans for the brand for the first time since 1993. Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta also fell to Peugeot in 2009, though it was a much less satisfying victory, as torrential rain brought a halt to proceedings after only four hours.





TRIPLE DISASTER

2010 started out promisingly enough for Peugeot. Audi seemed to be on the back foot, skipping the Sebring 12 Hours in order to devote more time to a comprehensive overhaul of the R15 in order to get on terms with the now very well sorted 908s. The rivals' first confrontation would be at Spa, but as at Petit Le Mans the previous year, freak circumstances diluted the purity of competition - a power failure at the circuit causing the race to be halted and then restarted. Peugeot was victorious nonetheless, and within a matter of weeks the 908s were once again leaving the R15s floundering around La Sarthe.

The top brass must have felt assured that a serene repetition of the 2009 victory was on the cards. Then, the first hint of trouble: The suspension on Lamy's car collapsed, leading to instant retirement. It was worrying, but not hugely concerning. The #3 car had been given an almighty pounding over the kerbs during qualifying, and perhaps Bourdais' efforts to set pole position had gone too far. But much worse was to come as dawn broke: the #2 car also retired, but not with suspension failure. A brief fire in the engine suggested something was seriously amiss with the diesel powerplant, so the tension for the remaining works car, and the privateer Oreca machine, was ratcheted up a notch. Before the flag fell at 3pm, they too would fall by the wayside, leaving Audi to clinch a very traditional Le Mans victory on the strength of its cars' faultless reliability.

The Peugeot family had no choice but to dust themselves down and

focus on a new goal: the inaugural three-round Intercontinental Le Mans Cup (ILMC), the ACO's first step towards re-establishing the proper World Championship that sportscar racing had lacked since 1992. The series would consist of six-hour/1,000km races at Silverstone and Zuhai in China, either side of the familiar jaunt to Georgia for Petit Le Mans. To Peugeot's credit, the cause of the multiple engine meltdowns (conrod failure) was diagnosed and then reported in a frank and detailed press release, allowing everyone to move on from the June disaster. And move on they did. Three wins from three races, ranged against the Audi R15+ every time, saw Peugeot sweep the inaugural ILMC and reaffirm its status as the team to beat at the top of the sportscar tree. Yes, Audi would probably have claimed Petit Le Mans were it not for an unusual problem involving Dindo Capello's helmet insert blocking his vision, but it was nonetheless the best possible end to a very bittersweet season for the French team.

In the final analysis, it's hard to see the original 908 as anything other than highly successful. It won 19 of the 28 races it entered and, after some tweaking, fulfilled the programme's initial aim of winning Le Mans in 2009, and added the 2010 ILMC title for good measure. But its record will forever be blighted by the disastrous quadruple engine failure at Le Mans 2010, which almost certainly denied the team back-to-back victories at its beloved home race. Still, despite this serious setback, the next chapter for Peugeot had already begun.





