

# “Driving with Legends”

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Published in Porsche Panorama

May 2015

Circulation: approximately 100,000







THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE PORSCHE CLUB OF AMERICA



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PORSCHE PANORAMA (ISSN 0147-3565) is published monthly by the Porsche Club of America, Inc., 9689 Gerwig Lane, Suite 4C/D, Columbia, MD 21045. Periodicals postage paid at Columbia, MD, and additional offices. PCA membership dues are \$45.00 for one year, \$90.00 for two years or \$132.00 for three years. Dues include \$12.00 per year for an annual subscription to Porsche Panorama. Postmaster: Send address changes to Porsche Panorama, PCA Executive Office, PO Box 6400, Columbia, MD 21045. Copyright ©2015 by the Porsche Club of America, Inc., all rights reserved. www.pca.org



# Driving With Legends

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO PARTNER WITH A FAMOUS DRIVER AT THE CLASSIC 24 AT DAYTONA? THREE PCA MEMBERS FOUND OUT.

STORY BY **PRESCOTT KELLY** WITH **SEAN CRIDLAND**  
PHOTOS BY **SEAN CRIDLAND**

**"I HAVE BECOME** so enthusiastic about driving old Porsches. The cars are raw and visceral. The emotions are higher; the experience is more electric. The sensation of speed is higher, and the driving is more challenging and engaging."

So said Porsche factory driver Patrick Long after a weekend spent racing vintage 911s at the inaugural Classic 24 at Daytona. He teamed up with Hurley Haywood and Gijs van Lennep plus PCA members/vintage racers Alan Benjamin, Johan Dirickx, and Frank Kovacevic. If you add in semi-pro drivers Tony Walker and Robert Ames, you end up with eight drivers in four 911 race cars. While the driving was spirited and competitive, the group's emphasis was firmly fixed on having fun.

"There's something about the atmosphere," remarked Long at Daytona. "It's so approachable. All the stuff you love about motor-sports exists here.... It's like being a kid again. It reminds me of all the emotions I had when I first started racing."



Patrick Long, Hurley Haywood, and Gijs van Lennep: Three legends who had never raced together before formed new bonds at the 2014 Classic 24 at Daytona.





Top: The 911S that won the GT2000 class at Daytona in 1967 and took ninth overall relives its day of glory 47 years later. Far right: Patrick Long is ready for the first stint of the Classic 24. Right: Alan Benjamin prepares for the start of Session 2 in his 1967 911S.



**WHEN THE INAUGURAL** Classic 24 at Daytona was announced, Americans flocked to experience the unusual 24-hour vintage racing format. They weren't the only ones.

The Classic 24 attracted 150 cars from 21 countries. Drivers and owners came from Europe as well as Central and South America. The venue was a prime attraction, as

was a schedule that had six groups, each running four one-hour sessions. Twenty-four hours of nearly continuous racing offered a new, exciting challenge for many amateurs: Daytona by night.

While some drivers iron-manned the event, driving all four sessions by themselves, it was common to have at least two drivers per car. The winners were those who covered the most distance through the four stints. Because each session had a mandatory stop, pit strategy became a key parameter.

**OUT OF THE 150 RACE CARS** entered in the Classic 24, nearly 60 were Porsches. Two were entered by Colorado PCA member Alan Benjamin, who saw the event as the chance of a lifetime.

Benjamin has several years of experience at Le Mans Classic, where he usually shares a BMW 3.5 CSL with owner Tony Walker. The moment the Classic 24 was announced, Benjamin started lining up friends to join him. He quickly recruited Pat-

rick Long and Hurley Haywood as co-drivers, along with Robert Ames, a hot shoe from Steamboat Springs.

The first of the two cars Benjamin entered was a 1967 911S. Bearing chassis number 305278S, the 911S has been a race car since it was new. It was an appropriate choice, having won its class at the 1967 24 Hours of Daytona in the hands of Jack Ryan and Bill Bencker, and is thus believed to be the first 911S to win an FIA-sanctioned event. Ryan and Bencker were no strangers to 911s—having given the 911 its first road racing win, also at Daytona, in early 1966 (*Panorama*, January 2015). Ryan was an Atlanta VW dealer who loved to race; Bencker drove 356 Carreras and GTs for the Brundage family under their Porsche dealership's banner.

