

**World champion! Forty years ago, Porsche takes home the Manufacturers' World Championship at the end of a tumultuous season of racing. The 908 and its outstanding driver Jo Siffert post the first of many championships to come...**

By  
Michael Sönke

Photos by  
Porsche Archive, dpa

## 1969 Going for Broke

**A victory celebration** looks a bit different. In 1969 Porsche won the Manufacturers' World Championship for the first time, and at the end of the season the international motor racing press was invited to the Hockenheimring to report on the mishaps that took place during the championship bid. It was a bold decision by race engineer Peter Falk. A thorough and forthright man both on and off the track, Falk had resolved to answer all the questions that had gone unanswered during the hectic months of racing. The result was a very unusual sort of reckoning, with an accumulation of errors adding up to victory. There they were, the parts that had cost the team victories, on display for all to see: the gear teeth from Daytona, the frame from Sebring, the tires from Brands Hatch, the clutch from Le Mans. The upshot was a PR coup of the most extraordinary kind.

The year 1969 was a special one in the Manufacturers' World Championship. The 24 Hours of Daytona and Le Mans, the 12 Hours of Sebring, the Targa Florio, the 1000 km of Monza, Spa-Francorchamps, and the Nürburgring. Motor-racing classics that drew hundreds of thousands of fans. The field was illustrious: Porsche 908 and 917, Ford GT40 and Mirage Ford, Ferrari 312P, Alfa Romeo T33, Lola-Chevy T70, and Matra MS650 models competed for the title. The Champions League of motor racing. The championship also boasted an elite group of drivers, including Jo Siffert, Jacky Ickx, Mario Andretti, Chris Amon, Hans Herrmann, Pedro Rodríguez, Gerhard Mitter, Vic Elford, Brian Redman, and Joakim Bonnier. In 1967 and 1968, the small, lightweight Porsches had won the most championship points. However, as only the top five results were counted towards the championship, the titles went to Ferrari and Ford, respectively. "In 1969 we were under enormous pressure to win the championship," recalls Falk.

And the pressure grew. In spite of the introduction of the new Porsche 908, after Daytona and Sebring the team had garnered only a few points. Even so, the drivers were full of praise for the ▶



25 April 1969

**Monza**

Brian Redman,  
Jo Siffert (right)



*“You have to try many different roads to find the best solution.”*

new 3.0-liter eight-cylinder car designed by Hans Mezger. Falk remembers the season well. “The losses at Daytona, Sebring, and Le Mans were practically pre-ordained,” he says. “We weren’t able to carry out the test-drives as planned.” The test-drive in Italy had ended with the car in flames after eighteen hours—exactly how long the last car lasted at Daytona. In all four 908 long-tails, a gear tooth that drove the camshaft broke during the race. The light metal alloy had failed. After Daytona, the part was replaced by a steel wheel. Problem solved. But the loss had been an agonizing one for the team, not least because when the leading Porsche broke down, it had had a 45-lap lead on the car that later won the race, a Lola fielded by Roger Penske.

Plans had also been in place to test the 908 Spyder for Sebring, where it made its debut. Test-drives on the rough track in Weissach were intended to identify potential weaknesses in the new Spyderys. But the plans were scuttled after heavy snowfall in February 1969 buried the track. Sebring 1969 was the greatest contest in the history of the famed race. “Twelve Hours of Suspense” was the headline in the magazine *auto, motor und sport*. With 70 vehicles at the starting line, six teams traded the lead fourteen times. Porsche was

one of the teams, but was beaten in the end—the frames on the 908s cracked. “We can’t just throw in the towel,” called mechanic Fritz Spingler. The mechanics sawed off flat steel pieces from the fueling station and “splinted” the tubular frame. This allowed the duo of Rolf Stommelen/Joe Buzzetta to place third.

Porsche headed to Brands Hatch with reworked frames, but only Jo Siffert was able to keep pace with the Ferraris. Was it the tires? “We had a gentleman’s agreement with Dunlop,” remembers Falk. The manufacturer agreed to let Siffert test some Firestone tires for a few laps. The time: 1.5 seconds faster. So Porsche opted for the Firestones, but Siffert’s engine was running with only a single ignition circuit. The speedy Swiss nevertheless pulled away at the start and won the race with Brian Redman, leading the way to a one-two-three finish for Porsche.