Photo: Peugeot Sport





A NEW BEGINNING AT THE END

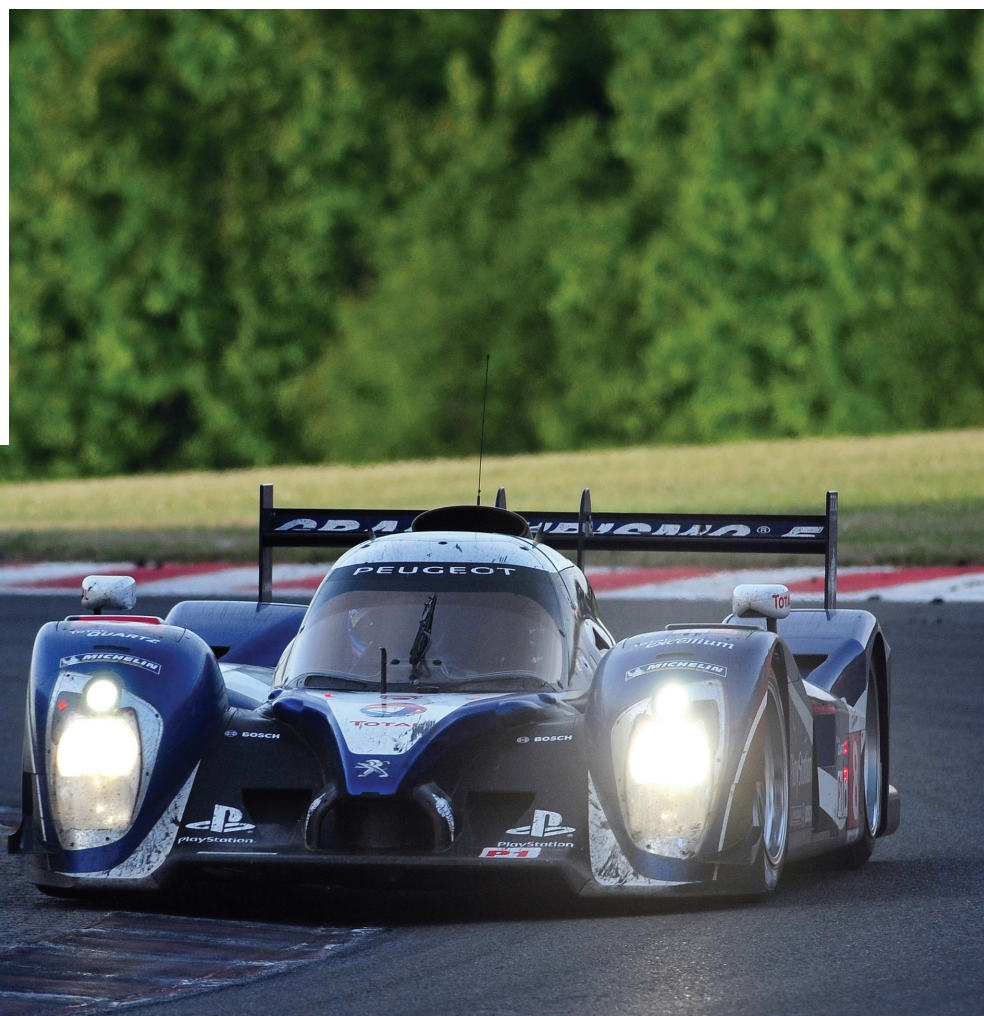


Photo: Dan Bathie

The 908 HDi FAP's Le Mans win in 2009 had taken a huge amount of pressure off Peugeot Sport's shoulders, and was also an important factor in persuading the company's board to fund the development of a new car and engine to meet the revised 2011 regulations. Development took place throughout 2010, and the new 3.7-litre V8 diesel-engined machine, badged simply 908, made its race debut at Sebring in 2011. The move from V12 to V8 engine configuration saw the vee angle go from 100 to

squad beat the works team at Sebring with a 'grandfathered' 908 HDi FAP at that event, but the first face-off between the 908 and the all-new Audi R18 TDI at Spa in May showed that Peugeot was on the right track. The new car finished one-two, despite a disastrous qualifying session that saw all Peugeot's entries start well down the grid - the ideal springboard for its assault on Le Mans. But the 2011 24 Hours proved to be a great deal more dramatic than Peugeot would

pants racing is not something Audi had become known for thus far in its endurance racing career, but it learned fast. The crews of both the remaining #2 car and the two retired entries pulled together and hung on for a remarkable win, much to the frustration of Peugeot, whose three works cars filed home second, third and fourth. The reliability demons of 2010 had been exorcised, but despite the use of questionable tactics by some of the French team's drivers, victory once again slipped from their grasp.

But there was still the ILMC to focus on. The inaugural season of the 'World Championship in all but name' had proved to be a happy hunting ground for Peugeot so far. Sebring had slipped from its grasp, but the win at Spa and second place at La Sarthe put the squad in a good position heading into the post-Le Mans phase of the season. The first stop was Imola, an unusual venue for prototype sportscar racing, and its tight confines made performance in traffic even more important than usual. The 908's straight-line speed advantage proved decisive in this regard, and despite some hiccups while negotiating slower cars, the R18s were left trailing a lap behind.

Silverstone was up next, and it would not be so easy this time around. The ACO added an extra dimension to the contest by introducing a new technical regulation concerning the 'planks' affixed to the bottom of the cars. Their minimum permissible thickness was increased from 20 to 25mm, effectively forcing the cars to

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The 2011 24 Hours proved to be a great deal more dramatic than Peugeot would have hoped.

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90 degrees, and the reduction in capacity obviously resulted in a drop in power (to an estimated 550bhp), but the more compact eight-cylinder motor allowed for better weight distribution compared to the previous car. Elsewhere, Peugeot put great focus on improved aerodynamics to claw back lap time lost due to the horsepower deficit, and also dispensed with the power-sapping air-conditioning system of the HDi FAP, as this is no longer mandatory for closed cars under ACO rules.

Famously, the privateer Oreca

have hoped, and will go down in history as one of the all-time greats in the race's history. In qualifying, Audi reversed the trend of previous years and seemed to finally have got on terms with Peugeot's pace, as Benoit Treluyer put the #2 R18 on pole. The car continued to enjoy a laptime advantage over the 908 in the early stages of the race, before disaster struck both the #3 Capello/Kristensen/McNish and #1 Bernhard/Dumas/Rockenfeller cars while lapping GT runners.

Dogged, scrappy, seat-of-the-

run higher ride heights, with a knock-on effect for aerodynamics. But both teams found more traditional ways to hurt their chances: First, the #8 Peugeot with Franck Montagny at the wheel made contact with a Formula Le Mans entry. A broken wishbone and other front-end damage meant extensive repairs were required and any chance of a win was wiped out. Audi didn't have a clean run through the first hour, either, with Allan McNish coming together with a Ferrari at the exit of Becketts corner. The remaining Audi overhauled the Pagnaud/Bourdais Peugeot for the lead in the third hour, and for a while it was anyone's race, but damage to the Bernhard/Fassler Audi necessitated a rear bodywork change - this procedure put the car almost a minute down and handed victory to the #7 Peugeot.

Peugeot then made it three wins in three years at Petit Le Mans - a race which saw one of Audi's worst performances of the entire rivalry, and decided the outcome of the 2011 ILMC title in Peugeot's favour. Audi salvaged some honour by pushing Peugeot hard in the opening stages of the season-ending Zuhai race, but as the temperatures rose, the R15+ once again could not live with the 908's pace. It was a pretty fair and accurate representation of the state of play before Peugeot's board decided to pull the plug.

