

CLASSIC DRIVER

A lap of Le Mans - in a Martini-Porsche 911 Carrera RSR

Lead

Classic Driver certainly got lucky this time. We were offered a spin on the track before the start of the Le Mans Classic... with Le Mans winner Jürgen Barth at the wheel of the Porsche 911 Carrera RSR that won the 1973 Targa Florio...

While Porsche's long-anticipated return to the Le Mans 24 Hours in June wasn't quite the hoped-for success, the marque's presence at this year's Le Mans Classic reminded us of the unrivalled number of victories that Porsche has enjoyed here over the years. The Classic saw huge numbers of privately owned Porsches in action, from 356 and 911 right through to 917 and 935, representing the entire spectrum of Zuffenhausen's finest. Even Porsche itself had brought several legends from the museum to Le Mans - and Classic Driver was thrilled to be offered a passenger ride round the circuit in the 330HP Martini Porsche 911 Carrera RSR in which Herbert Müller and Gijs van Lennep won the 1973 Targa Florio.

Race legend at the wheel



At the wheel was none other than Jürgen Barth, the legendary Porsche racer who - together with Jacky Ickx and Hurley Haywood - won the 1977 Le Mans 24 Hours. Barth was at the Le Mans Classic to race a 1967 Porsche 907: on Friday, in qualifying, it suffered a puncture at over 250km/h. "Lucky", was the driver's dry comment about the outcome of that little occurrence. We feel quite relieved that our lap of Le Mans in the Martini Porsche is very definitely a *parade lap*. And the driver is clearly well within the limits of safety, sliding casually through the Dunlop chicane and, on one occasion, steering with his knee while he takes pictures of the other Martini cars with his smartphone. On the Mulsanne Straight, we were stunned by the thought of the speeds that were reached in the 1970s, before the chicanes were added. There is a fabulous [onboard video from 1977](#), in which Jürgen Barth's Porsche 936 seems almost to be flying past the villages on the Hunaudières.

That 'backside' feeling



We ask Barth what has changed since his victory at Le Mans. "The high-tech racing cars of today make the need to 'drive with your backside' - a level of sensation that was required in those days - redundant. If a rev-counter failed, we still had to sense the precise moment at which a gearchange was needed, or two laps later we'd find ourselves in the pitlane with engine failure." He threads our car elegantly through the Porsche Curves and, too soon, we're at the end of our lap. Too bad: we were just getting into the groove of this high-speed interview technique.

Gallery