At Monza the Ferraris were the clear frontrunners. Only one Porsche was able to crack the red prototypes’ dominance in qualifying—Siffert’s 908. And he was just as good in the race, taking victory as the Ferraris broke down. At the Targa Florio in Sicily, the seven cars from Zuffenhausen were even more dominant. Porsche took places one through four, led by the German duo Gerhard Mitter/Udo Schütz. Spa, by contrast, looked to be a re-run of Monza. “Only Siffert could keep the Ferraris at bay,” recalls Falk. Again, Siffert was as formidable in the race as he had been in qualifying. Siffert/Redman took the checkered flag ahead of the Ferrari of Amon/Piper. One much-anticipated Porsche dropped out after one lap: the 12-cylinder Porsche 917 with Gerhard Mitter at the wheel. ▶

*The year 1969 was a special one in the Manufacturers’ World Championship: the 24 Hours of Daytona and Le Mans, the 12 Hours of Sebring, the Targa Florio, the 1000 km of Monza, Spa-Francorchamps, and the Nürburgring—the classics drew hundreds of thousands of spectators.*

Talking strategy: Vic Elford, Porsche designer and later board member Helmuth Bott, Brian Redman, Jo Siffert, and Jacky Ickx (from left)



2 February 1969  
24 Hours of  
Daytona

## Peter Falk and His Drivers

Race engineer and later racing director Peter Falk talks about his drivers in 1969



**Peter Falk**, born in 1932, came to Porsche in 1959. When he began in road testing, he was one of only ten men in what was then a small department. Later, Falk moved on to preliminary development and race support. What does the sequence 904, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, and 917 mean? These were the cars handled by Falk, testing many of them at race speeds between 1964 and 1969. Years later, from 1982 to 1988, came another imposing series: 956, 962, 962 C, 959, and TAG-Turbo, CART. This Porsche racing program without racing director Peter Falk? Unimaginable.

And the number 911? Falk was there beside driver Herbert Linge in the very first race with that type. The race: the Monte Carlo Rally of 1965. Falk devised one of the forerunners to today’s intercom systems. “I spoke into a thick plastic tube that ran directly into Herbert’s helmet. It worked

great.” Snow all but buried the field mid-rally. As always, race strategist Falk had the answer. He recalls: “Using a compass, we found the checkpoint at the end of the stage; no one else came after us.” Linge/Falk finished the race in fifth place with an almost entirely stock 911.

[1] **Joseph Siffert** (Switzerland, 1936–1971) “We loved Jo Siffert. He was very personable and easy-going. He only got a bit anxious right before starts. But that was over as soon as he got behind the wheel. There was only one problem: he was so talented that he could go incredibly fast in any car and be happy with that. He seldom wanted to change anything. Siffert was one of the best drivers in Formula One too. He was unbelievable. Of our seven wins in 1969, Siffert took six of them. He didn’t start the other one.”

[2] **Brian Redman** (England, 1937) – “Redman was barely slower than Siffert. But he was a much calmer sort of guy. He was the ideal partner for Siffert, the Swiss top driver.”

[3] **Hans Herrmann** (Germany, 1928) – “He was a good, dependable driver. He wasn’t always the fastest, but drove soft and wasn’t too hard on the material. An ideal man for long-distance races. He did a lot of tests. And if he liked the car, he’d get faster and faster.”

[4] **Kurt Ahrens** (Germany, 1940) – “He complemented Hans Herrmann very well. He wasn’t strictly a professional because he worked in the family scrap metal business during the week. Ahrens could be very fast, even in difficult conditions. That’s why we put him with Siffert in the not-quite-ready 917 at Zeltweg in 1969. Siffert/Ahrens won the season finale.”

[5] **Udo Schütz** (Germany, 1937) – “He was Gerhard Mitter’s partner. He had returned to Porsche after a year with Alfa Romeo. He was fast and reliable. The duo won the Targa Florio in Sicily. After a serious accident at Le Mans and Mitter’s death in a Formula Two car at the Nürburgring in August 1969, Schütz retired from motor racing.”

[6] **Vic Elford** (England, 1935) – “He was the quintessential all-rounder. In 1968, Vic won the Monte Carlo Rally for Porsche and finished in the points at the Monaco Grand Prix as well. He was the ideal man for the Targa Florio and the Nürburgring. The tight curves on those courses suited the rally ace perfectly. But even at Le Mans, he was in the lead in the 917 for almost 21 hours before the clutch housing broke.”

[7] **Richard Attwood** (England, 1940) – “He was a very calm, dependable man, both on and off the track. He made very few errors. For Porsche, 1970 was an especially important year. In that year, he brought home Porsche’s first victory at Le Mans in the 917 with Hans Herrmann.”

[8] **Gerhard Mitter** (Germany, 1935–1969) – “Mitter was our go-to man. He was the team leader and drivers’ representative. Mitter did a lot of testing for Porsche and he was a proud, ambitious racer and very technically minded. This wasn’t always an advantage. He would sometimes argue with engineers.”



Other drivers also took the wheel, if less frequently, in Porsche factory cars in 1969. This group included Rolf Stommelen, Gérard Larrousse, Joe Buzzetta, Umberto Maglioli, Karl von Wendt, Rudi Lins, Willibald Kauhsen, Frank Gardner, and David Piper.



