

Leo Kinnunen – a success with Porsche

The Finnish driver Leo Kinnunen celebrated his greatest victories with Porsche – but not as a classic works driver. Instead, he enjoyed a successful career at John Wyer's Gulf team.

Leo Kinnunen's situation was not unlike that of Brian Redman: while the Brit had to cede the limelight to his teammate Jo Siffert, the Finn found himself in the shadow of Pedro Rodríguez. However, the stars of the John Wyer team in 1970 and 1971 would not have enjoyed such success without these partners who were almost every bit as quick as they were. The 1970 season saw Kinnunen and Rodríguez win the 24 Hours of Daytona, the 1,000 Kilometres of Brands Hatch, the 1,000-kilometre race at Monza and the 1,000 Kilometres of Watkins Glen, with each victory achieved in a Porsche 917.

In 1974, Kinnunen became the first Finnish entrant in a Formula One World Championship race. However, unlike the generation of Finnish drivers such as Keke Rosberg, Mika Häkkinen and Kimi Räikkönen who followed in his footsteps, Kinnunen was unable to thrive in the world of Grand Prix racing.

Kinnunen's performances in the World Sportscar Championship nevertheless earned him quite a reputation, with his lap at the 1970 Targa Florio proving a particular highlight. In the extremely lightweight and nimble 908/03, he completed the 72-kilometre course in a record-breaking time of 33 minutes and 26 seconds. This was over a minute faster than the time that had been set by Vic Elford the previous year and was considered unbeatable. Kinnunen's lap saw him leapfrog a Ferrari 512 S into second place overall behind the Porsche of his long-term rivals Siffert and Redman.

He was a very successful Interserie driver after 1970, first in a Porsche 917 Spyder and subsequently in a 917/10 belonging to the Finnish VW and Porsche importer Antti Aarnio-Wihuri (AAW). Kinnunen won this European counterpart to the North American CanAm series three times in a row between 1971 and 1973. His high-speed exploits also extended to the world of rallying and saw him take a Porsche Carrera RS to third place in the 1000 Lakes Rally of 1973.

He continued to drive a variety of Porsche models in GT and sports car races until the late 1970s before retiring from motor sport.