The record will show that second-generation Peugeot 908 raced for only one season, winning five of the seven races it entered, beating the Audi R18 five of the six times they raced together and collecting the 2011 Intercontinental Le Mans Cup title in the process. But it wasn't meant to end there. The car's envisaged competitive life ran until the end of the 2013 season, before another new set of regulations (and new competition, in the form of Porsche) arrived in 2014. A major



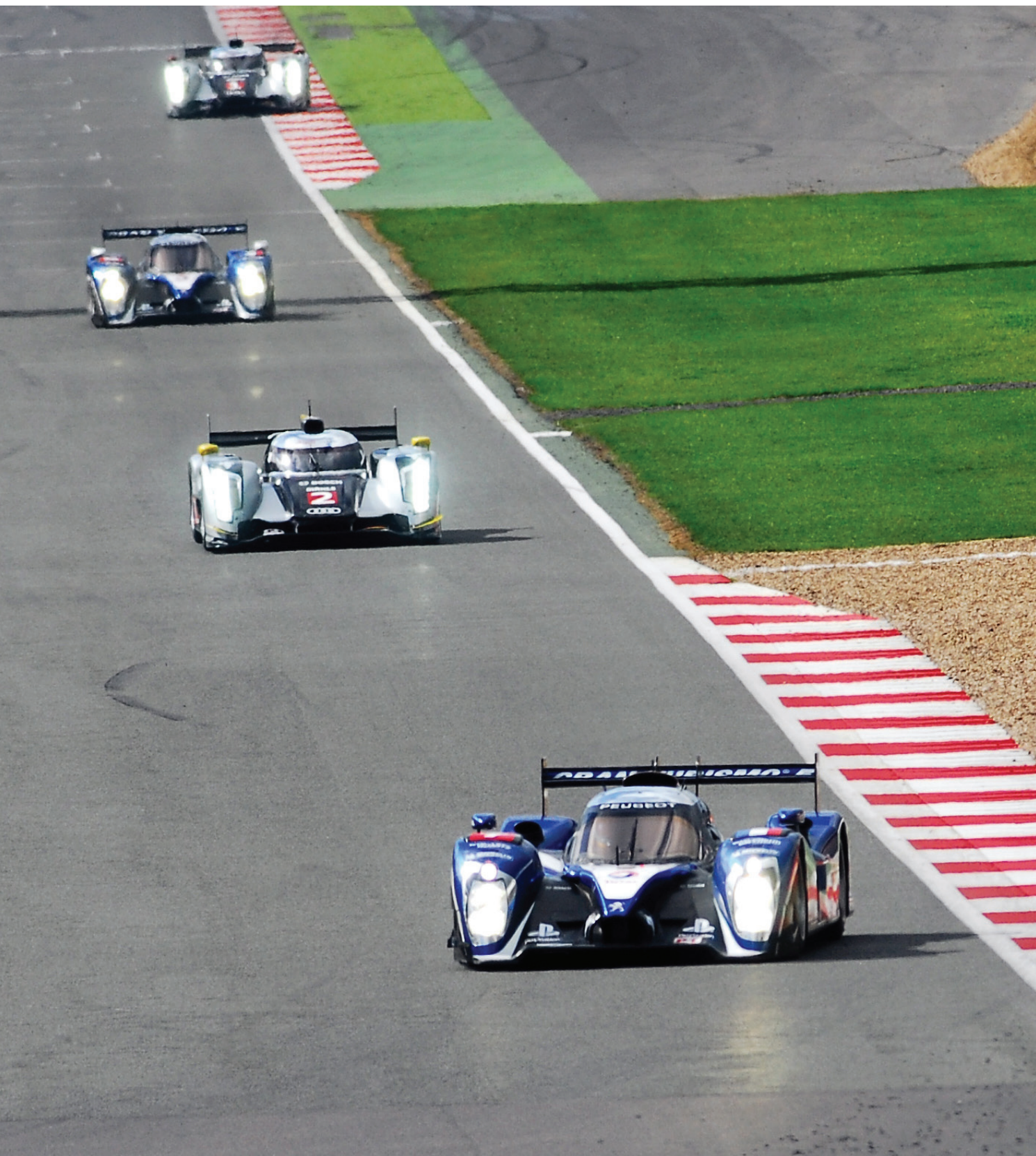


Photo: Dan Bathie

addition to the car was also on the cards for 2012: finally, after an initial version was shown in 2008, a hybrid drivetrain 908 would race in competition.

Yet as we now know all too well, it was not to be. Following Peugeot's sudden last-minute termination of its sportscar programme, a poignant run in front of Peugeot Sport staff at the company's Sator test track looks like being the last time the 908 Hybrid4 will be run in anger. Already it was proving to be up to a second faster than the diesel-only car in testing, and no doubt would have provided strong competition for Audi's diesel

hybrid 908 and Toyota's petrol hybrid TS030 in the inaugural World Endurance Championship season.

But sportscar racing now faces a new reality without Peugeot. The 908 Hybrid4 joins the pantheon of never-raced 'what if' cars, but the men and women of Peugeot Sport can hold their heads high. The programme may have been cut short in its prime, but it was harsh financial realities, not any serious failings on their part, that compelled the end. It's not the first time there's been an outcome like this in professional motorsport, and it won't be the last.



