

Porsche Rennsport Reunion VI - Laguna Seca 2018

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Rennsport Reunion poster collection, from Rennsport I through VI

It's hard to know where to begin when writing a report on Porsche Rennsport Reunion VI. It was both an emotional and a sensory overload! A reunion with people not seen for a while, and the historical impact of all the rare cars. This was the sixth iteration put on by Porsche, and just when you think you had seen it all, Porsche improved it yet again.



Porsche 718-1500 RSK Spyder on display at the Chopard Heritage tent. This car, a 718 RSK Spyder (chassis #718-006), is powered by a 1498 cc double overhead cam Type 547/3 engine. This actual car finished first in class in the 1959 Sebring 12 Hours, first in class at Nürburgring in 1959, it won two hill climbs (Mont Ventoux and Davos) 1959, and finished second in the 1959 Berlin GP. Amongst its drivers were von Trips, Bonnier, Maglioli, Herrmann, Barth and Seidel. That is quite some provenance!



Porsche 917-053, the 1971 Le Mans winner in the hands of Gijs van Lennep and Helmut Marko

Rennsport was started by the late Bob Carlson with the help of Brian Redman in 2001. The first one was held at Lime Rock Park race track. As it expanded, it moved to Daytona for Rennsport II and III. Editions IV, V and now VI, have been held at the WeatherTech Laguna Seca Raceway.



IMSA Porsche crew chiefs (from L-R) Kevin Doran and Michael Colucci



John and Sandra Fitzpatrick (with author in the centre) came by and said hello!

A large placard as one entered the Porsche paddock enclosure summed up what the event was all about: “Porsche Rennsport Reunion is the world’s largest gathering of Porsche race cars, renowned drivers, legendary engineers, historians, collectors, and enthusiasts. It’s an event where we can gather to celebrate racing and pay tribute to the men, women and cars that have helped build the Porsche Legacy”.



(Above) Kremer K3 and K4 sit together in the Heritage display - only two K4s were actually built, this is #001; (right) Derek Bell drove his old car 962-HR1 which was part of the Gunnar Racing entry



Porsche does a superb job in organising this event. As you can imagine, the logistics of arranging it are challenging with hundreds of cars showing up. Many are brought from the Stuttgart factory to California just for this event, but most are however brought by private owners. Some race in the race groups, while others just sat on display in the magnificent Chopard sponsored Heritage display. This display was in the centre of the paddock under a huge tent. Cars here were on display by invitation only and were selected to represent the defining cars over the 70-year life span of Porsche. They ranged from the 1938 [Type 64 Berlin-Rome racer](#) to the 1951 356SL Gmünd coupe all the way up to the 919 Hybrid. While none of these cars were raced, a few did some demonstration laps, including the Type 64 Berlin-Rome racer!



Rebuilt from genuine parts saved by Otto Mathé, this is one of just two surviving Porsche Type 64 Berlin-Rome cars (chassis #38/42). This revolutionary race car entertained the crowds with a few laps!



Porsche Indy Car driven in the day by Teo Fabi, but it was Patrick Long who drove it for some of the time at Rennsport on demonstration laps only

One thing was guaranteed, you would certainly see at least one of every significant race car that Porsche has ever made (assuming you have the time to make the rounds). Hundreds, if

not thousands of Porsche fans, showed up with their road cars. There was even a paddock area just for the road car display. Porsche built a sort of 'village' in the paddock which included all kinds of attractions such as a 'goodie' store (which had lines of people waiting to get in), a large stage for interviews (which was also used for a concert on Friday night), technical as well as new car displays. A fan favourite was the driver pavilion where the drivers signed autographs, the lines here were always long.



Since I had to work, my good friend Chris Hill took my 917 book and collected signatures for me. Here Rudi Lins signs



Gijs van Lennep stopped by the Gunnar compound



The 1979 Le Mans winner, Bill Whittington, came by to say hello to the Gunnar Team

A link to a review of the fabulous book (being autographed above) on the Porsche 917 by the late Walter Näher can be found [here](#). Porsche used the Rennsport Reunion to announce a new car which would appeal to the track day enthusiast, the 911 GT2 RS 935!



