

AUTOMOTIVE

Porsche shares raw look at racing in docuseries

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Actor Michael Fassbender is the subject of a new Porsche Racing documentary series. Image credit: Porsche

By SARAH RAMIREZ

German automaker Porsche is offering an insightful look at the work required to race the iconic 24 Hours of Le Mans in a new documentary series on YouTube.

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"Road to Le Mans" follows German-born actor Michael Fassbender as he begins his journey to one day race at Le Mans. Keeping the focus on the automaker, Mr. Fassbender participates in the Porsche Sports Cup, which serves as entry point into Porsche motorsports for first-time competitors and semi-professional race drivers alike.

"A series like this can be an effective marketing tool because it feels so authentic to the core of Porsche's mission: high performance, hard work and an insatiable quest to squeeze every drop of performance out of its cars," said Tyson Jominy, vice president of data and analytics consulting at [J.D. Power](#), Nashville, TN. "The message is clear that the car is capable of more, but is the driver up to the task of mastering it?"

"It helps that the race car looks very much the road-going version, so you too can be Michael Fassbender trying to master your commute to work, your Sunday drive through the hills or laps at your favorite track," he said. "Also, these episodic series can have lives that live on for many years and the fact that 911 design evolves slowly means the same basic shape will be on the road 10 years from now, making the spot relevant for years to come."

Mr. Jominy is not affiliated with Porsche, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [Porsche](#) was reached for comment.

Road to Le Mans

Porsche premiered the series on Oct. 11 and has released weekly episodes, which have run between seven and nine minutes. The next installment will debut on Oct. 25.

The series stands out for its intimate and uncensored look at Mr. Fassbender's training. Footage consists of interviews and behind-the-scenes moments, as well as film from the tracks and inside the race cars.

"The series is effective because it pairs an accomplished actor someone familiar with being on screen and the pressures that come with it with an iconic automaker that has a rich history of success at racing," said David

Undercoffler, editor in chief of [Autolist](#), San Francisco. "The result is a very aspirational duo that speaks to a wide, global audience."

The trailer for Michael Fassbender: Road to Le Mans

In the first episode, Mr. Fassbender races for the first time at the Hockenheimring track, the site of the first round of the Porsche Sports Cup. In a talking head interview, the actor turned racer recounts how he ended up crashing in one of the sprint races and shares his disappointment at what he describes as a "rookie mistake."

After reviewing the crash footage with the Porsche team, Mr. Fassbender is elated at the opportunity to continue racing. The following day he completes the track's endurance race.

At Nrburgring, Mr. Fassbender seeks redemption from his previous performance. After building on his confidence in practice laps, he is penalized during a qualifying race after missing several red flags following a crash.

"This whole thing for me is trying to catch up with people that have been doing since they were 10, 9, 8, whatever it is," Mr. Fassbender explains. "Anything in life, if you want to be good at it, it's 10,000 hours."

The 2020 Le Mans is scheduled for June 13 and 14.

Porsche has released two episodes of the Road to Le Mans series so far

"Michael Fassbender's quest in this Web series, of working up the ranks to achieve something heroic, reflects many of the characters that he has played onscreen," Mr. Jominy said. "He has an appeal of a down-to-earth guy that makes him very relatable, on a quest that is difficult without any guarantees."

"To get there he is relying on the expertise and mentoring of others to improve," he said. "He makes mistakes but bounces back again and again."

Racing stars

Automakers have previously teamed with actors or athletes to give them firsthand racing experience, engaging fans of both the celebrity and motorsports.

For instance, British automaker McLaren showcased the extreme engineering of its fastest sports car with the help of an Olympic athlete.

At the famed Brickyard in Indianapolis, ID, McLaren handed the keys of its 600LT to American Olympian Lolo Jones, who has competed in both the Summer and Winter Games. McLaren frequently leans on creative efforts to emphasize its innovative, high-performance vehicles ([see story](#)).

Porsche also has a longstanding relationship with the American actor Patrick Dempsey. He has been part of Porsche's motorsport team since 2013.

As part of Porsche's 919 tribute tour last year, Mr. Dempsey appeared in a short film. With a humorous and adventurous take on a night at the opera, Porsche showed the uniqueness of its vehicles as well as its appreciation for cultural heritage ([see story](#)).

"Porsche has a long history of excellence in motorsport, plenty of it with a gentleman racer' behind the wheel wealthy car fans willing to use their means and status to get a highly coveted seat in a rare car," Mr. Undercoffler said. "This new series is just another albeit subtle example of that."