Dawn parade – photographers and enthusiastic race goers break the skyline at the Mount Panorama circuit ahead of the Bathurst 12 Hour race

The Bathurst 12 Hour race serves as the opening round of the Intercontinental GT Challenge. First held in 1991, the Bathurst 12 Hour initially catered for production-based vehicles before becoming a race for international GT vehicles in 2011. The race has been held fifteen times, seven of them for GT3 vehicles. Now settled in the traditional date on the first weekend of February, the race represents the starting point for the Australian motorsport season. The Intercontinental GT Challenge, the world’s first racing series run for
GT3 vehicles, was founded in 2016 by the SRO Motorsports Group led by Stéphane Ratel.

Bathurst 12 Hour, 4 February 2018: The cars get underway for the start at 05h45

For most of the year, the characterful racetrack serves as a public road. The rollercoaster 6.213km Mount Panorama Circuit is nestled in the picturesque foothills of the Blue Mountains, and features 23 corners with gradients of up to 16 percent. But one of the oddities of the Bathurst 12 Hour, remains the 05h45 starting time, which means that the drivers get underway in the dark.
Bathurst 12 Hour, 4 February 2018: Early morning rush hour, as the field makes its way down the hill during the early stages of the race

Porsche announced in 2017 that they would be supporting its international customer teams campaigning in the 911 GT3 R by providing works drivers and engineers, in its expanded 2018 GT racing program. At the season-opener, 60 vehicles would line up to compete in various categories, amongst them eleven Porsche 911 GT3 R, 911 GT3 Cup and Cayman GT4 Clubsport models.
Sebastian Golz, Project Manager 911 GT3 R, explained the regulations, “The regulations prohibit the use of evolutionary stages, which have been homologated for 2018. Therefore, in Bathurst, we’re fielding 2017-spec vehicles.”
Practice and qualifying did not go according to plan for the Porsche cars, and the teams were not able to tap into the full potential of the 911 GT3 R during the previous day’s qualifying, and so they took up the race from far down the grid.

Enjoy a lap with Matt Campbell aboard the #12 Competition Motorsports Porsche 911 GT3 R

In the 911 GT3 R run by Competition Motorsports, the Class B winner from 2017, Patrick Long moved into the lead after four and a half hours. In this way, the 911 GT3 R fielded by Manthey-Racing, with drivers Romain Dumas, Dirk Werner and Frédéric Makowiecki
sharing the cockpit, made up no less than 21 positions and was running fifth at half distance. With the 911 GT3 R campaigned by the American team Black Swan Racing, Marc Lieb, Timothy Pappas, Jeroen Bleekemolen and Luca Stolz worked their way from the 25\textsuperscript{th} grid spot to eighth position.

After the half-distance mark, all four cars fielded by international Porsche customer teams were running amongst the top ten in the overall classification. The best-placed #991 GT3 R was the Craft Bamboo Racing entry from Hong Kong driven by Earl Bamber, Laurens Vanthoor and Kévin Estre, having ploughed its way through the field from 18th place up to third overall, in the first three hours of the race.
In the B class, Grove Motorsport led the field with the 911 GT3 Cup shared by Ben Barker and the Australians Stephen and Brenton Grove. Fourth place was held by the Carrera Cup Asia team with Paul Tresidder, Chris van der Drift and Andrew Tang and Chen Yi-Fan from China.
With 47 minutes left on the clock, Frédéric Makowiecki was running in the lead in Manthey-Racing’s 911 GT3 R, when the team then decided on an early pit stop. This strategy was foiled, however, when the race was red-flagged as a result of a huge crash between Audi driver Ash Walsh and Mercedes driver John Martin with 20 minutes left in the race. This eventually led to the race being suspended with the clock ticking down to zero as cars were parked on the front straight waiting for a restart. Ultimately, the Frenchman and his teammates Dirk Werner and Romain Dumas finished sixth, one position behind the Manthey-Racing 911 GT3 R of Earl Bamber, Laurens Vanthoor and Kévin Estre. The Competition Motorsports 911 GT3 R driven by Patrick Long, Matt Campbell and his Australian compatriots David Calvert-Jones and Alex Davison, finished in fourth place. The top Porsche finisher was the Black Swan Racing 911 GT3 R which was classified third
overall, also winning the Class A Pro-Am class.

Bathurst 12 Hour, 4 February 2018: #911 Manthey-Racing Porsche 911 GT3 R driven by Romain Dumas, Frederic Makowiecki and Dirk Werner

Unlike the two competitors ahead of them, all 911 GT3 R racers had enough fuel on board to complete the entire race distance, and so it was only the early termination of the race that prevented a possible victory. Grove Motorsports secured its second class victory, with the squad taking home the Class B trophy with the 911 GT3 Cup.

Dr Frank-Steffen Walliser, Vice President Motorsport and GT Cars, “…[we had] four Porsche in the top six – but unfortunately not in the positions we had aimed for. Still, we can take many positives home with us from this season-opener of the Intercontinental GT Challenge...”
Marc Lieb (911 GT3 R #540): “This race was typical of Bathurst. Lots of accidents, lots of drama. We did exactly what we set out to do, and that was to get through without any problems and bring the car home in one piece.”
Bathurst 12 Hour, 4 February 2018: #540 Black Swan Racing Porsche 911 GT3 R driven by Timothy Pappas, Jeroen Bleekemolen, Marc Lieb and Luca Stolz

Timothy Pappas (911 GT3 R #540): “That was a fantastic race. We travelled all the way from the USA and we really enjoyed Bathurst. To win the Pro-Am class and to stand on the podium in third overall is one of the biggest successes in my career.”

Jeroen Bleekemolen (911 GT3 R #540): “What an incredible race. The drivers and teams didn’t make one mistake, and that’s not easy in Bathurst.”

Luca Stolz (911 GT3 R #540): “First, thank you to the team. That was my first race on this fantastic racetrack and my first race with the 911 GT3 R.”

Patrick Long (911 GT3 R #12): “A great team result for Porsche. Our race was good to the
end and we had a very promising fuel strategy.”

Matt Campbell (911 GT3 R #12): “During my last stint I drove one qualifying lap after the other. In the end, we had the speed to be up at the front, however the red flag thwarted those plans.”

Kévin Estre (911 GT3 R #991): “If it hadn’t been for the early termination of the race, our strategy would have worked and we would have made it through to the flag.”
Bathurst 12 Hour, 4 February 2018: #991 Craft Bamboo Racing Porsche 911 GT3 R of Earl Bamber, Kevin Estre and Laurens Vanthoor

Frédéric Makowiecki (911 GT3 R #911): “We knew that we first had to bond as a team. We’ve never raced together before, and now we’re contesting the Intercontinental GT Challenge together. Bathurst was completely uncharted territory for us. We managed to improve step by step from the first practice, and towards the end of the race our 911 GT3 R was running better than it had over the entire weekend.”
Bathurst 12 Hour, 4 February 2018: #911 Manthey-Racing Porsche 911 GT3 R driven by Romain Dumas, Frederic Makowiecki and Dirk Werner

Top overall Porsche finishers:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>O/A</th>
<th>Pos.</th>
<th>Car No.</th>
<th>Drivers</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>540</td>
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<td>Black Swan Racing</td>
<td>PRO-AM</td>
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<td>Long, Campbell, Davison, Calvert-Jones</td>
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2018 Intercontinental GT Challenge races:

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>28/29 July</td>
<td>24 Hours of Spa</td>
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<td>28 October</td>
<td>Mazda Raceway California 8 Hours</td>
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Edited by: Glen Smale
Images by: Porsche Motorsport