New Porsche 911 GT2 RS 935



The 919 E Hybrid did some demonstration laps in the hands of factory drivers Neel Jani and Earl Bamber

You would also get to meet many, if not most, of the Porsche drivers who drove these cars in period. The list is too long to mention, as is the list of cars. I am not sure who the oldest driver there was, but they ranged from the era of Vic Elford, Brian Redman, George Follmer, and Willi Kauhsen all the way through to the current factory drivers (all of them). At recent events, Porsche has started a trend of also inviting some of the better-known engineers and team managers, and this year's list included John Horsman, Kevin Jeannette, Alex Job, Hartmut Kristen, Hans Mezger, Valentin Schaeffer, Norbert Singer and Alwin Springer.



(Above) Norbert Singer was all smiles when it came to the 962s; (right) Jerry Woods (left - Porsche engine builder for Dick Barbour, Bob Garretson, Kremer and others) and Drew Slayton (right - former chief mechanic for Interscope)



My Rennsport attendance started a few months ago, when I got a call from long-time friend

Kevin Jeannette. He and his wife Sharon own and run Gunnar Racing, a restoration and racing shop in West Palm Beach Florida. As it turns out, they have been in the business for 40 years this year! So, well done! He mentioned that they were bringing some 15 cars to Rennsport and signed me up to help the team. I had actually worked with the team before with the IMSA crew in the early 1990s on the Gunnar 966. Kevin and I also worked together on the Bayside team in 1987 and 1988. The Gunnar car list included no less than five 962 variants, three RS Spyders, two 935s, several Porsche cup cars, a 959-safari car, and several RSRs for display in the Chopard heritage tent.



(Above) Chopard Heritage display tent; (right) Derek Bell and Alwin Springer give a tribute to Al Holbert



Rennsport has turned into a full four-day event. Amazingly, several fans mentioned in passing that it needed to be longer, as there just was just not enough time to see everything and everybody, and to also enjoy the other attractions. I think four days is about the limit of endurance for most however.



(Above) Interior of 935 (#930 770 0904), the ex-Claude Haldi/Kannacher car, pretty spartan compared to today's race cars; (right) The interior of Bruce Canepa's 917-10 was clean enough to eat from, but who would want to mess up that interior with food and drink?





The ex-John Fitzpatrick 956-110 is up for auction by Sotheby's this month. This was the famous car that beat the factory cars at Brands Hatch in the rain

In the Gunnar mix of cars, some cars were for running and racing, and some were just for display. We had a great crew for the cars which included Bret Plazak (crew chief), Andy Jensen, Nolan Fingerhut, Martin Rabatie and his son Andrew, Tim Munday, Kevin Doran, Drew Slayton, myself, and Sharon Jeannette. Kevin Jeannette gave overall direction, but spent a lot of time with his Porsche duties, as he was one of the invited guests.



Jochen Mass drove the 917-028 Can-Am Spyder PA



There was no race for the 917 Turbos, but over a series of demo laps, Bruce Canepa gave this ex-Loos car (#917-10-017) some track time



Porsche 962-HR1, IMSA Single turbo version. According to the rules, the IMSA car could only run a street-based engine (930) which used a single turbo

Gunnar had just restored the 935-77 of Claude Haldi (Jürgen Kannacher) and it was in the livery as Haldi ran it at Le Mans. Drew Slayton, Andy Jensen and I spent most of the time working on this car. It was brand new and had not run, so it had a few teething issues, but all was sorted in the end and it ran well with Rod Emory driving. Not having driven a 935 single-turbo before, he mentioned after the first stint, that maybe the engine had some problems as there was a lot of turbo lag. We laughed and said, "No that is the way these cars are!" This car was also entered in the Rennsport Concours, so we waxed it and

vacuumed it out and it won the “Best Restoration” category. The second 935 did not run at all, this being one of the Peter Gregg cars that was sold to Bruce Leven. Hurley Haywood was to drive it, but he was so busy with the Brumos 917-10 and the IMSA Supercar of the early '90s, that he did not have time to drive it.



