

Philippe Alméras of Team Martinet by Alméras and his passion for Porsche

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Philippe Alméras is the owner of Team Martinet by Alméras, one of the main Porsche team contenders in the 2017 racing calendar: Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup, Porsche Carrera Cup France, French GT4 Championship, VdeV Endurance Series, Porsche Club Racing and more.

The name Alméras is linked from the very beginning with Porsche. Brothers Jean-Marie and

Jacques Alméras (the latter being the father of Philippe) set up their Porsche tuning and racing workshop in the late '60s in southern France near Montpellier. Quite soon, lots of Porsche owners came along from all over France and even from wider Europe to benefit from Alméras Freres' skills of preparing Porsches, modifying bodywork, racing tuned engines, chassis development and special parts.



With this Porsche 962 C sport-prototype (now fully restored to its original condition) Équipe Alméras Freres took part at the 1989 edition of the Le Mans 24hrs (Group C1). The drivers were Jean-Marie Alméras, Jacques Alméras and Allain Iannetta. The car retired in the 13th hour due to an accident. The Ville de Montpellier sticker means the team had support from

the City Hall of Montpellier. The race start number #34, corresponds to the department of Hérault (of which the departmental capital is Montpellier)

In parallel with this workshop activity, their name became a benchmark in racing all through the '70s and '80s, especially in rallying and endurance. With Jean Marie Alméras at the wheel and co-driven by his brother Jacques (although a fast driver himself) the Alméras Porsche 911 SC scored some brilliant results in Tour de Corse, Rallye Monte Carlo or Criterium de Cevennes.

In 1978, a Porsche Alméras won the Monte Carlo Rallye with driver Jean-Pierre Nicolas. Jürgen Barth, then head of customer competition at Porsche and present at that race driving a Toyota, was so impressed with that result that he promised special factory support to Alméras Freres.

The plan to replace the 911 SC with the 924 GTS by 1982 ordered by Dr Fuhrmann was clear, but Barth 'saved' the SC thanks to the brilliant results by Alméras. Their participation with a 911 SC through the Alméras Freres name enabled Walter Röhrl to lead the San Remo Rally in 1981 ahead of the Audi Quattros, which were unbeatable at that time.

In 1980, the red Porsche 930 with the Alméras Freres branding participated in the Le Mans 24 Hours with both Jean-Marie and Jacques at the wheel. In total, the Alméras Freres team participated at Le Mans on eight occasions with four different Porsche models: in GT (Porsche 930 in 1980, 1983 and 1984; 924 GTR in 1981; and Carrera RSR in 1994) and in prototype (Porsche 962 C in 1989, 1991 and 1992). Each time, Jean-Marie and Jacques were at the wheel of their own cars, each with different drivers completing their three-driver line-up.

Philippe Alméras, after years of accompanying his father and uncle on the circuits or rally roads, showed some impressive results at the wheel: starting with a Peugeot 206 CC Cup in the French single make Cup (Alméras Freres is also a local Peugeot dealer) and continuing with the Porsche Carrera Cup in 2006 and 2007. To date, Philippe has made just the one



start at Le Mans in the 24-hour race, when in 2004 with the Luc Alphand Adventures Porsche 996 GT3-RS, he finished fifth in the GT category. Philippe has an engineering degree from the famous INSA, the French leading engineering school in Lyon. He specialised in vehicle dynamics, and therefore his ambition was clearly to continue the family tradition and set himself the target to become one of the best Porsche teams in Europe and in the world.

Since the official launch of Pro GT by Philippe Alméras in 2008, Philippe entered his cars in the Porsche Carrera Cup France and Mobil 1 Porsche Supercup, Blancpain GT Series, 24 Hours of Spa, VdeV and other Endurance or Porsche Club events.

After scoring multiple wins and top results, the 2016 season was the pinnacle for his team, with its main Teams Title in the Porsche Carrera Cup France. Their driver, Mathieu Jaminet won the drivers' title in a very dominant manner and finished third overall in the Mobil 1 Supercup (with three wins).