“*The 908 Hybrid4 joins the
pantheon of never-raced
‘what if’ cars.*”



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Sportscar racing fans all over the world have a love affair with Martini Racing. *Jake Yorath* attempts to explain why.

Earning your Stripes



Three colours - one that comes in two shades and one that occasionally changes. Eleven stripes of various widths. For many sportscar fans, the rainbow has a slightly different scheme - deep blue, light blue, red and white. Martini Racing stripes.

It all started with Porsche in the late 1960s, but it really kicked off with the arrival of those stripes in 1971, along the sumptuous lines of the near perfect 917 and her baby sister, the lightweight 908/3. The previous year had seen the 917 dressed as a hippy, but in '71 the stripes arrived and won the race. Not only that, but

they made the ill fated long tails look like Roman goddesses, too.

They arrived on the 911 in 1973 and those racing stripes were carried to victory in the Targa Florio. 1974 saw them adorn the brutal turbo RSR, suiting the hairy chested group 4 car just as well as they had suited the 917's subtle curves before. That, of course, is the key to a legendary livery, in that it can suit almost any car. Porsches 911 and 917, Lancias LC1, LC2 and the monstrous group 5 Monte Carlo (as well as various rally cars). It even made the Ford Focus look good.

They adorned those aforementioned Lancias throughout the eighties,



For many sportscar fans, the rainbow has a slightly different scheme - deep blue, light blue, red and white

