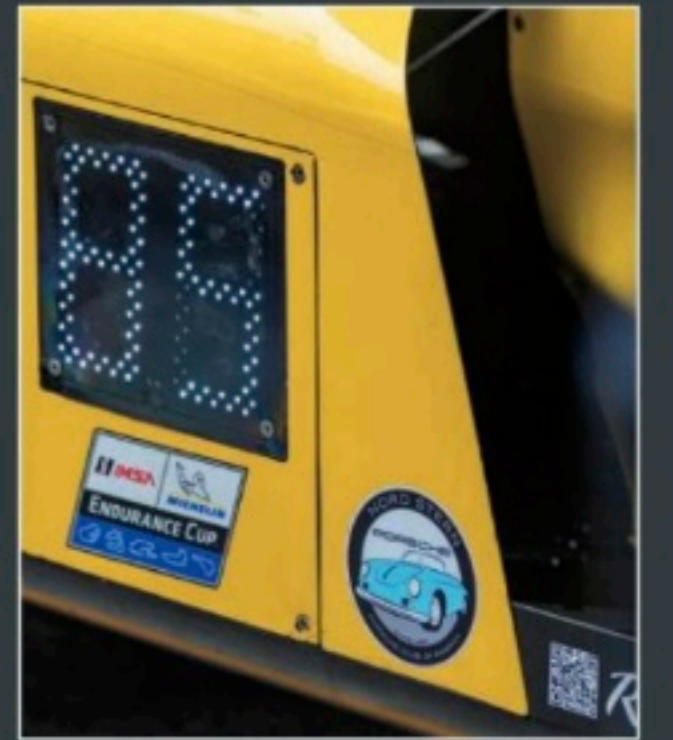




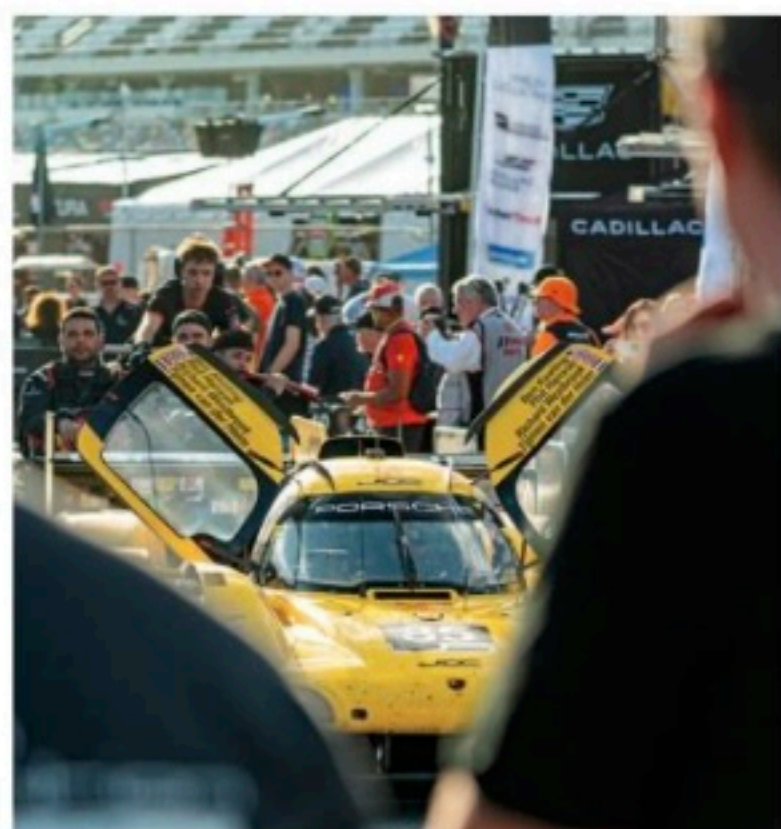
Something To Build On

JDC-MILLER MOTORSPORTS HAD GOOD STRATEGY, BUT LITTLE LUCK, AT DAYTONA.

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The record books contain numerous Porsche 935s, 936s, 956s, 962s, and now, a 963. This collection of numbers represents 12 overall wins at 24-hour races at Daytona and 11 overall wins at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Porsche wants the 963 to join the legendary ranks of its predecessors, but is also eager for a return of repeated victories achieved by factory and customer teams.



Supply chain problems and production delays stalled plans for customer teams upon the Grand Touring Prototype (GTP) car's debut at the 2023 Rolex 24 At Daytona. Fans had to wait until the spring for any chance of a repeat of the dizzying dominance of the late 1970s and 1980s, when Porsche 956 and 962s owned victory lane on both sides of the Atlantic. Unlike the 962, the 963 would take time to reach its potential.

After receiving the first North American customer car in mid-April and racing it two weeks later, the JDC-Miller MotorSports team spent the remainder of the 2023 season learning and gaining confidence in its new Porsche. The team ended the season with four top-five finishes, occasionally bettering the more experienced factory cars.

