

Derek Bell – a Porsche ambassador to this day

Derek Bell is Britain's most successful sports car driver. He raced 26 times in Le Mans, winning five times – and four times in a Porsche.

Derek Bell is a great fit for the Porsche team. That was already true back in 1971, when he shared a Porsche 917 with Jo Siffert. Similarly, Bell won numerous victories between 1982 and 1987 – in the era of the Porsche 956 and 962 – with Jacky Ickx, Stefan Bellof and Hans-Joachim Stuck. He won the drivers' title of the World Endurance Championship in 1985 and 1986. Porsche racing manager Peter Falk talks very highly of the Brit: 'He was a constant and very reliable driver – not the fastest, but definitely the safest. We always knew that Bell would bring his car over the finishing line. And he could win, too.' Falk rates the skills of the British racer on par with those of German Porsche works driver Hans Herrmann.

Derek Bell wanted to become Formula One driver. He moved to Ferrari, competing in Formula Two and then two Formula One races, even using the 512 S sports car. However, his career then faltered and he only raced for smaller Formula One teams. 'I thought I would have some good years in Formula One. I wasn't not good enough to become world champion, but finishing directly behind the leader was possible,' he says in retrospect. He claims to have improved year after year throughout his career. When he ended up only marginally behind the extremely talented Stefan Bellof in 1984, he was already over 40 years old. Bell won at Le Mans in 1975, 1981, 1982, 1986 and 1987. In his view, his best race at the Sarthe circuit was in 1983, when Jacky Ickx and Derek Bell lost a lap at the start yet still came second. No Brit has been more successful than Bell at these motor races. The Le Mans in 1993 was an especially emotional experience because he shared the cockpit with his son Justin and Andy Wallace. This father-and-son undertaking ultimately resulted in a third-place finish.

Derek Bell, who has held the title of MBE (Member of the British Empire) for many years, still has close connections to Porsche today. He represents the company at many historic motor racing events. Furthermore, Bell regularly takes part in events like the Goodwood Festival of Speed, driving the same cars he used as one of the most versatile and popular racers of his generation when actively competing.