

# Le Mans 1997 – renewed victory for Reinhold Joest

**For the second time since 1996, a Porsche entered by Reinhold Joest's private team won in Le Mans. Both Porsche 911 GT1 works cars were out of the race.**

Two categories were competing for victory in Le Mans in 1997. On the one hand were GT cars, which would shape endurance racing for the next few years. On the other hand were open, lighter prototypes – once again allowed to join the starting line. Porsche racing cars were considered favourites in both categories.

After taking second and third place in the previous year, the works team from Weissach had its eyes firmly set on victory with the Porsche 911 GT1 and experienced drivers Hans-Joachim Stuck, Thierry Boutsen, Bob Wollek, Emanuel Collard, Ralf Kelleners and Yannick Dalmas. At the same time, Reinhold Joest – a former racing driver and very experienced racing team owner from Germany's Odenwald – hoped to repeat his triumph from the previous year with the TWR Porsche prototype against the works cars from Weissach.

The two Porsche works cars quickly took the lead and maintained their position during the night. At 7.45 on Sunday morning, there was a serious mistake for Bob Wollek's leading Porsche: driver error caused a spin and two impacts with the boundary wall. The man from Alsace was uninjured, but the disappointment was clear on his face. Having achieved second place in 1978, 1995 and 1996, he had missed out on his major goal once again. Wollek lined up behind the starting line at the Sarthe circuit 30 times since 1968 but he always denied victory. The second works Porsche was only two hours away from securing victory. However, an oil hose sprung a leak and the rear of the 911 GT1 caught fire. Ralf Kelleners had to abandon the Porsche at the edge of the track.

Nevertheless, a Porsche was still in front after the two 911 GT1 cars dropped out: for the second time since 1996, the TWR Porsche WSC 95 claimed victory, driven by Stefan Johansson, Michaele Alboreto and Tom Kristensen. In the words of Porsche director Wendelin Wiedeking, 'Porsche has celebrated its greatest successes in Le Mans in the past, so we also have to swallow the occasional defeat for the works team. Congratulations to the Joest team.'