



# It's About Fun

*AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL ARMBRUSTER,  
CEO OF PORSCHE MOTORSPORT NORTH AMERICA.*

*INTERVIEW BY RYAN CARIGNAN PHOTOS BY BOB CHAPMAN/PCNA*

***How long have you been with Porsche, and what was your path to your current position as CEO of PMNA?***

I've been with Porsche since 2000. I started in the lighting division at Weissach, and my first project was the Carrera GT development program. I developed the lighting systems, headlights, taillights, and wiper system for the car. I also developed the first full LED light in a car. It was a very cool job, especially driving the prototype cars on the street. With headlights, you have to ensure proper ventilation, and to do that you need to drive up and down the mountains because of the different pressure changes. That meant driving the Alps to test the system, which was really cool.

After that, I went to Zuffenhausen and moved out of development and into quality management. I was responsible for the quality of the electronics for the 911. That was my first contact with quality, which was very interesting



**Top: Celebrating the Wright Motorsports IMSA GTD class victory at Road America in 2018. Above: Talking with Porsche Motorsport factory driver Patrick Long.**

because, with quality, you are an attorney for the customer. Engineers fall in love with technology, and they can optimize everything and increase complexity because it is very interesting from an engineering perspective, but if it isn't necessary for the customer, it doesn't make sense. Quality management is the "man-in-the-middle" to balance the equation between engineer needs and customer requests.

In 2008, I was in the motorsports department; we had the [financial] crisis, and motorsports activities decreased. Wolfgang Dürheimer, the former R&D boss for Porsche Weissach, gave me a very small budget and told me to try to develop a hybrid race car. Within a year we had the GT3R Hybrid; it was a

very exciting time. My proposal was to run the car under cover in Super Cup, and after the 55-minute race was finished, we would reveal that it was a hybrid.

The former motorsports boss, Hartmut Kristen, brought our idea to the board. When he came back, he said okay, we can go racing, but in the 24 Hours Nürburgring. We were really shocked. With the same money, of course. The budget didn't change. It was tough, but I had a great team, and we ran at the Nürburgring. After 11 hours and 50 minutes, we were 20 minutes in advance of second place when the combustion engine failed. Game over.

After the race, I sent the electric engine back to the mechanics to inspect. They called saying they needed the race motor, not a new one! It was nearly brand-new inside, but it is logical because with 95% efficiency you just have 5% energy and wear. We proved that hybrids could have performance and be economical and ecological. Frank Walliser started with the 918, and now we have performance hybrids in almost every car, but this was the first milestone for the hybrid cars, and the Taycan.

Frank Walliser took over the Motorsport department, and I was his

right hand and managed the change process. I learned a lot of things from him: strategy, organizational structures, and process. When Jens Walthers had to move back [to Germany], I was in the best situation to apply for the PMNA CEO position and got the job. I was really nervous because as an engineer, being in sales and marketing is totally different. In the past when I changed my job, my family wasn't affected. They just knew Dad would come back a little late because of the workload in the beginning, but in this situation, the whole family was fully affected, and that was tough. There was a lot of responsibility on me because failing in this situation would really affect the family.

**How does the family feel about California?**

I have two daughters, 13 and 20. Our youngest is with us, and the other one is in Germany at university. The youngest complained at first, but I told her, "I know it will be hard to leave Germany, but I promise it will be harder moving back," and I was absolutely right. She has adapted and started to speak without an accent, and at school everything is fine. We are really happy.

**Do you have a specific project or goal you will use to judge your time as CEO a success?**

As an engineer, I need measures. I use several gauges. The first thing I did was use KPI (Key Performance Indicators) reports to measure change and look to see if we are successful. That is the first logical thing to set up as an engineer, but that's just one side. On the other hand, what drives me is having fun. I think that if I have fun, I can positively influence my environment. If I have a team that is having fun in what they are doing, then success will come from that. If you have fun, you are successful, and if you are successful, you should be having fun. That is my personal way of thinking, and time goes by very fast when you are having fun. I have been here a cou-

ple of years, and I feel like it was a week ago. My team has fun, and that's very important. I am only as successful as my teammates. My target is having fun with what I am doing, and right now, I would say we are a very happy team.

**With the changing dynamics of road cars now (electric, hybrid, small-displacement turbo engines), do you still see motorsports as the key development laboratory for Porsche street cars?**

As we saw with the hybrid, we developed the technology and transferred it to road cars. With other topics like suspensions, light weight, carbon fiber, aerodynamics, everything is focused and developed with the motorsports department. Porsche Motorsport is responsible for both the racing cars and the street GT cars. That means they are connected, they are sitting desk by desk, and there is a transfer from people to people and not just from the car to car. I think in the future we will continue this transfer because GT cars continue to be developed in motorsports.

