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A new departure: On the West Coast, a new chapter in Porsche motorsports history has had a promising start. The new RS Spyder, driven by the Penske Team, won its first victory at its debut in the American Le Mans Series.

Sports

Highway Won





Flat car resurgence:
The RS Spyder moves straight from the shadow into the limelight

All you can see of the car are the taillights, but the yellow arm is still waving at maximum rpm. The boss of the Penske Team's pit crew is waving the sleeve of his fireproof suit so untiringly that it seems he wants to give the RS Spyder an additional boost by way of body language. His gesture is international racing sign language to the driver to open up again after a pit stop. An imaginary string of letters forms in the California night sky, reading "Go for it!"

It's a message that travels far beyond the four-hour race in Monterey. For most, it's the finale of the American Le Mans Series, but for the Penske Team, the Porsche Racing Department in Weissach and the Porsche RS Spyder, it's the debut. Just three months after the wheels of the prototype first turned, it has gone from a pole position and a track record on the notorious roller coaster of Laguna Seca to a victory with an eight-lap lead over the runner-up in its class, the LMP2. Its overall ranking in Category One—against competition with far more powerful engines—is a respectable fifth place overall. The "Race in the Darkness"—which starts in the afternoon—ends with a shining triumph.

When the confetti cannons were fired on the victory rostrum for Sascha Maassen—who was behind the wheel of the Spyder for three quarters of the distance—and Lucas Luhr,

and the golden champagne rain poured down on them in the pit lane under the spotlights, Porsche's technology manager Wolfgang Dürheimer was in the cheering crowd. Together with the thirty-member team of engineers and mechanics from Weissach, he had watched the long-distance race from the pit wall. The tension built up. When it was finally released—with a smack on the already graying three-day beard of tactician Roland Kussmaul by motorsports boss Hartmut Kristen, and with a powerful hug for strategist Frank-Steffen Walliser from vehicle development manager Dieter Steinhauser—the obviously impressed boss from Weissach tried to express his feelings: "We aren't just happy about the result, but especially because the car, the drivers and the team have done such a terrific job, right from the start. The switch from the testing to the racing phase and the turnover of the RS Spyder to the Penske Team have gone smoothly. It was a perfect team performance. It was worth it to work for this goal for two years. Our strategy has proven itself; the plan has been fulfilled, for now at least."

When Dürheimer called for a spontaneous stand-up party in the workshop tent with a glass of champagne, he couldn't yet suspect that the *Monterey Herald* would be featuring a cover picture of the RS Spyder with the headline "Fast and Furious" in its Sunday edition. But the Porsche manager immedi-

ately realized what this success could mean: "We've proved to a US audience that we have forgotten nothing during the six years' absence of a factory vehicle. Porsche is a player to be reckoned with once again!" The organizers of the race series were already talking about a "historic event," even before the shining performance of the 480-horsepower racecar painted in the yellow and red of the new main sponsor DHL Global. The factory team is back at the starting line for the first time since the Le Mans victory in 1998.

The high expectations were partially due to the fact that with Porsche, Roger Penske, who is something like North America's Mister Motorsports, is back in the sports car scene. "It's a great day for us," the top manager beamed. His crew had practiced thirty-two years of abstinence from this class of motorsports: In 1973, a Porsche 917 won the CanAm series in Laguna Seca with Mark Donahue at the wheel. The Penske Porsche bore the number six then—as it does today. "I'm back home again," said Penske, who rattled off three good reasons why he plans to run the entire 2006 ALMS season exclusively with two Spyders: "First, the people at my company love motorsports, like the people at Porsche. Second, I'm a Porsche dealer in the USA and in Great Britain, and our customers also buy the motorsports image of the brand. Third, Porsche is committed to racing, and to the best possible technology."

The Penske race truck, fresh from the last test drives of the RS Spyder, was the center of attention from the very first day. But that didn't mean any additional pressure for Hartmut Kristen: "We knew we had to justify the confidence the company had in us. If Porsche commits itself to motorsports, there's only one possible goal: it has to be able to win. Porsche will not enter just to be there. We at ALMS also set the same standards for ourselves." A mixture of self-confidence and respect characterized the spirit of the two teams, which rapidly established a relationship with each other.

At the Weissach Racing Department, this new challenge has meant a change of generations, moving the Spyder project from the computer screen to victory capability within a year's time. Up to 140 Porsche employees and ninety external experts manufactured the 5000 vehicle parts. A sequential six-speed transmission was also designed and built especially for the 3.4-liter V8 engine; each is a self-supporting unit in the carbon-fiber monocoque. For this unusual and effective solution (at just 750 kilograms/1,650 lbs., the Spyder is right at the minimum weight), the Porsche technicians can rely on their experience in designing the Carrera GT road car. There was just one problem that no one could have thought of beforehand: That the production of a new jumbo jet, the Airbus A-380, would cause a carbon fiber shortage. But the process management team in Weissach managed to overcome even this bottleneck.