Founded by John Church in 1994, Minnesota-based JDC MotorSports quickly progressed through

the ranks from Formula Ford to the Star Mazda Championship, the IMSA Prototype Lite Series, Michelin Pilot Challenge Series, and then the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship series in the top-level prototype class (then DPi).

With wins, podiums, and championships at nearly every level, the small team has always been an underdog that consistently punches above its weight.

The changing landscape of the top prototype class made the decision to switch to Porsche easy. The announcement they would run the 963 got the attention of Nord Stern Region Historian Roger Johnson. Johnson has known Church since 2016 and has organized Nord Stern events at the shop each year. Through hosting Nord Stern events, Church understood and recognized the value of PCA to a Porsche team. Since switching to Porsche, a built-in fanbase of knowledgeable and

loyal fans has made its presence known through a corresponding huge spike in requests for team gear and merchandise.

It also resulted in one of the more unique ways for someone to join PCA, by way of their top-tier, multimillion dollar Porsche prototype. Oddly enough, the PCA da-

tabase didn't have an option for a VIN starting with 963. After several phone calls, the staff sorted the details, and Church was a PCA member. The Nord Stern logo is proudly attached to the No. 85 race car.

During the annual Roar Before the 24 testing sessions, all GTP class manufacturers ran similar times. Ev-

ery GTP car that qualified broke the class track record. Even though no Porsche made the pole position, every team looked extremely capable of competing for a win.

As the green flag flew on race day, driver Richard Westbrook fought with the car. A nearly perfect car in practice the day before was now giving Westbrook fits. The brakes locked into Turn 1, and the car cut power as he left the Le Mans Chicane and tried to accelerate toward the high banks of the backstretch. Driver communication on the team radio was... lively.

The team was able to suggest changes to various switches and knobs on the Formula 1-derived steering wheel, and with an hour and a half gone in the race, Westbrook climbed to third place and was happy with his car. "We changed nothing (during a pit stop), and then the car was good," Westbrook said. "I mean, it was just the controls in

Above: The beauty of multi-class sports car racing at Daytona is seen as the No. 85 maneuvers through slower GT3 traffic. **Left:** The frantic ballet of a pit stop has many moving parts. Don't forget to clean the windshield.





the car... We completely changed the balance in the car."

THEY RAN SMOOTHLY for several hours, sometimes matching the leaders' pace but unable to consistently set a top lap time. The team noticed that its overall top speed was a few kilometers per hour slower than that of the leaders and the other 963s.

Modern race cars are similar to their road-going counterparts in one important way: they are rolling computers. The 963, for example, live-streams 4,000 pieces of data to the team when running. Four dedicated crew members monitor various categories of data. They communicate with each other about what each aspect of the car is doing and how they might make changes to improve things.

But nothing in the data correlated to the lack of top speed. The internal combustion and electric hybrid power units were spot on, the aero and braking looked as they should, and nothing was amiss in the critical engine, tire pressure, or temperature reports. Yet they were losing ground to the leaders.

A decision to change the nose of the car during a pit stop alleviated the top-speed issue, but didn't solve it completely. The team will have to investigate further before the next event in March to see what caused them to be slower than their peers.

When an LMP2 class prototype stopped on track after 8 p.m., the team gambled that a yellow flag would come out and ducked into the pits for a quick fuel stop. The strategy made sense. The race already had seen several cautions, at

least one caused by the same car now stopped on the track. The move would put the team on a different strategy than the competition, forcing them to adapt.

The stop went off without a hitch. The problem was the caution never flew. The LMP2 car fired up and re-entered the race. JDC-Miller Motorsports was slightly off the pace and a lap down to the competition.

Losing a lap early in a 24-hour race is rarely tragic. Things happen to almost every team over a full day of racing, leaving opportunities to make up one lap here or there. Several GTP cars saw their share of misfortune during the race as an Acura, Cadillac, and both BMWs spent dozens of laps in the garage, and some didn't return.

Sunday morning turned into afternoon, and the No. 85 team ran

in fifth place and on the lead lap. With just one hour and 20 minutes remaining, they were knocked off that lead lap for good.

While on track, the door popped open, and the driver could not close it. The team had no choice but to pit. The crew got the door closed and repaired the latch, but the time in the pits was enough to leave them multiple laps down.

The 2024 Rolex 24 At Daytona didn't produce a duel to the finish between factory and customer teams, but it did yield a return to victory lane for Porsche. The No. 7 Porsche Penske Motorsport car delivered the win, Porsche's first overall since 2010. But probably as important to Porsche Motorsport, the race ended with all four 963s running in the top six positions. It was a far cry from the car's debut in



The pit box, the team's nerve center, has 18 monitors displaying information from IMSA, the track, and the car. The steering wheel, the car's nerve center, has hundreds of parameters at the driver's fingertips, all while the car hurtles around the track at maximum velocity.



2023 when reliability issues plagued the two factory cars.

The JDC-Miller Motorsports team may not take much solace in their competitor's win, but can be proud of its first 24-hour race with the car and what the future holds. Fans have hope that the 2024 season will herald a return to the wild days when customer and factory Porsche teams dominated victory lane. 🏁

