

New ‘Raceborn Moments’ episode: Two RS Spyders, countless memories

30/10/2026 Twenty years on from the Porsche RS Spyder’s first full racing season, Porsche Heritage and Museum has brought together two cars from 2006 and 2008. Timo Bernhard and Sascha Maassen discuss the initial tests, races and the technical development of the LMP2 prototype, as well as a period that both still look back on fondly. The filming of the new ‘Raceborn Moments’ episode also provides the setting for a personal reunion.

Two RS Spyders stand side by side. One reflects the 2006 specification, the other the 2008 version. In front of them stand Sascha Maassen and Timo Bernhard. After just a few minutes, they are in full flow. There is plenty of laughter, with anecdotes alternating with technical details and stories from the cockpit.

For the latest episode of ‘Raceborn Moments’, Porsche Heritage and Museum brings together two cars from different phases of the programme. The differences in their bodywork alone reveal how much

changed between 2006 and 2008. The sight of the cars quickly brings back memories of their development and racing careers. Maassen and Bernhard talk about a programme that marked Porsche's return to prototype racing after several years in GT racing, and about how they themselves experienced those years.

A debut against the odds

At the end of 2005, the RS Spyder made its debut in the American Le Mans Series. It was originally intended to make its racing debut at the Petit Le Mans in Atlanta. However, following problems during testing, Porsche postponed its first outing until the season finale at Laguna Seca. There, the new LMP2 prototype secured pole position and won its class. Sascha Maassen and Lucas Luhr shared the cockpit. In 2006, Penske Racing contested its first full ALMS season with two RS Spyders. Maassen and Luhr won the LMP2 drivers' championship, Porsche the manufacturers' championship and Penske the teams' championship.

Maassen remembers all too well how uncertain this successful start had seemed at the time. One of the stories begins with a sensor and a rather unsettling announcement shortly before the start. 'During the morning warm-up at Laguna Seca, we had a sensor that was reporting a temperature far too high on the steering column. As I was being strapped into the car for the race, the mechanic said to me: "The car might last half an hour." In the end, we won; the only thing that broke was the sensor', recalls Maassen.

During filming, details keep coming up that aren't mentioned in any list of results. For the drivers, however, these details are an integral part of the RS Spyder's history. In October 2006, Porsche unveiled the RS Spyder for the 2007 season at the Paris Motor Show. The bodywork also differed from the early versions: the wings and rear diffuser were redesigned, and the carbon-fibre bodywork was adapted to allow for faster maintenance and assembly.

Two cars, two stages of development

The older of the two vehicles dates from 2006 and served as a test and demonstration car until 2008. In 2007, it was driven on the Jerez circuit and the Ehra test track, amongst other places, followed in 2008 by a demonstration run on the Nürburgring Nordschleife. During this period, the car was painted yellow. In the summer of 2020, it was restored to its original 2006 specification. The figures: 3.4-litre displacement, 503 PS (370 kW) and a weight of 775 kilograms. At 800 kilograms, the 2008 RS Spyder is 25 kilograms heavier, while its output of 476 PS (350 kW) is lower despite retaining the same engine capacity. The fact that the newer car delivers less power despite the technical advances is also down to the regulations. Maassen recalls that the air restrictors were reduced in size over the course of the programme, causing the nominal power output to fall.

The technical leap forward is particularly evident in its aerodynamics. For the 2007 season, Porsche redesigned the wings and rear diffuser, thereby improving aerodynamic efficiency. For 2008, the

aerodynamics were further developed to generate additional downforce, particularly with the twisty city circuits of the American Le Mans Series in mind. Maassen explains what these changes meant for the driver: 'The step from 2006 to the Evo was huge. For me, that was mainly down to the aerodynamics: with the same drag, we had 20 per cent more downforce, or with the same downforce, 20 per cent less drag. It was a whole different world.' Bernhard adds: 'The car demanded determination; otherwise, you weren't fast. I've only had that feeling in very few racing cars. The RS Spyder is one of them.'

From first laps to race victories

In 2007, the RS Spyders secured eight overall victories and eleven wins in the LMP2 class of the American Le Mans Series. These included the overall victory by Timo Bernhard and Romain Dumas at Road America. At the end of the season, RS Spyders took the top four places in the LMP2 class. Bernhard, alongside Dumas, clinched the class drivers' title and went on to win it again in 2008. Maassen had already won the LMP2 drivers' championship in 2006 alongside Lucas Luhr.

Behind the success on the racetrack lay intensive development work. Bernhard was involved from an early stage; at the end of August 2005, his phone rang: 'Roland Kussmaul rang me and asked: "How quickly can you get to Weissach?" I replied: "Perhaps in two hours." He said: "We need a driver for the RS Spyder." So I said: "An hour and a half." His first few laps were initially focused on sorting out a gearbox issue and were initially purely functional test runs.' For Bernhard, they also marked his entry into the world of prototypes and driving with high aerodynamic downforce. Test drives and race action followed in quick succession during this phase. During the first intensive test at Estoril, the RS Spyder's potential quickly became apparent. At the same time, the developers were still grappling with the durability of individual components, as well as with sensors, the gearbox and the engine. 'In terms of balance and performance, the car was very good right from the start,' says Maassen. As the conversation progresses, one detail leads to the next. For one, it is a particular moment from the race that stands out. For the other, it is the feeling behind the wheel.

Direct injection and triumph at Sebring

In 2008, Porsche revised the RS Spyder once again. Over the course of the season, direct injection was introduced for the high-revving V8 racing engine. This improved driveability and performance while reducing fuel consumption. In the same year, Timo Bernhard, Romain Dumas and Emmanuel Collard won the 12 Hours of Sebring.

'For me, the 919 Hybrid and the RS Spyder are the two best racing cars I've ever driven in terms of driving pleasure. Both demanded a great deal from the driver and gave you an incredible amount in return,' summarises Bernhard.

More than just a look back

There are only two years of development between the two RS Spyders featured in the film. In that short period, the wings, diffuser, bodywork and engine evolved, as did details relating to maintenance and assembly. These changes were based on experience gained during testing and racing. But this encounter is about much more than technology. Maassen and Bernhard talk about the years when they themselves sat in the cockpit and were involved in the development. For Bernhard, the RS Spyder also marked the start of a new chapter in his career. 'The RS Spyder was my first step into prototype racing,' he says. 'Everything that followed with Audi and later in LMP1 began for me there. Looking back, that was probably the biggest step in my career.' Maassen rates the programme just as highly: 'For me, the RS Spyder was the highlight of my racing career. After that, nothing else came along that surpassed it.'

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