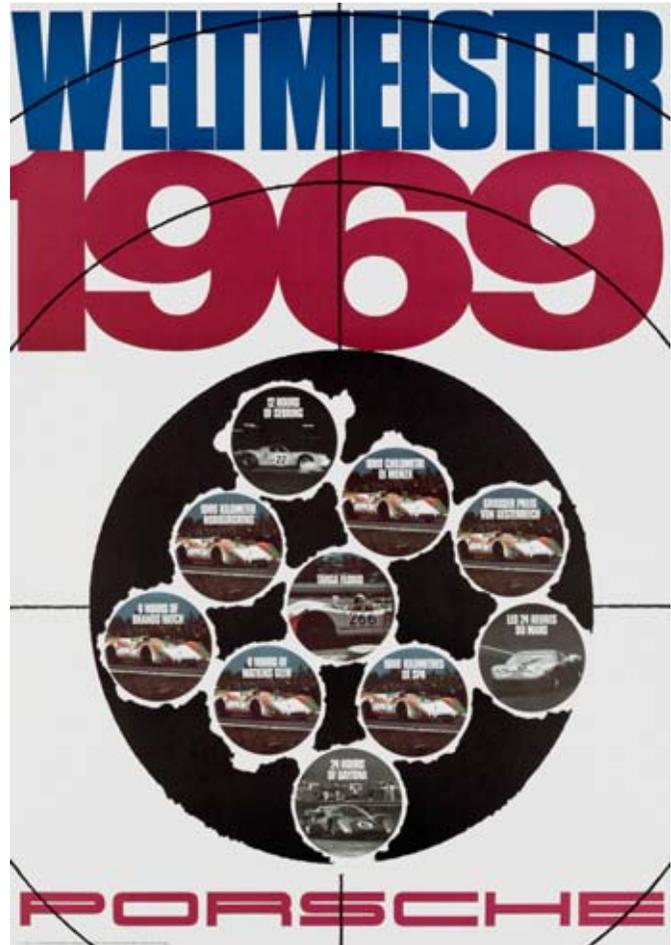
2009  
Porsche  
Museum

## Porsche 908 Technical Specifications

<b>Engine:</b>	<b>Eight-cylinder Boxer</b>
<b>Displacement:</b>	<b>2,997 cc</b>
<b>Output:</b>	<b>350 hp (259 kW)</b>
<b>Maximum speed:</b>	<b>280 km/h (174 mph)</b>
<b>Weight:</b>	<b>Approx. 600 kg (1,320 lbs.)</b>

The 908 was built as a Spyder version (908/02) and as a long-tail for extremely fast tracks. There was also a third version. This version was dubbed the “flounder” by mechanics because of its sleek, aerodynamic shape. It was 20 km/h (12 mph) faster than the old Spyder. Siffert destroyed a “flounder” in the preliminary training for the 1,000-km race at the Nürburgring. His replacement was an older spare car, the Salzburg Spyder “Austria 2.” The second “flounder” was crashed by Elford in training. With only one of the “flounders” left, a lottery was held to decide which team would have the honor. Luck was with Hans Herrmann. Who won? Siffert/Redman, of course, followed by Herrmann/Stommelen, Elford/Ahrens, Lins/Attwood, Kauhsen/von Wendt. “It’s getting lonely at the top for Porsche,” opined *auto, motor und sport*. With three races left to go, Porsche had already taken its first Manufacturers’ Championship.

4 May 1969  
Targa  
Florio



Siffert won two of the last three. At Watkins Glen, the Swiss won with Redman in the 908, while in the 1000 km of Austria he drove the new 917 to its first victory along with Kurt Ahrens. But after the Nürburgring, that most prestigious of races, the 24 Hours of Le Mans awaited the racers. Siffert/Redman drove the “flounder,” but were forced to drop out with transmission trouble. Then Elford/Attwood took the lead in the 917. Still a work in progress, the super sports car had left the field far behind when its clutch housing broke in hour 21. The Ford team of Ickx/ Oliver had built up an eight-lap lead after the 908 of Hans Herrmann/Gérard Larrousse lost nearly 40 minutes due to a damaged wheel bearing and a defective fueling station provided by the organizers. The Porsche team mounted a furious chase. In the most exciting finale in the history of the race, the lead changed hands several times each lap. Herrmann’s eight-cylinder engine came up a few horsepower short at the end of the pursuit; the warning lights indicating that worn-out brake pads were glowing. Daring maneuvers were out of the question, and Ickx won the sprint down the homestretch. Falk calls this chapter “the 120 meters of Le Mans.”

Porsche had been beaten at Le Mans. “What really hurt was losing the Elford 917, which had had such a commanding lead,” says Falk forty years later. The team director of the victors, John Wyer, said in 1969: “Porsche can’t win at Le Mans.” In 1970, however, Wyer himself fielded the Porsche 917 in the world championship. But despite the efforts of Siffert, the team failed to prevail at Le Mans. Herrmann/Attwood took the victory in the Porsche 917 factory car fielded by Porsche Salzburg. Beating the John Wyer team at Le Mans after two close losses still brings a grin to Falk’s face all these years later.