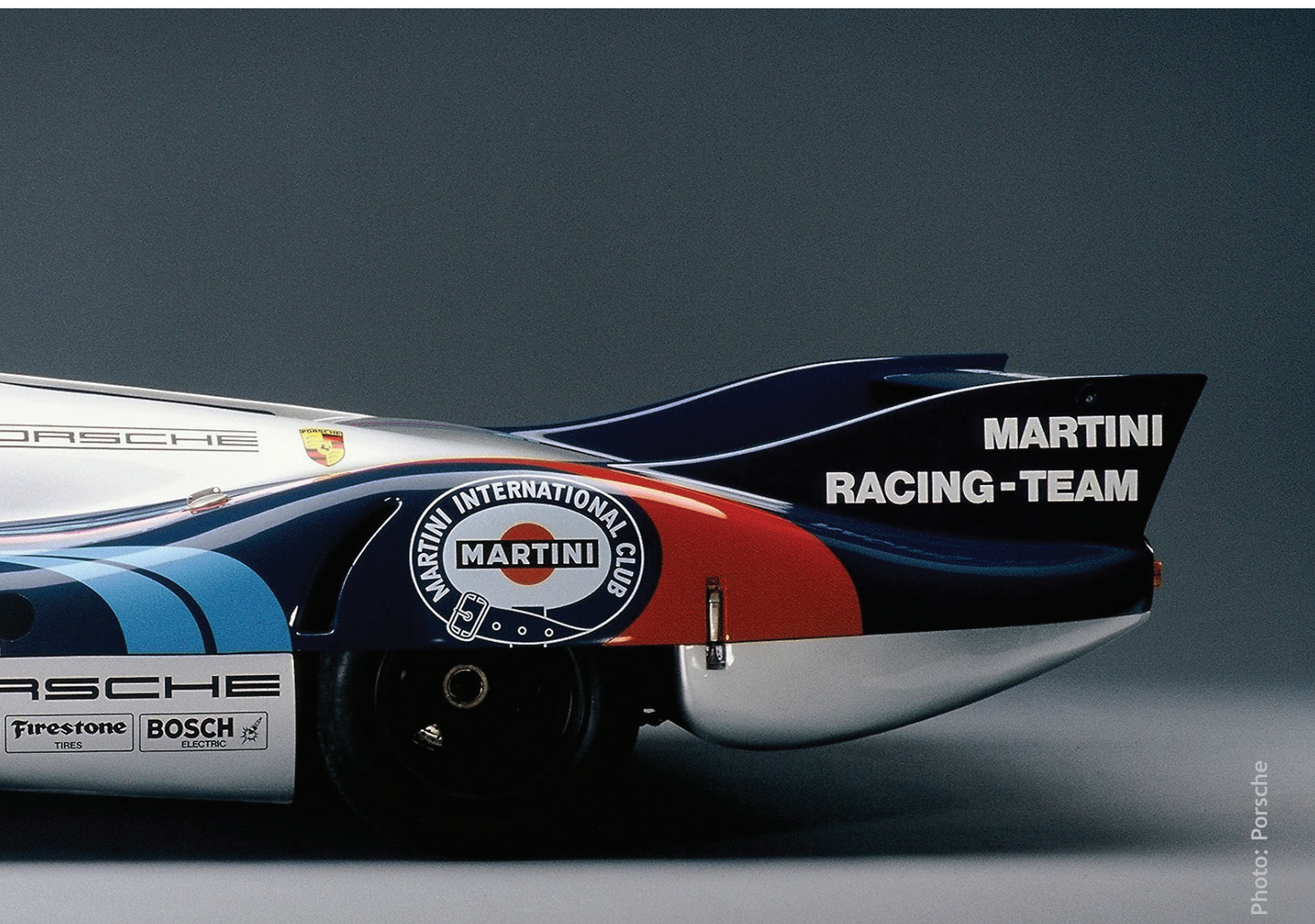


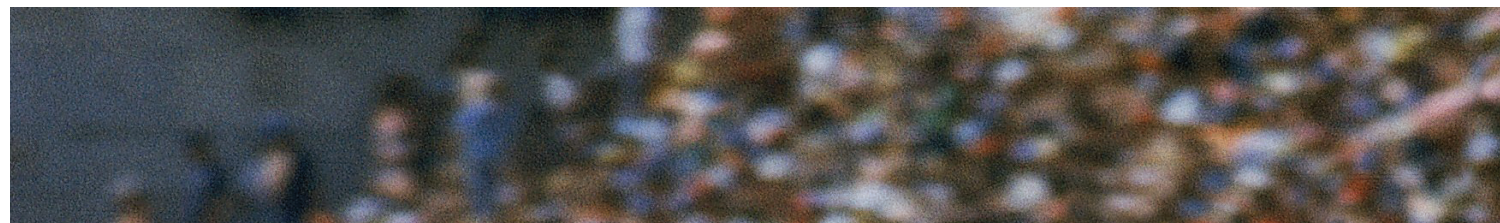
Photo: Porsche

It is best served mated to a flowing curve, streaming along and embellishing a stationary prototype with the illusion of 100mph





Photo: Lancia



making the heroic failure of the LC2 all the more glorious and memorable for the right reasons, and suiting the Monte Carlo's comedy arches just the same as the '74 RSR's.

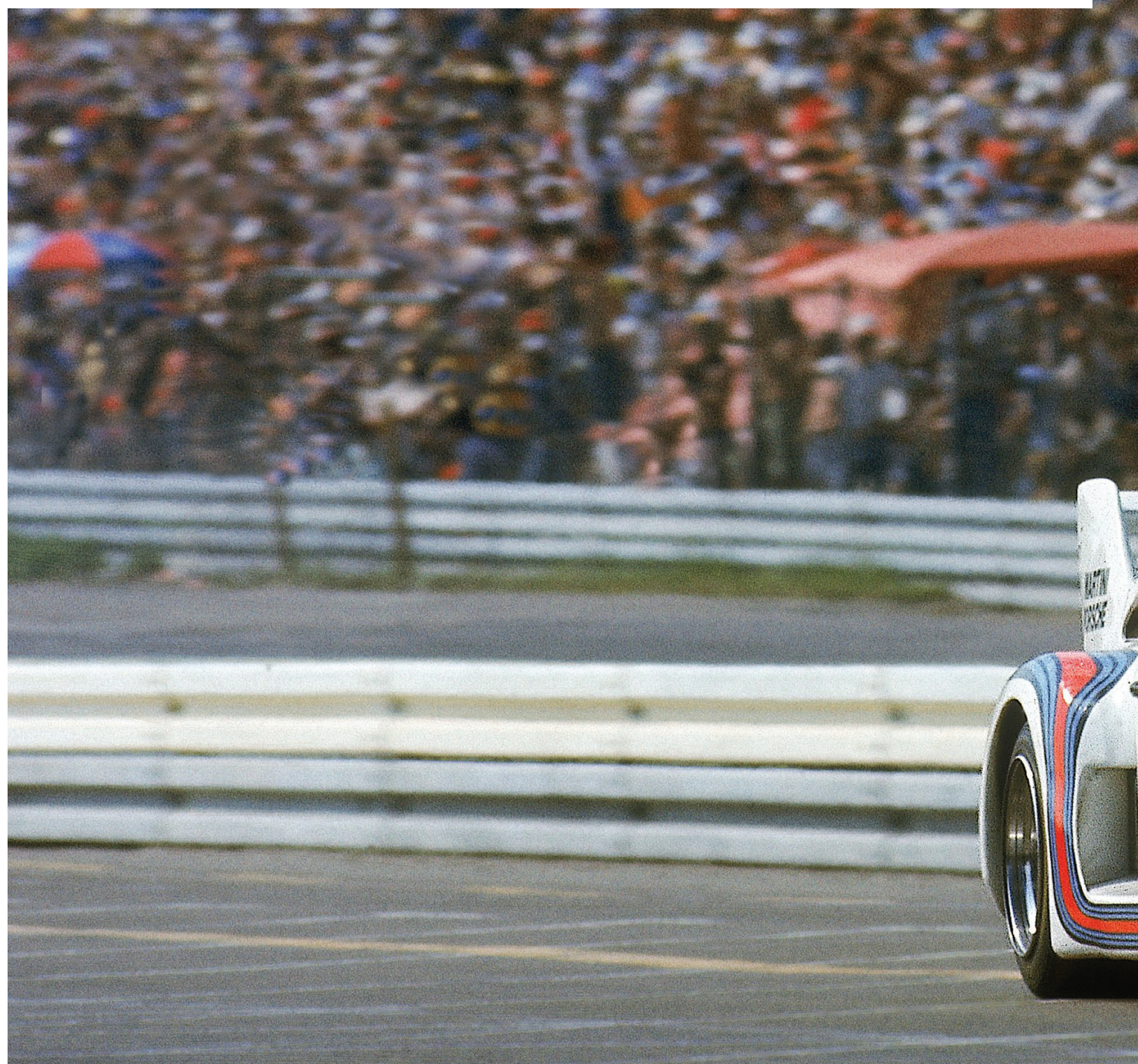
When used simply, as a stripe down the centre of the car on a silver shell, it is a livery that deserves a gallery all of its own, oozing class and style like an Italian in a well cut suit. But it is best served mated to a flowing