Freshly restored by Gunnar Racing, this is the 1977 935 (#930 770 0904) single-turbo driven by Claude Haldi (and others). This car won the Concours category of Best Restoration, and was driven by Rod Emory at the event



Chassis #930 670 0180, this Interscope 934 was used in period as the template for the

IMSA 934.5 racer

In the 962 category, we had the Holbert Lowenbrau chassis 962-HR1 (first Holbert Racing car built at Holbert's in Pennsylvania). Kevin Doran (crew chief at Holbert in 1985-1987) was on hand to manage this car and Derek Bell drove it. It ran pretty much faultlessly, and all we did was add fuel, and check the tyre pressures and oil level. Derek seemed to enjoy himself as he ran in all the sessions except one, when he and Alwin Springer did a tribute on stage to the late Al Holbert, which was well done and well received. David Donohue shuttled between 962-106 (a BFG IMSA car with single turbo), and 962-123 (a twin-turbo water-cooled car). Justin Bell drove the Kremer K8 (a 962-based Kremer built car) that won the Daytona 24 hours in 1996, until the engine had a problem on Saturday. So, he was then shifted across to drive in the Porsche tractor race on Sunday.



The Gunnar Racing 962-123 was driven by David Donohue



The first Porsche 962 to turn a wheel in the USA, 962-001 driven by Mario and Michael Andretti in the 1984 Daytona 24 Hours, made some demonstration laps

The Porsche tractor race was a big hit with fans. There was a Le Mans start on the start/finish straight and the tractors 'raced' over to turn 5 at Laguna Seca. Thank goodness, they did not make them navigate the corkscrew! The Gunnar tractor however had a big handicap, as it was dragging around a cart with a bunch of small kiddie tractors, all painted up in the 'Pink Pig' 917-20 paint scheme. John Oates (of the rock group Hall & Oates) drove this tractor on Saturday, and Justin Bell drove it on Sunday. Although we did not win, the Gunnar tractor did win the award for best tractor! Kevin Jeannette had once again hit a home run with his tractor preparation!



John Oates ready to go for the tractor race



A mini reunion of Derek Bell's crew from the 1980s - (from L-R): Todd Holbert (son of Al Holbert), Kevin Doran (crew chief Holbert Racing 1985-1987), Derek Bell, Michael Colucci (crew chief at Busby Racing winning 1989 Daytona with Bell, Wollek and Andretti),

Tom Seabolt (crew chief Holbert Racing
1982-1984)

Jeroen Bleekemolen was on hand to drive the various Spyders and the Dauer 1994 Le Mans winning GT car. The Dauer GT (962-LM GT003) was the 962 GT that the factory used to circumvent the rules in 1994 when only GT cars were allowed. It won the race with Haywood, Dalmas and Baldi driving. It only ran one session at Rennsport but did well in the Concours, winning the racing category. As it happened, with high speed Le Mans body work, it was not well suited to the Laguna Seca circuit. Jeroen spent most of his time shuttling between the three RS Spyders: 9R6-704 (Muscle Milk car), 9R6-708 (Van Merksteijn car) and 9R6-711 (Lista Office car), eventually settling on chassis #711 in which he finished second in the prototype race with the 962s. Gunnar Jeannette won the race in WeatherTech's RS Spyder (Essex car), the two RS Spyders at the front basically lapped every 962 in the 25-minute race. Derek Bell remarked that it seemed strange that while driving a car in which he had won a lot of races, that he kept having to look in his mirrors for the RS Spyders that were coming up behind. The Laguna circuit certainly favours the Spyder over the 962.



Porsche RS Spyder 9R6-709, driven to victory
in the prototype race by Gunnar Jeannette



Jeff Lewis in the ex-Dick Barbour car 935 000 00009. This car is one of two used by John Fitzpatrick to win the IMSA championship in 1980

But on Sunday after the last race, is when the real work began. All these hundreds of cars had to be packed up for transport. The semi-trucks started to arrive, and the chaotic loading began as cars had to be shuttled to the back paddock and lined up with the proper truck for loading.



Adam Carolla in the 'Old Warhorse' 935 (chassis #009 00030)



The 1979 Le Mans winner, the #41 Numero Reservé 935 (#009 00015), was given a few demo laps by Bruce Meyer



A fan favourite, was the 962-HR1 driven by Derek Bell. He won quite a few races with this very car in his 1980s IMSA campaigns



Lee Giannone drove his ex-Akin 962-102, a beautifully presented car with the famous Coca-Cola livery

It was announced that the crowd attendance for the weekend was some 81,000 which is a lot for this circuit. It is probably the most I have seen there since the days of MotoGP at Laguna Seca, but I am sure those who attended were not disappointed. Those who missed it should plan for the next one, tentatively in 2021. The venue has not been announced, so stay tuned.

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