Benjamin's second entry was a 1990 911 Carrera Cup, serial number WPOZZZ96ZLS409011. It was built to race in the Carrera Cup, a one-make

series that famously ran support races at Formula 1 events. The series was the forerunner of today's GT3 Cup and was known for mayhem, as top GT drivers worked to shine in front of a sophisticated racing audience. Chassis 409011 was campaigned in 1990 by Strähle Autosport, and was driven by 1989 and 1991 Carrera Cup Champion Roland Asch. While Asch did not run the full 1990 season, he won three races and finished fifth in the final point standings. Porsche built 297 Carrera Cup cars between 1990 and 1993, but original intact tubs are fairly rare today.

With two cars entered for four drivers, Benjamin was far from done. He invited Johan Dirickx, a friend from Belgium, to bring his 1974 911 Carrera RS 3.0. Gijs van Lennep, a two-time Le Mans winner and Targa Florio champion, was drafted to be his co-driver. A fourth car, a 1992 911 Carrera Cup USA—one of just 45 built—was brought to Daytona



Left: Robert Ames' smile says it all. Below: Hurley Haywood enjoys a light moment with the crew.







Above: Patrick Long, car nut. Above right: Gijs van Lennep and Johan Dirickx are thrilled to co-drive the 1974 911 Carrera RS 3.0 at Daytona. They stood in fifth place after Session 1 before falling to 14th in Group B.



by Frank Kovacevic of Napa, California. Bringing it full circle, Kovacevic would split driving duties with Benjamin's Le Mans Classic cohort, U.K. rally driver Tony Walker.

So it was that four Porsches with four two-man driver teams took over one end of the B Building in Daytona's paddock. They would race against one another as friends. Why would such accomplished drivers go vintage racing with a bunch of, well, us? For the love of driving,

**"VINTAGE RACING IS** really just an extension of my day job, more about Porsches," explained Long at Daytona. "I cannot race at the top professional level forever. When that's done, I want to still be racing, into Porsches, doing this stuff. Brian Redman and Hurley Haywood are out here this weekend because they love the sport."

Long has been the lone American Porsche factory driver since 2003. He raced karts in Europe as a teenager and was a participant in the Red Bull Formula 1 Driver Search in 2002, where he caught the eye of Porsche. Known for his speed in 911 RSRs, he drove LMP2-class Penske Porsche RS Spyders in the American Le Mans Series. Long's resume includes three ALMS driver championships, one Pirelli World Challenge championship, two class wins at Le Mans, two class wins at Sebring, three class wins at Petit Le Mans, and a class win at Daytona.

Haywood is a bit further down the road. He's been racing for more than 45 years, having driven for the Porsche factory and Brumos Porsche for decades. He has collected three overall wins at Le Mans, five overall wins at the 24 Hours of Daytona, and two overall wins at the 12 Hours of Sebring. Haywood also has seven season championships to his credit, and estimates he has logged 100,000 miles at Daytona.

"I got involved in the Classic 24 through Patrick, who called to say he was driving a 911S," said Haywood. "When I drove the car in the

first practice, I was immediately laughing to myself. It's so in your face. When you're accustomed to driving modern race cars, you're used to having cars do *exactly* what you want them to do. You're used to having the platform be absolutely totally rigid and you, the driver, are being banged around on the track."

Gijs van Lennep might be a name less familiar to Americans—unless they know their history. The Dutchman drove for Porsche beginning in

pit stop and driver change," continued van Lennep. "I'm old, but eight laps here is easy."

**WALKING AMONG GIANTS** of motorsports—past or present—makes for an understandably interesting weekend, especially if you're a dyed-in-the-wool car nut like Benjamin. The amateur PCA and vintage racer's life with cars started early. When he was seven, his mother filled out a *Road & Track* subscription form for him.

