

# Le Mans 1998 – the anniversary victory

**Porsche celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding with victory in Le Mans, overcoming stiff competition from Mercedes, BMW and Toyota. Driven by Allan McNish, Laurent Aïello and Stéphane Ortelli, the 911 GT1 '98 secured Porsche's 16th overall victory in Le Mans.**

The strength of the starting field led Porsche race director Herbert Ampferer to describe it as the 'race of the century'. A crowd of at least 250,000 attended the 1998 edition of the classic race, with Porsche not looking much like a winner in the opening stages. An AMG-Mercedes took the lead early on and the BMWs were also setting a good pace, but engine trouble and problems with the wheel bearings forced the cars from both teams to retire.

The Porsche 911 GT1 '98 models were built with a focus on durability rather than recording the quickest lap times. The engineer Norbert Singer noted the gearbox as an example of this phenomenon, as rival Toyota took greater risks than Porsche in its design and trusted that this would enable them to perform a gearbox change within a few short minutes. By the early hours of Sunday morning, the quickest Toyota and the two Porsches – one driven by Allan McNish, Laurent Aïello and Stéphane Ortelli, the other by Jörg Müller, Uwe Alzen and Bob Wollek – were almost neck-and-neck. However, both cars from Weissach then lost time in the pits. Jörg Müller gave his team a lot of work to do after spinning into the gravel, with the entire crew descending on the Porsche to perform repairs. Even race director Herbert Ampferer lent a hand as the front section, water cooling system, all side parts including the sills, and the underbodies were replaced. The Porsche then returned to the race following a delay of 32 minutes. The second Porsche lost a full 35 minutes after its crew had to replace a broken coolant pipe. It appeared as though the Porsche team's race was run.

Suddenly, the Toyotas began to experience problems that led to a number of gearbox changes. The Toyota team was unable to repair the leading car, however, as this had come off the track around 90 minutes before the end of the race due to a broken gear and failed to make it back to the pits. Norbert Singer took this as vindication of his decision to prioritise reliability, as Porsche recorded an emphatic double victory ahead of a works Nissan. Wendelin Wiedeking, chief executive officer of Porsche, joined in the victory celebrations in the pits and described the win as 'the icing on the cake for our company anniversary'. The first sports car bearing the Porsche name had been road-certified 50 years earlier, on 8 June 1948.