The complexity for road cars will rise, that's for sure, but motorsports will continue to be the development arena. Internally, we are already discussing how we can support new technologies from a racing point of view. Porsche is entering [Formula] E racing this season, so that will bring better battery technology, drivetrains, improved high voltage charging. The new battery chemistry being developed by Porsche Motorsport will transfer to road cars. So I think motorsports will continue to influence developments for road cars.

**What are the differences you've seen between customer racing in the U.S. versus Europe?**

Customer racing in the U.S., Asia, and Europe is very different. Lots of our competitors try to copy our systems, but they only look at the platform—Carrera Cup, for ex-



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ample. But you have to copy the full motorsports pyramid, and as I said at the PCA Porsche Parade, without a proper foundation, you can never build a pyramid. I am in a lucky situation, having a very large foundation with PCA because that's a foundation we can build all our platforms upon. That is why I reached out to PCA to see how Club Racing worked and how people were racing. There is a relatively low cost of racing, you have the flexibility to change and modify your cars, and that's what people want to do. Everyone at the club level wants to develop their car, and you are successful with that model.

In Germany it's a little more difficult. Asia has been very different;

it is very new, and we have had to develop a foundation and culture of motorsports. In America, we have everything in place. We have a strong and well-organized foundation. If you look at other brands, which other brand has this large club [PCA]? No one. They cannot copy our system; just look at Rennsport. I think Ferrari is a very good competitor; they are better than others. But with our heritage, we can tell a much better story when it comes to racing.

**Coming off the immense success and popularity of Rennsport Reunion VI, have you seen an uptick in customer inquiries and orders at PMNA?**

Definitely a positive bump for us;



**The stunning Porsche Motorsport "family portrait" on the famous WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca during Rennsport Reunion VI.**

Left: Armbruster with former Pikes Peak winner Jeff Zwart, who worked with PMNA on its Pikes Peak program. Right: A 981 GT4 Clubsport at Pikes Peak in 2018.



it had a huge impact. I would like to do it every year! For me, it was obvious that we needed better communication with the customers about what we were offering, and what we are doing. Rennsport solved a lot of that communication gap. We could explain our business and what we are responsible for, but we need to continue to do that in a more professional way. We started this year with social media—Facebook and Instagram—as the first part of our new communications. Next will be our newsletter.

The newsletter is the second part of that communication effort; we can explain the customer journey, the new cars, where people can buy them. Outlining parts and services, where customers can get new and historic cars and parts, engines, and gearboxes serviced. Rennsport was an eye-opener for us, and as I said, I would love to do that every year. We are working on an online car configurator, but we realized that we are a car manufacturer and not a software developer. It was not as easy as we thought, but we are working with our IT department. It will be coming.

**What is PMNA looking at doing in the future to continue to attract new racers outside of Rennsport? Is the focus social media or increasing events?**

Events are very important for

us, and for me, they are really special events. Like Pikes Peak—we did Pikes Peak again this year. You have to bring new things to make it more attractive and have access to new target groups, so you need new concepts and events. Pikes Peak was a new pilot, and it was very successful, so that's the reason to do it again this year, and hopefully the year after. We are also thinking about additional special events, especially with the GT2 RS Clubsport, and others as well.

**With the GT2 RS as a limited production vehicle, where do you see it racing? Do you see it as more of a club racer or a series-based race car?**

Stéphane Ratel created a series where the car can race, so that is one avenue. We are also working on other concepts, but it depends on the type of customer and what their expectations are. Very wealthy customers sometimes don't want to join a series, they just want to have an arrive-and-drive concept similar to a Ferrari program, with small groups, nice hotels, and something that is more a lifestyle event. Ultimately, it depends on the needs of our customers, so they will let us know what they want. We started the discussion months ago with possible GT2 RS Clubsport customers to get a feeling of their expectations. Do they want

an additional run group in Clubsport, an additional Trophy level, arrive and drive, how many venues per year? We asked lots of questions.

**With some Porsche customer race cars getting older, particularly 996 and 997.1 Cup, is PMNA developing parts or programs to keep those customers on track?**

Yes, definitely. I am working backward from the 991 to the 997 and 996. With the 993, we are working on an air-cooled cup for that. We are restoring 962s and 917s; we are rebuilding and reproducing parts for the 935 engine. If you have the history, you have to have the service, the knowledge, and the spare parts in place. Otherwise, you just have a car in the garage. Our intention is to keep these cars at the racetrack. That is what our customers want. The next generation will be the RS Spyder. At Rennsport we saw ten RS Spyderys [on track]. We are already preparing with guys here from Germany working as part of a personal development program. We are collecting the knowledge, information, and documentation from our example, which is a properly documented car. We are now looking for spare parts, engine documentation products. We are interested in keeping these cars running at the racetrack, and everyone wants to help us. 🌀

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