

Björn Waldegård – the first World Rally Champion

Björn Waldegård drove for many teams. Porsche was especially close to his heart. He won the Monte Carlo Rally twice in the 911, which he also drove decades later at historic rallies.

Born in Sweden, Björn Waldegård competed for his first major rally titles in a Porsche. The results were impressive: following Vic Elford in 1968, it was Waldegård who gave Porsche three successive victories at the Monte Carlo Rally in 1969 and 1970. The 1971 Monte Carlo Rally was much harder for him. Porsche wanted to prove the capabilities of the new 914/6 and so sent three of these mid-engine sports cars to one of the snowiest editions of the traditional rally. Waldegård fought like never before. On a few dry tests, he beat the Renault Alpine, but on icy ground he had to let them get away. Nevertheless, he remained completely calm. He filmed service work carried out by the team during a short break and engaged in some shop talk about studded tires. He was in third place before the last round, when Porsche racing manager Rico Steinemann spoke to him. Waldegård made only a dry comment: 'Of course, a lot can still happen. And with a 911, a lot definitely would happen.' Waldegård reached the finishing line in third place. When people talked about him over the next few decades, he was often referred to as the 'quiet Swede': a man who always appeared modest and reserved, and who answered his fan mail personally. But he was also a very fast Swede.

In 1973, 1974 and 1978, he competed in the East African Safari for Porsche, now driving a 911 again. At times he was dominant, but a rear suspension failure caused him to fall back to second and fourth position in 1974 and 1978. The fact that he won this rally through Kenya four times between 1977 and 1990 demonstrates his keen senses when it came to dealing with technology. He celebrated his victory in 1990 at the age of 46, racing in a Toyota. He was the oldest driver ever to win a WRC rally, and he was also the very first driver to be named World Rally Champion. This title was awarded for the first time in 1979. Waldegård won points in a Ford Escort RS 1800 and a Mercedes 450 SLC 5.0.

In 1992, Waldegård withdrew from the world championship. However, he often took part in historic rallies in Europe and Africa. In his final years, he chose his son Mathias as co-driver and a Porsche 911 as his car.