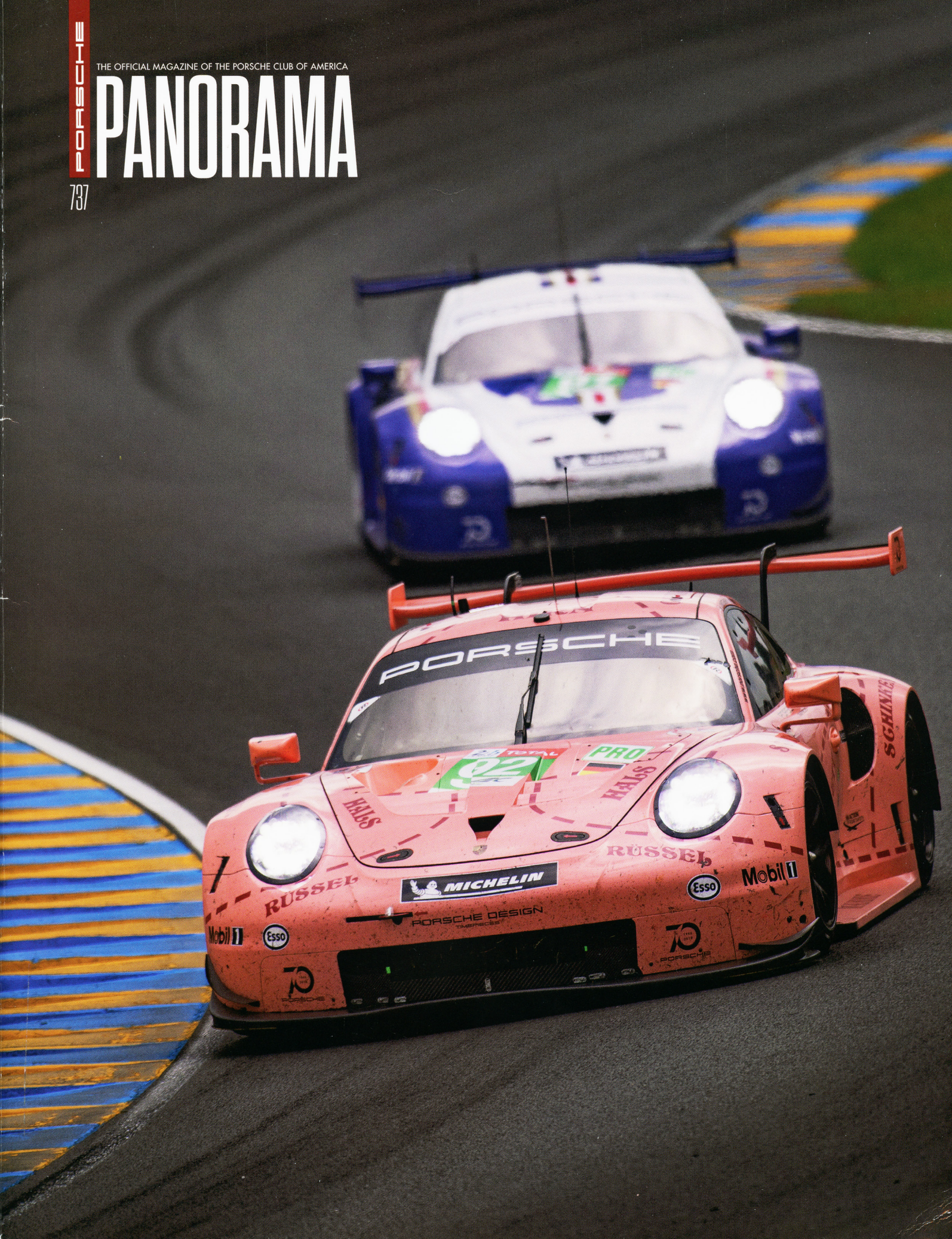


Cayman Country

Text and Photos by Sean Cridland
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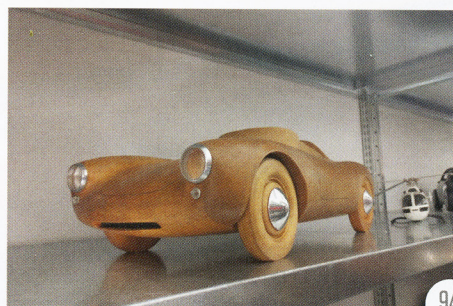
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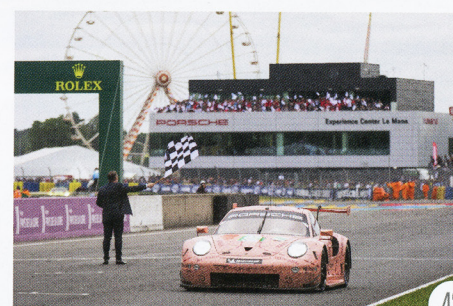
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CAYMAN COUNTRY

THE CAYMAN GT4 CLUBSPORT WAS IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN AT THE 2018 PIKES PEAK INTERNATIONAL HILL CLIMB.