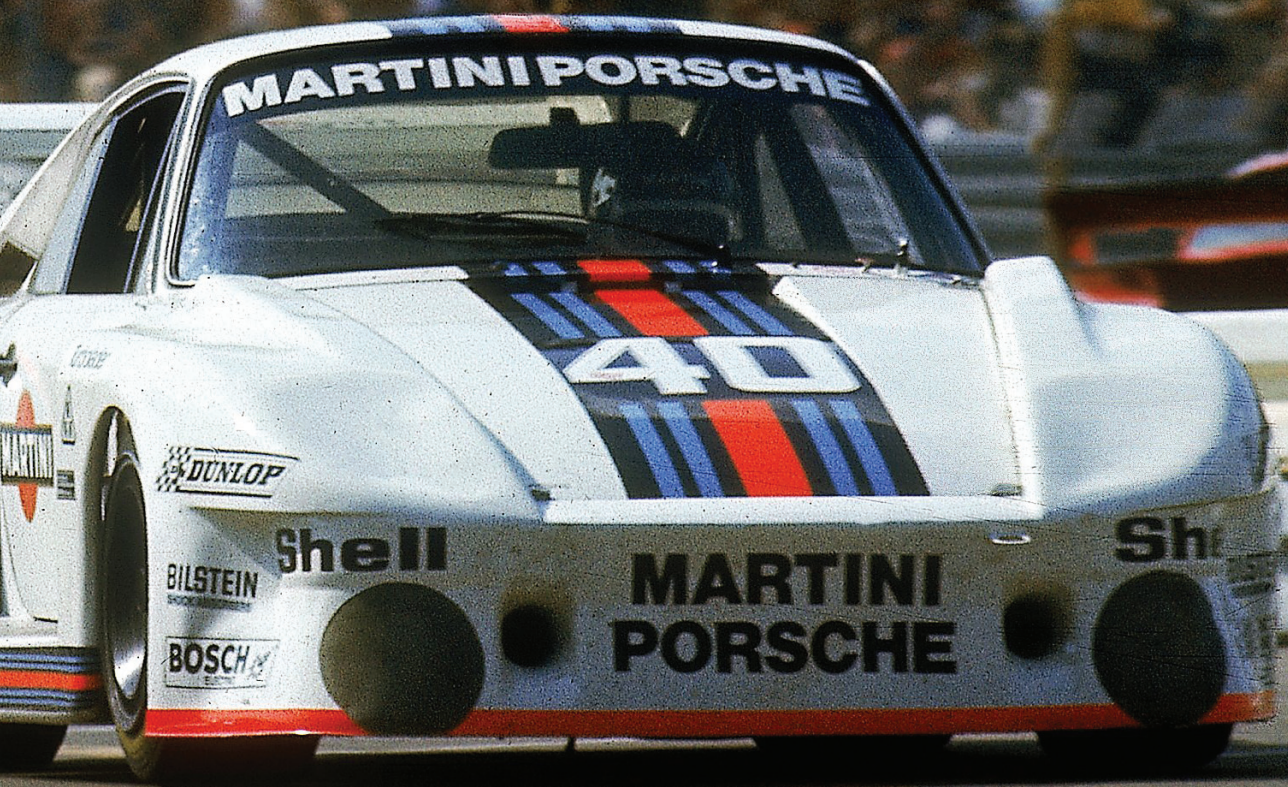
curve, streaming along a flank and embellishing a stationary prototype with the illusion of a 100mph dash. In that guise it is an Oscar winning leading lady, draped in a long silk gown and gliding into the room as if she were a ghost. Elegance laid along machinery.

You may believe that the praise is too gushing, too readily handed out. However, these cars were true

greats, driven by true greats - Gijs van Lennep and Helmut Marko (who won Le Mans together), Vic Elford, Bob Wollek, Michele Alboreto and Colin McRae to name but a few.

Some things in life don't change; the majesty of these stripes is one of those things, irrespective of the car they adorn. But my personal favourite? 935 Moby Dick. It doesn't get better than that.





*Sh*t*

PHOTOGRAPH

RAPHERS

say

It's time to put one or two things straight...

Words: *Jake Yorath*

————— *(Delete as appropriate)* —————

CANON

NIKON

IS BETTER THAN

CANON

NIKON

I hate this argument more than anything in the world and yet I seem to spend half my year telling everyone who'll listen that my Nikon equipment will do a big poo over my friend's Canon gear. At the end of the day, it really doesn't matter at all.

What makes the real difference between a good photograph and a great one is the person holding the gear, not the gear itself and, though better gear might help in improving your photography, it's pretty unlikely the five (or four, or seven) letters printed on the prism will change your life.

To be honest, you'd be better off practicing 'your mum' notes than trying to outdo your friends in a game of photographic Top Trumps! Of course, it is practically relevant and advisable to properly research your choice and keep vaguely up to date with the latest developments, because there are advantages to some brands. Choosing one of the 'big two' (Nikon and Canon) does mean you have a far greater scope of accessories and lenses, both branded and third party, to choose from. Many a friend has been frustrated by the lack of lenses on offer to him with a Sony or Panasonic choice, and this is an important consideration. But once you've made **your choice, stick with it and do the best you can with what you have.**

—JY—

YOU CAN'T GET
GOOD
PICTURES
— *from the* —
WRONG SIDE
— *of the* —
FENCE

I'm sorry to say it, but this is absolutely bollocks. Complete rubbish. I'm a photographer who is blessed, almost every time I shoot, with the chance to shoot from the media side of that fence, but not only did I build a portfolio good enough to get me accredited from the other side, I actively seek angles from both sides of the fence.

