

AUTOMOTIVE

Porsche takes another spin with Road to Le Mans docuseries

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

By ELLEN KELLEHER

German automaker Porsche is returning to the race track with a second season of its "Road to Le Mans" documentary series following actor Michael Fassbender.

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The series shows the unglamorous side of endurance racing, with Mr. Fassbender having trained for years in the hopes to achieve his dream of participating in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The first season premiered last fall and followed the actor's participation in the Porsche Sports Cup ([see story](#)).

"Fassbender has been linked to the Porsche brand for some time now and it's a perfect fit for the automaker: a camera-ready Hollywood star who also has the driving chops to back it up," said David Undercoffler, editor in chief of [Autolist](#), San Francisco. "It makes sense that Porsche would want to drive home the message that its commitment to racing hasn't wavered even in the face of a global pandemic."

Journey in France

New episodes premiere weekly on on Porsche's YouTube channel.

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

The second season begins with a brief recap of Mr. Fassbender's first racing season, which was filled with highs and lows. Now the stakes are higher, as the Porsche Racing team works to prepare him for endurance competition.

As seen in the docuseries, Mr. Fassbender meets his new teammates, German driver Felipe Fernandez Laser and Austrian driver Richard Lietz, in February 2020 weeks before the pandemic derailed training plans.

In the second episode, the tests and qualifying rounds begin. The passage of time is clear, as Mr. Fassbender arrives at France's Circuit Paul Ricard track wearing a mask.

Mr. Fassbender drives a No. 93 Porsche 911 RSR

The race season was originally set to begin in April, but the pandemic pushed it to July. The episode reveals how the new schedule has made Mr. Fassbender feel a bit uneasy and less prepared.

"I felt that I might be out of my depth," he says, as footage shows him struggling to adjust to the driver transitions. "That it was much too soon."

As the action develops, Mr. Fassbender manages to get past the test day and qualifies for the first race of the season at Le Castellet. The final scenes show the opening shots of the race beginning as the drivers start to make their way along the treacherous track.

The action cuts out, however, in a cliffhanger, and the viewer is left with little sense of how Mr. Fassbender is progressing in the competition.

Episode three picks up with the race action, before changing course with a more confessional scene with the actor. He shares the challenges he has experienced, and compares the physicality of racing to that of acting.

After being told by the racing managers to settle down, Mr. Fassbender finds a good pace as the competition continues. However, he unexpectedly ends up slowly crashing into a turn and has to gingerly drive back to the pit for repairs and a driver switch.

While the team falls short of expectations after the crash, the race serves as a valuable learning experience for Mr. Fassbender.



Michael Fassbender drove 47 laps in his first endurance race. Image credit: Porsche

The European Le Mans is open to Le Mans prototypes, divided into the LMP2 and LMP3 classes, and grand-tourer-style racing cars in the LMGTE class.

Mr. Fassbender made his first foray toward a racing career as a gentleman driver who took part in the Porsche Driving experience. This entry-level program for enthusiasts includes training sessions with a Porsche 911 GT3 Cup.

After completing this stint, the Heidelberg native advanced to the Porsche Racing experience program where he competed in races as part of the Porsche Sports Cup, which serves as entry point into Porsche motorsports for first-time competitors and semi-professional race drivers alike.

A touch of celebrity

Automakers have made a habit out of teaming up 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 in a 2019 effort.

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 ([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 and is an ambassador for the brand.

As part of Porsche's 919 tribute tour in 2018, 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's legacy has been entwined with its motorsport success since the earliest days of the company and it's been at the core of the company's identity ever since," Mr. Undercoffler said. "Porsche has weathered 2020 quite well, all things considered.

"Sales are indeed down but they've rebounded nicely after the pandemic-induced dropoff," he said.

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