With this Porsche 935, Jean-Marie Alméras became European Hillclimb champion in 2016 for Historic Vehicles

As a matter of fact, Philippe's uncle Jean-Marie Alméras won the European Hillclimb title for Historic Vehicles (VHC) with a Porsche 935 entirely restored in the family garage.

Philippe Alméras interview

In an exclusive interview for *Porsche Road & Race*, Philippe Alméras, now 37 years old, speaks about his plans for 2017 and about his passion for Porsche cars:

Philippe, in 2016 you and your team set an unprecedented record in the Porsche Carrera

Cup France, winning all the races. What was the secret of such a dominant and consecutive series of wins?



Philippe Alméras, to the right of driver Mathieu Jaminet, enjoying one of the three wins with the team after in the 2016 Supercup

The secret is hard work and concentration. We worked very hard during the free practices, in order to acquire the maximum data and set-up feedback from our drivers and to exploit that during qualifying and in the races. As a plus, we tried to surpass ourselves and continuously set new standards of performance.

Having raced yourself as a driver in the Porsche Carrera Cup France in 2006 and 2007, how do you see the evolution of this championship and its level of performance, compared with

that of ten years ago?

The level of performance has evolved a lot, and mainly since the arrival of the new Porsche 991 because of its hybrid chassis, that was revolutionary for driver and for the car's overall setup. The Cup cars today are quicker but also easier to drive, because they require less physical effort from the driver. Honestly, after 30 minutes of racing in the old model, without paddle shift and a temperamental gearbox, that was hard.



Philippe Alméras sits on the roof, Mathieu Jaminet on the bonnet and the entire team celebrate at Paul Ricard after two wins, to end the French Carrera Cup season as Driver and Team Champions

The same question for the Porsche Supercup, you did participate as a driver in a few races a decade ago.

Well, in the Supercup ten years ago we had the PCCB (Porsche Carbon Ceramic Brakes). That was very hard, but it was awesome because the car was so demanding, mainly because of its very narrow front wheels (24 inch Michelins versus 27 inch today)

You announced your project to race with your team in the new French GT4 Championship, with three Porsche Cayman GT4 Clubsport, in parallel with full Porsche Carrera Cup France and Mobil 1 Supercup programs. Do you have other plans or ideas for this coming 2017 season?

This is already a lot. We will manage a total of ten Porsche race cars (all categories combined), so my team will surely have a lot of work.



Mathieu Jaminet celebrating the last win of the season, at Paul Ricard, with Alm eras team members on the pit wall

What will the name of the team be?

Team Martinet By Alméras, because Pierre Martinet (the owner of Pierre Martinet brand: French prepared salads specialist) really wanted to be associated to the Alméras name in competition.

Who will your drivers be for the 2017 season, and what are the key recruiting criteria in order to find the new champions, like Mathieu Jaminet?

We will bet on a young Swedish driver to debut in the Supercup but in addition we will rely on the continuity and stability of Steven Palette. As for the French Carrera Cup, following some test sessions during the winter, we have chosen Julien Andlauer and Florian Latorre for the Class A of the championship. As for the Class B (Gentlemen) Stéphane Denoual and Nicolas Misslin will carry our colours. In the newly created French GT4 Championship, we will be racing the Cayman GT4 Clubsport with Steven Palette/Henry Hassid and Anthony Beltoise/Olivier Estèves in another car.

(Note that Beltoise-Hassid, won the French Title in 2012 with the Porsche 911 GT3 R of Team Alméras).

Did you follow the first endurance races of the year: 24 Hours of Dubai, 24 Hours of Daytona or the 12 Hours of Bathurst? Do you plan to race there with one of your cars?

Yes, I followed these races but only briefly. Our Cayman GT4s are not prepared for endurance events yet, and I do not want to buy and race a Porsche GT3-R as it is too expensive.

