

Sports

# Teamwork

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In the American Le Mans Series, teamwork is the key to success. Drivers, engineers, and mechanics must be able to rely on each other. That's the only way the Porsche RS Spyder can win races.





When the Porsche RS Spyder must come to a stop, everything else runs like clockwork: it's a pit stop at the Twelve Hours of Sebring. A thrill a second. While a mechanic connects the fuel hose to the sports-car prototype with starting number "7," Timo Bernhard jumps out of the cockpit and makes room for Romain Dumas. The two tire changers squatting on either side of the car are ready with their pneumatic wrenches. For safety reasons, they aren't allowed to start until the refueling is complete. The officials monitoring every pit stop are merciless. Once the new tires are on, the crew chief Jon Bouslog gives the signal to start the engine. The RS Spyder roars back on the track. The tension gradually subsides among the highly spirited members of the pit crew, some of whom look like astronauts suited up for a spacewalk, despite Florida's burning sun. Owen Hayes, the race engineer, looks at his stopwatch: "Sixty-eight seconds," he announces with satisfaction, "a good stop."

During the long-distance races of the American Le Mans Series, pit stops rank among the most exciting moments. Everyone must rely on each other—teamwork at its best. The pit crew members are the fixed stars that help the strategic planners navigate through the uncertainties. On the narrow concrete lane next to the track, they use their exquisitely honed skills while under immense pressure. The quest for the winning second can cause sheer stress and demands the utmost from the participants. The difference between triumph and tragedy often comes down to a single hand movement—the right one or the wrong one. That explains the painstaking process in selecting the best crew members.

"Only the very best are good enough for this job," says Jeff Swartwout, team manager of Penske Motorsports. The selection process is arduous. The chosen must not only be excellent mechanics but also be able to perform flawless work under the most hectic circumstances. They train throughout the winter. By the start of the season they have already run through 120 pit-stops, and the schedule calls for pit-stop and driver-exchange training even on racing weekends. That's the only way the teams can gain that decisive edge of a second or two when the chips are down. "Many unforeseen things can happen during a pit stop," Porsche engineer Roland Kussmaul says, speaking from experience. "In these situations, it's vital that the guys stay cool and don't lose their nerve." ▶

**Buckling up (left):** Timo Bernhard helps Hélio Castroneves get settled in. **Below:** Sascha Maassen at a pit stop





**Power pairs: Ryan Briscoe and Emmanuel Collard (top left, left to right), Romain Dumas with Porsche Motor Sport Chief Hartmut Kristen (top right), racing engineer Owen Hayes with Timo Bernhard (bottom left), and Roger Penske with Sascha Maassen**

Teammates don't necessarily have to be close buddies, but it helps. "I almost spend more time with my teammate than with my girlfriend," Maassen says. "So it's a good thing that we're having some fun while we're working."

To understand the teamwork at Porsche, it helps to know that there are no secrets among the Penske Motorsports RS drivers. Both drivers see all the data, and everyone's experience is openly shared at many team conferences. The drivers know that they ultimately benefit from this openness. "When you have two vehicles at your disposal to learn certain things, you can make headway that much faster," confirms Briscoe, who joined Porsche recently. For Maassen it's obvious: "If I help my teammates to be faster, I've got a better chance of winning myself."

For Bernhard, who takes turns with Dumas behind the wheel of the number 7 RS Spyder, what counts most is that his teammate shares the same professional work ethic. That means he must be willing to work toward a common goal with the whole team: "Everyone wins together, or everyone loses, that's what motorsport means to me." As the youngest team member, he especially appreciates the sharing of experience with his colleagues: "There's so much we can learn from each other."

Another key to success is the way the drivers work closely together with their racing engineer. "We've got to be on the same ▶

Pit stops make or break any racing strategy. That's especially true in long-distance races, in which two or more drivers share a car. For racing drivers, who often are solo performers used to the spotlight, that's a huge adjustment. Here they must compromise, for instance in the seat adjustment or in the tuning of the car. They may not even get the last word when it comes to the choice of tires.

"You've got to be willing to share with the other guy," says Sascha Maassen, who won the American Le Mans Series 2006 and is sharing the RS Spyder with the Australian Ryan Briscoe again this season. He doesn't have any problem with that. He abhors the "dog-eat-dog" society that he says characterizes some other racing series. He's much more comfortable preparing for a common goal with other drivers, instead of everyone playing adversarial roles.

wavelength and understand each other perfectly,” says Hayes, the engineer in charge of number 7. “At the racetrack there’s usually not enough time for lengthy discussions.” It’s the racing engineer’s job to convert the drivers’ feedback about the car into improvements as promptly as possible. Having to reconcile two different opinions most of the time doesn’t make things any easier. When one driver says the car understeers while the other complains about oversteering, the engineer has to search for the right compromise.

“I always try to find a solution that reconciles such differences,” says Hayes. As a rule he succeeds. Departing a bit from a purely

democratic approach at times in this daily hustle and bustle—well, that goes with the job, says the Irishman. “When I get three different opinions about the same problem, I’ve got to take the route I consider the right one. I can’t do it three different ways.”

Dealing with the different drivers’ mentalities can also be a challenge. For example, each driver might react differently to the same problem. One may report an issue without emotion, and that’s all there is to it. Another may also discuss a problem without emotion—though the car is practically inoperable. One of the latter is Emmanuel Collard, a Frenchman. “If he says he’s got a tire problem, it’s quite possible the tire actually exploded,” reports Nigel Beresford, the British racing engineer of the RS Spyder with the number 6.

Once the RS Spyder is in the starting lineup, such discussions are over. During the race, communications between pit and driver are limited to the bare essentials. When the driver is preoccupied, especially when engaged in positioning battles or while passing, no one bothers him. There might be a brief wireless dialogue on one of the straightways: “There isn’t a lot of chitchat,” says Hayes. “From our pit position we see everything. But the drivers are much too focused. So we make all the important decisions.”

That’s no problem for Maassen, even when the instructions from the strategists around the pit aren’t always what he’d like to hear. “We drivers are employees of Porsche,” says the old hand on the team, “and making Porsche successful comes first.” ◀

**Last pit stop:  
The RS Spyder roars back onto the Sebring track**