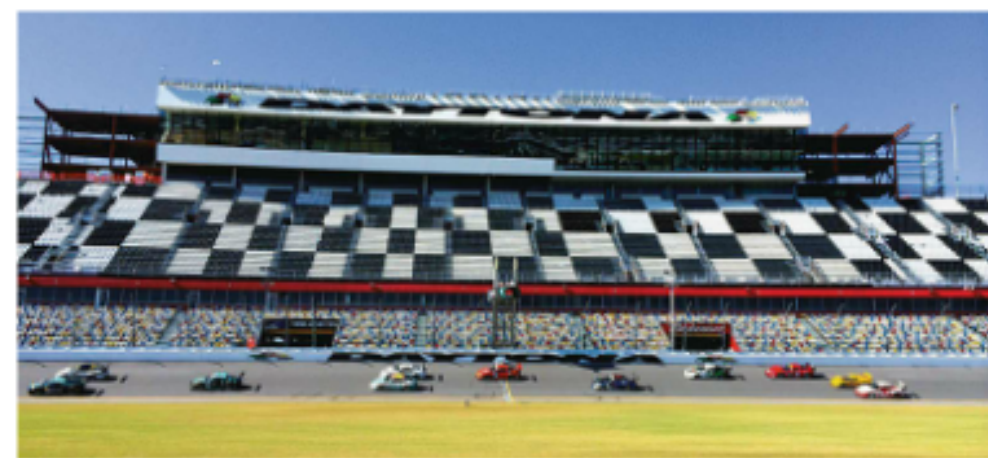


PHOTO: JEFF ZANKS

1967, and won Le Mans in a 917 in 1971 with co-driver Helmut Marko. He won the European Formula 5000 Championship in 1972, won the Targa Florio in a 911 Carrera RSR with Herbert Müller in 1973, and took a second win at Le Mans in a 936 with Jacky Ickx in 1976. Like Haywood, he's no stranger to Daytona.

"I was here in 1967 driving a 906," said van Lennep. "We had gearbox problems if I remember correctly, and did not do well. Then, in 1971, I was here with Vic Elford in the 917. He blew a tire and spun the car in the banking. The car was damaged, so it could not continue. In those days, there was no Bus Stop—so the track was very fast. I came back to Daytona in 2007 for Rennsport Reunion. That event had very knowledgeable Porsche and racing people. American fans are very knowledgeable, especially if you won Le Mans. They consider that a magical race."

"This event is just eight laps for each of us, me and Johan, with the

Things festered until 1992, when he tried PCA Club Racing in a 140-hp 1973 911T. He still races that car regularly, and has accumulated 27,000 racing miles in it.

Benjamin's friend, Robert Ames, is a driving coach for several organizations, and he works a number of tire and new-car introductions. He currently races a 911 RS America with PCA and a Ford Boss 302S in NASA's American Iron pro series.

Third among the amateurs was Johan Dirickx, a Porsche collector who likes to rally and road race. He's a regular entrant at the Goodwood Festival of Speed Rally Stage in a 1984 911 SC/RS, and has raced in a number of prominent vintage events, including Le Mans Classic, Rennsport Reunion, and the Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion. As a devotee of the Porsche marque, he regularly organizes outings at Circuit Abbeville in northern France.

Frank Kovacevic, a reformed California dirt tracker, has a variety of





Top: The 1990 Carrera Cup hit a true 160 mph at Daytona. Above: It took an army to support four cars and eight drivers over 24 hours.

competed in World Rally Championship events and Historic Rallies.

**AS THE WEEKEND UNFOLDED**, Benjamin, Ames, Dirickx, Kovacevic, and Walker experienced something few amateurs get to, sharing a garage at a famous track with legendary factory Porsche drivers and listening to them discuss 911s—while sharing the cars with them.

"Racing at Daytona in a Daytona class winner with Hurley and Patrick is a dream come true," said Benjamin. "The only way I can relate it to my 'non-car' friends is to compare it to playing guitar with the Rolling Stones at Wembley Stadium."

Ames, who has done the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon five times, is in top physical condition and happily volunteered to take the graveyard stints. That made him popular with the other drivers.

He was also quick.

As for the 911s in the garage, they nicely spanned three decades, representing the late 1960s, the mid-1970s, and the early 1990s. Long and Haywood were both enthusiastic about the earliest car on hand.

"The 1967 911S is in one sense

more refined than you'd imagine, but it is a short-wheelbase car," observed Long. "You have to be comfortable with the rear end stepping out. It's probably faster to drive the car sideways, but when it steps out, you have to stay in it—it takes every ounce of car control I have acquired after 25 years in sprint cars, LMP2 cars, and everything in between."

"It's amazing," continued Long. "People usually don't believe me, but driving a '67 911S or '90 Cup—or a modern RSR—is the same set of braking, trail-braking, getting the diff locked up, and getting the car straight again so you can accelerate. Those things happen at different places on the track, but the concept and the tempo are the same."

The 1967 911S was a trip down memory lane for Haywood. "It's like the 911 I drove the first time at Watkins Glen with Peter Gregg in 1969, the very same feeling," said Haywood. "It took me a few laps to get used to it. It moves around so much that you are adjusting all the time to compensate. It isn't going to fly out from under you, but you can get it completely sideways and it's still controllable with your foot."

The 1974 RS 3.0 was seven years newer, and it was interesting to hear van Lennep talk about the car he was sharing with Dirickx. "I like the 1974 RS I'm driving with Johan because it requires a lot of technique," he said. "Suspension settings are very important and make a big difference in handling and speed. We had way too much toe-out in front for a while. It turns in better now and is more stable on the banking. The 3.0-liter engine is strong, with good torque for exit speeds. We're experimenting with the tire pressures to fine-tune the car. Once we get that set, we'll probably stiffen the car up a little."