Yes, it is easier to get good images without the fence getting in your way, but it is more than possible to get excellent, gallery worthy photos from either side. In fact, at least one of my top five favourite photos from 2011 was shot from some way back in a spectator area, shooting through a crowd of fans - and I couldn't have gotten that shot from media side. Step back, have a look around. Kneel down. Take ten steps in any direction and your point of view totally changes.

I suppose this all revolves around the modern motorsport photographer's love for the head on shot, which is something I'm not sure I can fathom. In the digital era, there's no real risk in experimenting with new and different shots, because you're not having to pay to get a crap 36 roll processed. It's worth saying to yourself 'OK, today I will step outside my comfort zone' and live a little. So you might go home and find you only have five good images, but they'll be five really good images.

—JY—

I'll
NEVER
— *be any* —
GOOD
— *until I* —
UPGRADE
MY EQUIPMENT

This statement does have a little nugget of truth in it. You'll never get professional quality images with anything other than an SLR, and the technology has moved on such in recent years that this is a rather expensive proposition. However, while you're learning your craft, it is certainly not necessary to go out and spend £10,000 on two pro bodies and a 500mm F4.

My first camera was a Nikon D50, which has less mega pixels than my mobile phone, and I have taken some beautiful images with that camera body. I was still using it throughout 2011. Until 2008, I didn't have regular access to high quality glass, either, using a third party 70-210mm F4-5.6 lens that was an inexpensive (but, it turns out, invaluable) Christmas gift. Upgrading your glass is a very important step and in my opinion, a more important step than upgrading a body.

If you don't have decent glass, it's still possible to shoot good stuff, but you do have to be more careful. Shoot more pan shots (as softness in focus is less easy to spot - I defy you to spot the difference) and if you do shoot head ons, try and only let people see small res files!

At the end of the day, good talent will shine through despite the limitations placed on it, in photography as it does in motorsport.

—JY—

It's
ALMOST
IMPOSSIBLE
to get
MEDIA
ACCREDITATION
as a
PHOTOGRAPHER

You can't see it, but I'm currently banging my head against the wall in frustration (which makes any grammar errors in the next 200 or so words perfectly OK, incidentally). Where did all the photographers who are accredited appear from then?

It is not easy to get accredited for a motor racing event because if it was, there would be more accidents and there would be too many photos for too few outlets. It is also not a god given right that once you've been accredited once, you will always be accredited. Photographers in the media centre are forever complaining about the new kid who's got in their way, or is sat in their seat, while photographers behind the fence are forever complaining they never get an opportunity. It is impossible to please both parties, and for the part of the media officers who grant the accreditations, they will do what they see as best for their series. If you have never shot an event before and you apply for a World Championship, you are going to be turned away.

You need to build a very good portfolio and then approach media outlets and offer your services. I was lucky in that someone approached me, but when that opportunity died I created l'endurance. It is not impossible. Determination, tenacity and a thick skin are all necessary to get anywhere.

—JY—

My
TELEPHOTO
isn't
BIG
enough
I REALLY NEED
500MM

Deary me. As a photographer, I'm surprised I've never been sent spam offering me 'lens enlargement', or some kind of herbal wonderment that can enhance my millimetres. The telephoto is the great penis replacement of the media centre, with crowds occasionally gathering around a new or particularly impressive specimen. It's time to feel beautiful with what you have!

There's something to be said for a big lens, certainly - it can get you closer to nearby action, or give an opportunity to shoot a wild pan shot from a mile. But it is not the be all and all. My reputation (minimal though it almost certainly is, largely limited to friends...) has been built on big, open space pan shots with wide open sky, colourful crowd or expanses of green to fill the frame. They're not really all that difficult, and you don't need more than 100mm to get them, either.

On top of that, some of the best motorsport photos of all time (I'd argue most of the best) aren't close ups of cars taken from a mile away. They're atmosphere shots - a car dwarfed by its surroundings, a driver cracking a smile, a car's scuffed wing... You get the idea. Very few of these need a huge lens, they need a keen eye and an adventurous mind! As I keep saying, just keep trying and do the best with whatcha got.

—JY—



essential

Nürburgring Nordschleife



As part of an occasional series, let us introduce you to some of the world's great tracks. Thinking of travelling to the Eiffel mountain any time soon? Read up on the 'Green Hell'.