If you're familiar with European sports car racing, the ALMS takes some adjustment. And that's okay. The proverbial American openness blends with the sport. Spectators stroll through the drivers' camp, the drivers give autographs as a ▶



All systems roger:
Team Manager Roger Penske, Porsche North America boss Peter Schwarzenbauer (right) expecting the best



Spyder Men:
Lucas Luhr (left) and Sascha Maassen switched off successfully behind the wheel



It sparked straight off:
Roger Penske and Porsche development manager Wolfgang Dürheimer deep in discussion in the pit

matter of course, and even after four hours of racing, track speakers still provide non-stop entertainment with their breathless commentary, specialized knowledge, and sheer enthusiasm. And it's all set against a background of an engine roar that can best be described as "replete." The organizers of Laguna Seca had a brilliant idea when they decided to move the final to the twilight hours. Around 5 p.m., as the sun sinks slowly behind the hills of the John Steinbeck landscape, toward the dream road Highway One, the light turns golden. When the sports cars roar down the series of curves known as the "corkscrew," it's like a modern version of the old cry "Westward ho!"

In the Porsche lounge above the garages, this fascination has also taken hold of Peter Schwarzenbauer, who, as president and CEO of Porsche Cars North America (PCNA), is the driving force behind the return to factory racing. "It's important for our customers that Porsche return to top-level motorsports. After all, that's where we come from, and that heritage has to be preserved. At every customer event we've held over the past few years, the call for motorsports involvement has gotten stronger. We finally announced that we would address the topic again, after the successful introduction of the Cayenne freed up some capacities in Weissach. I think we've caught the right time now. This success, straight off the bat, is a kind of turbo-start for us."

This test run in public—a race is still the best test—moves into its decisive and also visually most dramatic phase when the lights go on. The cars swarm through the double bends like fireflies. A flashing blue light shines from the cockpit of the RS Spyder. Not an emergency signal but the contrary—that's how the respective class winners are marked at the ALMS. The car has by now advanced to second place overall. Maassen, who sat in the cockpit for the first three hours,

is exhausted but happy: "I've enjoyed being able to keep pace with the strong LMP1 vehicles." Luhr, who drove the Spyder to the finish with no problems, despite darkness, falling temperatures and a dirty roadway, concludes with one word: "Wunderbar!" The Porsche signet hasn't moved that fast in a long time. Even the tireless track speaker almost gives up: "I'm at a loss for words..."

In soccer, what the RS Spyder has achieved here would be called a "clearance." Immediately after the run in California, testing and coordinating work for the launch of the season in March begins with the classic Twelve Hours of Sebring. Penske will take two vehicles to the starting line then. For 2007, plans call for going beyond this exclusive agreement and providing the car in the best tradition of Porsche customer sports to other teams as well, for use in various European and Asian racing series. Porsche views the LMP2 category as a first-class field of activity for private teams, with a healthy cost-benefit ratio.

In the final rounds, after having to fuel up again quickly just 3:57 minutes before the end, the four plasma screens at the command center light up the faces of the men in the Porsche racing suits. In their concentration, they don't feel the increasing chill in the air. With every number that the digital display counts down, they are more spellbound by the clock. With five minutes to go, an analogue clock face is displayed, like on New Year's Eve. Now the men's eyes start to glow back.

The finale in 2005 is a new beginning, a promise born and sustained in 163 high-speed circuits. Now it's time to get to work. *Let's go!*

American Le Mans Series

Founded in 1999 by American businessman Don Panoz, to give sports cars built for Le Mans another field of activity. The racing distance is measured in hours, with various formats throughout the season, from the usual sprint (2:45 hours.) to the twelve-hour classic. The starting field includes vehicles of four different categories (the pure Le Mans prototype classes 1 and 2, and the near-production GT classes 1 and 2.) The ALMS rules are based on the rules of the *Automobile Club de l'Ouest* of Le Mans. Porsche has been participating in the American Le Mans Series since the beginning, and has repeatedly won the manufacturer's competition. Porsche customers have also won numerous team and driver titles.

www.americanlemans.com

Dimensions, Porsche RS Spyder

Length:	4650 mm (183.0 in.)
Width:	2000 mm (78.7 in.)
Height:	1068 mm (42.0 in.)
Weight:	750 kg (1,653 lbs.) without driver or fuel
Tank capacity:	90 liters (23.8 gal.)

Technical data, Porsche RS Spyder

Engine: Porsche Type MR6 long-distance engine, compact and light structure with electronic engine management, dry-sump lubrication, oil-water heat exchanger, two overhead camshafts and very low center of gravity, integrated into the chassis as a bearing part; 8 cylinders at a 90° V-angle; cubic capacity 3,397 cc; output approx. 480 hp at 10,300 rpm; torque 370 Newton meters (273 lb.-ft.) at 7500 rpm.

Transmission: Porsche Type GR6. Sequential spur-tooth dog gearbox, installed longitudinally with aluminum case; like the engine, a bearing part of the chassis. Six forward and one reverse gears, shifted via switch on steering wheel. Three-plate carbon-fiber racing clutch.

Chassis: Open racing sports car. Monocoque with integrated crash structures and driver safety cell of carbon-fiber composite materials and exchangeable nose, also with integrated crash structures. Body with a multi-sectional outer shell and covered underbody with rear diffuser.

www.porsche.com