After successfully participating in the Blancpain Endurance Series in 2012/2013 and your stated ambition to attend Le Mans for the 24-hour race, you decided three years ago to race exclusively sprint series like Carrera Cup or Supercup. Are you, today, of the same mind?

Yes, and I'm fully satisfied with this choice. In 2014, we were close to completely stop the

sprint races to concentrate entirely on endurance, but we finally had to abandon that project. If I were to start over again, I would make the same choice. I love sprint races as a team owner, and I really love endurance as a driver. The new French GT4 Championship is sprint racing with controlled costs.

Given the latest developments of the ACO, Blancpain or IMSA championships, are you favourably disposed towards an equivalence and convergence of the GTE and GT3 classes? What is your opinion about the global evolution of the GT regulations over the last few years?

I am hesitant about the future of the GT class in the Le Mans/WEC series: either they should render the class accessible to the GT3 teams, or leave it like it is now with these 'crazy' GTE cars. But honestly, it makes no sense to develop GTE cars that cost 1 million euros and then to apply a BoP index afterwards. The GT3 concept seems better in my eyes, but it needs better technical follow up. The main point is, why spend 450,000 euros on a car to do a lap time that is restricted by a BoP, while another car, half the price of the first, can do the same lap time. It makes no sense...



Mathieu Jaminet, 2016 French Carrera Cup Champion with team Martinet by Alm eras, in action at Variante Alta chicane at Imola, during a round of Carrera Cup

How do you see the new 911 RSR Porsche and its brand-new concept (central rear engine), a new weight distribution and all the new technology that accompanies it?

It is a beautiful car, for sure, but a bi-turbo is sorely missed...

Given the price of the race cars, parts and accessories, how difficult is it to find a viable business model for a race team today while still delivering strong performance at the same time?

The Porsche Carrera Cup is the only car and series around which we can build a business model today that both works for us and is stable. All the other cars and race series need a budget mix from sponsors or car manufacturers to survive.

How do you see your team in 5 years and in 10 years from now?

My dream is to win the Supercup within five years and to win it again within the next ten years.

Is your activity today dedicated one hundred per cent to racing, or you do also manage the Alméras Porsche garage and the road cars for its customers?

My job is ninety per cent focused on racing activities, the other ten per cent I use to help Alméras Freres with administrative tasks such as recruiting, accounting etc.

Today the Alméras name is known and recognized by the Porsche community and enthusiasts in France and abroad for its road cars. Alméras Freres is to Porsche in France what Charles Pozzi is to the name Ferrari. Do you see that as a constraint (for example increased pressure, or the need for investment) or as an advantage?

Honestly, I don't see it as either, I am only focused on my job, to do it in the best way possible.

You had a successful racing career in the single make series, Porsche Carrera Cup and also Le Mans 24 hours (in 2004). Is there any chance that we will see you behind the wheel once again in either Sprint or Endurance racing?

I will do some endurance racing on a small scale, that is for sure, and I will give myself another three years in the Supercup to try and reach the top ten!

Your uncle, Jean-Marie Alméras, clinched the FIA 2016 European Hillclimb title for Historic Vehicles, in a superb Porsche 935 3.5-litre prepared in the family garage. Did you go with him to the races this year?

I followed the project mainly because my office view is right over the work place of this Porsche 935. Therefore, I am aware of the amount of work that it required. Hats off to them!

After so many years and having driven (on both roads and circuits) and prepared so many Porsche models, is there one that you love in particular? Which is your favourite road or race Porsche model of all times, and why?

I think the best Porsche I have even driven was the 993 GT2, the 3.8-litre version with its double ignition system. It is a real sports car, especially when you do a 360° spin at the S des Sablières at Dijon-Prenois racetrack, while being at full throttle in fourth gear (around 295km/h), because of an oil pipe failure...

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