Words: *Stephen Errity*
Photos: *Julien Mahiels*



Nürburgring. Nordschleife. The Green Hell. Or just simply 'The Ring'. Different names, but they all inspire the same things: awe, fear and respect. This torturous 13-mile ribbon of tarmac, snaking its way through the deep forests of the Eifel Mountains in western Germany, is probably the most famous and evocative racetrack in the world. As most of us know, you can roll up, pay up and drive your own car around its hallowed curves. But your Nürburgring experience isn't complete until you've seen a proper race there. This is as far from the world of massive tarmac run-off areas, anodyne circuit design and sanitised spectacle that you're likely to get in the modern world, and you owe it to yourself as a motorsport fan to make the pilgrimage at least once

In Formula One terms, the story of the Nürburgring ends in 1976 - the year of Niki Lauda's horrific, fiery crash, which finally convinced the powers that be that modern Grand Prix cars could not race safely there. But the Nürburgring 1,000km World Sportscar Championship round had been running (with a few missed years) since 1953, and continued until the beginning of the Group C era. The 1983 event saw the late Stefan Bellof set the still-standing outright Nordschleife lap record of six minutes and 11 seconds while qualifying his Rothmans Porsche 956. But the next year, top-line sportscar racing also deserted the Nordschleife, in favour of the newly constructed, safer, but far less inspirational Grand Prix track next door. Nürburgring 1,000km races have continued to be held there until the current era - the 2009 Le Mans

Series event being the most recent visit.

But since 1970, a huge grid of less potent but more varied machinery has been pounding round the Nordschleife for 24 hours once a year, every year. This mixed GT and touring-car race is the main draw of the Nordschleife for sportscar fans today. And it's getting more popular every year, with fans and international works teams alike. At its heart though, it's still a German club racing event, run by the national governing body ADAC. Which means there's no other race on earth where you'll see the cream of GT racing talent from Audi, BMW, Porsche and others share the track with crews of have-a-go heroes in modest track-prepped VW Golfs and Renault Clios. The best illustration of this crazy combination can be seen in the pitlane. Seven cars share each garage, and all manner of friends, family, VIP guests, photographers, journalists and hangers-on are milling about, eager to be at the centre of the action. Amidst the chaos, well drilled pit crews do what they can to get their car in, fuelled, repaired and back out as quickly as possible. It's a blend of typical German commitment, application and organisation with an untamed, chaotic streak that makes

It almost goes without saying, but the Nürburgring is big. I'll say that again. It is really big.

this race genuinely deserving of that grossly overused adjective 'unique'.

So what can you expect as a spectator? It almost goes without saying, but the Nürburgring is big. I'll say that again. The Nürburgring is big. Really big. Anyone used to

parking their car, walking in the gate and spending the day wandering leisurely from corner to corner at a more conventional racetrack is in for a shock. Making the most of a visit to the full Nürburgring takes planning, perseverance and patience. You'll need to get a map, get in the car, expect some traffic jams and bring some walking boots. But it's all more than worth it.

You'll be one of approximately 250,000 fans to descend on the track for the weekend. Most of them are still German, but as more and more international racegoers hear about the fun to be had here, the Nürburgring 24 Hours is slowly becoming more cosmopolitan, like its more established French counterpart. Everyone here is definitely in a party mood, however, and it's worth tearing yourself away from the track action for a little bit to explore the legendary campsites. All around the perimeter of the track, hardy enthusiasts spend almost the whole week leading up to the race constructing a huge variety of impressively elaborate temporary structures to view the action from, and most will be happy to share a beer or some barbecued meat if you say hello.

But don't get distracted in there too long. The Nürburgring is all about the great corners. Possibly the most spectacular location on the track, the Flugplatz, is also one of the easier to access if you're coming from the pits complex. Prepare to stand open-mouthed for several minutes as the cars leap into the air over the crest of a rise at the end of the long Quiddelbacher straight, then sweep through a right-hander just after landing. Anyone lacking balls, precision and total commitment need not apply. The Schwadenkreuz left-hander is the next challenge. It's a fairly gentle and innocuous-looking corner, but a deadly camber change mid-way through can seriously unsettle a car, so watch for drivers being caught out here.

Heading for the village of Adenau allows you to access the track and walk back in the opposite direction to race traffic. Starting at the Breidscheid bridge, you climb uphill with the circuit to your right, peering down through trees at the action below. You'll eventually come to Metzgesfeld, which offers a nice view



of the double-apex left-hander after Adenaur-Forst. Another good entry point is Hohe Acht, towards the end of the lap. You'll need to park up and walk along a forest path for about 20 minutes to reach the track, but once there you can walk down through a campsite to the the Karussell, where front splitters and undertrays receive a merciless beating as the cars negotiate this semi-circular, banked concrete bowl with a rhythmic 'crash-crash-crash-crash' sound.

You can then walk back up the hill to Hohe Acht, before heading downhill in the opposite direction, walking in the same direction of the cars this time, past a series of sweeping left- and right-handers that drop down to the double-apex left at Brünchen: home to a large and very vocal spectator camp. The track then climbs again, passing through another opportunity to 'get air' at Pflanzgarten, before it reaches Döttinger Hohe - the Nürburgring's answer to the Mulsanne. If you're driving on the main road that runs parallel to the straight, turn off at the Bilstein bridge and park on the approach to it. Taller fans (or shorter ones on stepladders) should be able to peer over the advertising hoarding and get a stunning view of the cars cannoning down the straight towards them on the approach to the Antoniusbuche left-hand kink. Shortly after this point, the cars rejoin the modern Grand Prix circuit and begin another lap.

But these are just the highlights. There are scores of spectator points and hundreds of corners on the Nürburgring, and even 24 hours isn't enough to see them all. That's why you'll want to come back, year after year, to the race event and circuit that are truly like no other.

Get to the Nordschleife in 2012 with Travel Destinations. They offer great deals for the 24 hours, so there's no decent excuse not to go.

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