

Gérard Larrousse – the gentleman from Lyon

Gérard Larrousse was one of the real all-rounders in motor sport: fast on the racetrack and just as competitive in rallies. He was also successful as a team boss.

Gérard Larrousse almost prevented the first Porsche victory at the 1968 Monte Carlo Rally. Driving a Renault Alpine 1300, he was the major opponent of Porsche works driver Vic Elford in the 911 T. Only when spectators shovelled snow onto the otherwise dry track during a special test did the Frenchman lose control of the car and have to give up. In a certain sense, though, Larrousse still won. When Peter Falk, senior race engineer for Porsche, approached Elford a short time later and asked the Brit to name the best French racing driver, he replied: 'Gérard Larrousse.'

The business graduate became a professional racing driver in 1966, and in 1969 he joined the Porsche works team. The season began with the Monte Carlo Rally. In a 911, he finished second behind Björn Waldegaard. He also took second place in Le Mans, where he and Hans Herrmann lost the closest race finish of all time by 120 metres. In 1970, he again came second in the classic endurance race, this time with Willi Kauhsen and finishing behind Herrmann and Richard Attwood. He took third place in the same year at the Tour de France in a 911 ST with a red and yellow hippy paintwork, only just behind two Matra-Simca prototypes. 'I drove the lightest 911 the factory has ever built. It weighed in at 789 kilograms,' notes Larrousse. The 911 weighs close to 800 kilos. But then Larrousse offers the engineers a bottle of champagne for each kilo less.

Larrousse took first place with Vic Elford. In 1971, the pair won the 12 Hours of Sebring in a 917 as well as the 1,000 km race at the Nürburgring in a 908/03. At Porsche, Larrousse became known as an all-purpose weapon with the nickname of 'the gentleman from Lyon' – straightforward, correct and one of the fastest on every circuit.

A win in Le Mans was due, and Gérard Larrousse made it a double. In 1973 and 1974, he shared the victorious Matra-Simca with Henri Pescarolo. As head of the Renault racing team, he began leading the French automotive company into the world of Formula One in 1976. In 1986, in collaboration with French lawyer Didier Calmels, he established his own Formula One crew under the name Team Larrousse Calmels.