

Bob Wollek – Decades for Motorsports

A native of Alsace, the French driver Bob Wollek was awarded six Porsche Cups and recorded four victories in the 24 Hours of Daytona. Le Mans was the only race he never won.

Bob Wollek's ultimate goal was to win the 24 Hours of Le Mans. He entered the classic race a total of 30 times from 1968 onwards but, despite finishing as runner-up on four occasions, the Alsatian driver never managed to take top spot. Coming second in the Porsche 911 GT1 '98 behind his teammates Allan McNish, Laurent Aiello and Stéphane Ortelli proved a particularly bitter pill to swallow: 'A compatriot of mine enters Le Mans for the first time and wins.'

Born in Strasbourg in 1943, Wollek enjoyed his greatest success with Porsche and was the driver with the most wins during this period. Competing for private teams operated by Erwin Kremer and Reinhold Joest, he was awarded the Porsche Cup a total of seven times between 1976 and 1989. Even today, Porsche continues to present this lucrative honour to the best private Porsche driver of the year. Wollek collected a great deal of points in the Porsche Cup standings at events in the USA. He achieved four first-place finishes in the 24 Hours of Daytona (1983, 1985, 1989 and 1991) and also won the 12 Hours of Sebring. In certain years, Wollek flew across the Atlantic more than 20 times a season in order to race Porsches in the USA. After sleeping on the return flight following a race weekend, he would be back at work in his Strasbourg car dealership bright and early the next morning. Wollek sold the dealership at the age of 50: 'Only then did I become a professional.'

Aside from motorsport, his second great passion was sport outside the cockpit. As a ski racer, Wollek made it into the French national team. His love of cycling also helped him age more slowly than many other racing drivers, with the racing doctors from the Porsche team terming it the 'Wollek phenomenon'. He also enjoyed making frequent 600-kilometre trips from Strasbourg to Le Mans on a racing bike. It was only at the age of 57 that he considered retirement, resolving that the 2001 season would be his last. Wollek had already held advanced discussions regarding a role in the upper echelons of Porsche Motorsport when he suffered a fatal accident in Florida on 16 March 2001. Cycling back to his hotel after a training session prior to the 12 Hours of Sebring, he was struck on the head by the mirror of a passing motorhome.