Perhaps most refreshing was van Lennep's take on his own driving. It is something he still works at. "As I get older, braking is the toughest part for me—braking late enough," he said. "I am still braking too early in some corners; I have to work on that. The most difficult part of Daytona is the kink between the hairpins in the infield. That should be flat out, but it isn't. That's a spot where you can pick up a little distance on someone. Also, braking into the first corner—that is quite challenging. It's too easy to brake early. You have to brake later, later, later... without going too late!"

As for the 1990 Carrera Cup? Despite being 23 years newer than the 1967 911S, Long sees it as the last 911 of the same school. "The 1990 Cup runs on a standard setup: non-adjustable shocks, no power steering...it's the last of the old-school race cars," he said. "And here, with the bumps at the Bus Stop, for example, the car moves around a lot."

He isn't saying the 964 race car is without advantages, however. "The Cup is stiffer, and it has anti-lock brakes and an easier gearbox than the 901 in the '67 S," noted Long. "Both cars are really docile, user-friendly, even—until you try to squeeze that last second out of the lap. When you do that, it's all about what type of hero you are. You can do it really smoothly, or you can

hang it all out and look racy. Both work, and yield about the same lap times. One just gives you a better YouTube video."

Which does Long prefer? "Smooth car control works better for me. My hands are moving a lot in the cockpit, but the car is moving smoothly. You adjust subconsciously, before the car moves. If you're catching the car consciously, it's too late."

While the group focused on having fun, they did well for their first time out in a new event. Sharing the 1967 911S, Haywood, Long, Benjamin, and Ames would finish ninth in Group A after 69 laps, with a best lap of 2:13.528—making them the third 911 to cross the finish in a class that included Lola, Ford, Chevron, and Porsche prototypes. Van Lennep and Dirickx ran as high as fifth in the second of Group B's four one-hour sessions but finished 14th after logging 63 laps, with a best lap time of 2:10.051.

Long, Benjamin, and Ames shared the ex-Strähle Carrera Cup in Group C and finished eighth after 61 laps, with a best lap time of 2:02.508. The Carrera Cup USA of Frank Kovacevic and Tony Walker fared better in Group C, placing fifth after 70 laps with a best time of 2:07.974 behind a 968, a 956, a 964 RSR, and the winning 962.

**PERHAPS THE BEST NEWS** for racing fans is that the Classic 24 at Daytona appears to be here to stay. A second installment is planned for November 13-15, 2015. Following that, the plan is to make it a biennial event that alternates with Le Mans Classic. Haywood is already looking forward to the next one.

"I had a great time," he said. "The team was great. I really enjoyed everybody on the team."

As for Long? He may race new Porsches for a living, but there's no question he wants to become more involved in the vintage scene. "Yes there's competition, yes there are egos, yes there's politics, but it's not really measurable compared to the

appreciation of racing and the camaraderie," he observed.

"I grew up appreciating old cars," he said. "My grandfather ran a gas station in Glendale, California in the 1960s in the hot-rod era. I had this exposure to vintage cars at a young age. I have melded that with what I love about Porsches and what I love about racing. In new, modern race Porsches, the cars are so advanced. You get a driving style set by simulations, wind tunnels, and computer aids. In older cars, it's more of a blank canvas—there are more ways to get speed out of them...You can be more creative."

It's a good bet that van Lennep will be back, too. "It's been fun to be back at Daytona," he said. "I like the track, although it is a funny circuit with its banking and long straights. The banking is not so extreme—we have a track with 60° banking while this one is 32°—but the straights are longer than I'm accustomed to. The infield is fun and it is flat, so not too difficult. It's a safe circuit and well organized."

As for the amateurs, they had the time of their lives. "The weekend was not about lap times," says Benjamin. "It was about the experience of racing with historically important cars, but also about being totally present in the event. Daytona is the epic track of America and the epic race. I felt a ton a pressure not to embarrass myself before the race, but I must say that you will never find more down-to-earth pro racers who love the cars and love Porsche. I am signed up for next year!"

The driver who has more racing laps at Daytona than anyone gets the last word, and he doesn't waste it. Haywood's final observation has less to do with the track or the cars and more with the enthusiasm that made the Classic 24 possible.

"That's what makes Porsche Porsche, when you have people like Alan Benjamin, who are the guardians of the heritage," said Haywood. "As guardians, they take on that kind of responsibility to really display something that's worthwhile." ☺