

Monza 1967 – world records with obstacles

Four Swiss racers aimed to break world records over several days and distances in 1967. At first, the project appeared to fail in Monza that October. Porsche then helped out by sending two 911 R cars to Italy.

Over a glass of beer in the summer of 1967, recently appointed Porsche racing manager Rico Steinemann and his colleague Dieter Spoerry were thinking about good ways to spend the winter. Both of them were contemplating world records. They aimed to set new all-time bests on Monza Oval for 15,000 kilometres, 10,000 miles and 20,000 kilometres as well as 72 hours and 96 hours. The drivers that occurred to Steinemann and Spoerry were Porsche works driver Jo Siffert and Charles Vögele. The car was Vögele's private Porsche 906 Carrera 6 with BP livery. The oil company wanted to demonstrate the performance of a new engine oil and so took over organisation of the event. Support was also provided by experts from the Porsche racing department. On Sunday, 29 October, Siffert began the record drive at noon. However, the delicate sports car was no match for the steep turns with their many potholes. After the third defect on the front axle, the world record attempt was cancelled. The only chance was to resume the world record attempt within 48 hours, in which case the result would still be valid.

After a call from Rico Steinemann, a crisis team was formed in Stuttgart under the direction of technical director Helmuth Bott. They had the idea of using a robust Porsche 911 R instead of the 906. After many hours on the test bench, a newly built engine was ready. Two fifth gears were fitted in one gearbox because a single pair of gears was unable to bear the full load. There was not enough time for the customs formalities to secure a spare parts quota. Instead, a second 911 R was driven to Monza and dismantled there as a spare parts warehouse on four wheels. The first 911 R was not allowed through to Monza by the Swiss customs office. Here officials commented: 'That car is far too loud.' The mechanic therefore took a detour through France. The second 911 R then followed the route through Austria with senior race engineer Peter Falk and motor sport boss Paul Hensler. Here the customs officers simply said: 'Bella macchina!'

On Tuesday, 31 October, the world record attempt was resumed at 8 p.m. By the same time four days later, on 4 November, the success story had been written: despite miserable weather, the average speed after 96 hours and 20,086 kilometres was 209.23 km/h. This broke all five world records.