STORY AND PHOTOS **BY SEAN CRIDLAND**

WHEN PIKES PEAK veteran Fred Veitch drove a Cayman GT4 Clubsport in the Time Attack I class at the 2016 Pikes Peak International Hill Climb, he had two observations. First, the car was remarkably stable, and its neutral handling was perfect for the rigors of the 12.4-mile, 156-corner course. Second, it was severely underpowered for the class. When you consider that the racing version of the Cayman makes 385 hp and Jeff Zwart's GT3 Turbo that ran in the same class was rumored to make well over 700 hp, you get the picture. Nice car, wrong class.

Maybe it could run in Time Attack II? Unfortunately, Pikes Peak's Time Attack II class severely limits cars to near stock specifications, and the GT4 Clubsport was designed for club racing. In other words, it was all dressed up with no place to go on America's Mountain. For good reason, no Caymans were entered at Pikes Peak in 2017. It seemed a shame, especially in light of how popular the cars are in PCA Club Racing and Pirelli Cup.

However, Veitch found a champion in newly inducted Pikes Peak Hall of Famer Zwart. He carried the message to Porsche Motorsport North America (PMNA) headquarters and into the ears of then-president Jens Walther and, subsequently, his successor Daniel Armbruster. The what-ifs started flying. Various options that might make the Cayman more viable for hill climbing started to be considered. There were the usual speculations on power increase. What if it were lightened and had a 4.0-liter engine, or what if it were turbocharged?

Those ideas were quickly struck down. A "super-Cayman" would have required a comprehensive redesign and development program, the expense of which would have simply made it a replacement for the GT3 platform that already worked very well. It would also be counter to the idea of the GT4 Clubsport as a viable club racing platform.



David Donohue (left) and Jeff Zwart (center) join GT4 drivers Mike Skeen, Travis Pastrana, J.R. Hildebrand, Thomas Collingwood, Nick Kwan, Till Bechtolsheimer, C.J. Wilson, and Dr. Alex Marmureanu on the morning of the race.

AS OCCAM'S RAZOR suggests, the simplest solution is almost always the best one, even if it's not the most obvious. The class structure for the world's oldest hill climb event has always shifted and evolved. Why not create a specific class for Cayman GT4s? With Zwart as liaison, PMNA approached the Pikes Peak organizers and found they were open to the idea, though they did have questions: What do you have in mind? Can you guarantee entries? How would it benefit the race as a

whole? Would PMNA promote the race in their marketing campaign? How would the drivers—many of whom had never seen the mountain—be vetted and trained?

Over the next year and a half, with a good understanding of the course, the organization, and the Porsche way, Zwart was able to negotiate the establishment of the Porsche Cayman GT4 Clubsport class on a trial basis for both the Pikes Peak Hill Climb and Porsche Motorsport. Next, the question was

how to package and market the concept to the racers and to the racing public. According to Daniel Armbruster, president and CEO of PMNA, Porsche will always be interested in winning on Pikes Peak (as it did this year with David Donohue in a GT3 R), and sees the 2018 Pikes Peak Cayman program as an extension of Porsche's commitment to supporting club and semi-pro level racing. With the interest in Pikes Peak that Zwart, Donohue, David Donner, and others have generated for Porsche fans, it seemed only natural for there to be a program allowing other racers to participate in the world's most famous hill climb.

Rather than simply implementing a class and then stepping back to see what would happen, PMNA and Zwart worked quietly behind the scenes to ensure that it would be a success. Yokohama came on board as tire sponsor, and PMNA paired with Porsche of Colorado Springs to provide a "home base" for the cars. Several Porsche Motorsport personnel were on hand to

help with tuning the cars for altitude and to help out with any repairs that might be needed during the week-long racing event.

Going a step beyond, PMNA wanted the program to provide a sense of camaraderie among the teams and drivers taking on the challenge. There were team debriefs, dinners, and a meet-and-greet hosted by Zwart to help introduce the concept to hill climb fans and the local Porsche community. Amazingly, it all came together.

Eventually, the entries came in, with a group of drivers representing several levels of skill, on-mountain experience, and notoriety. The list of drivers included IndyCar regular J.R. Hildebrand, pro racer and



Pastrana leaves the start during early morning testing.



Above: Marmureanu seems to float through Boulder Park at 13,500 feet. Far left: Donohue compares notes with Pastrana. Left: Marmureanu prepares for an interview.

Till Bechtolsheimer threads his way through the twisting ribbon of highway known as the Ws, where the slightest mistake can mean a long fall.



former MLB pitcher C.J. Wilson, X Games star Travis Pastrana, vintage racer Till Bechtolsheimer, PCA club racer Thomas Collingwood, Porsche super-enthusiast Nicholas Kwan, Hollywood-based heart surgeon and racing driver Alexander Marmureanu, and road-racing veteran Mike Skeen. All were enthusiastic about the challenge, several of them talking about checking another item off their bucket list.

MARKETING IS ONE thing, and bonding experiences are great, but racing on Pikes Peak is a challenge like no other. That's where Zwart was able to use his strengths to help the program entrants. Besides his eight wins on the mountain, Zwart is a film director and Porsche ambassador. His communication and coaching skills are world class. Throughout the event, Zwart took

the competitors up for scouting sessions, stopping to look at various corners that have been troublesome over the years and discussing the challenges of working at altitude.

One facet often overlooked by circuit racers is that cars and drivers are subjected to entirely different kinds of stresses while ascending sustained grades. Consider the hype about the loads generated by the hill leading to the first corner at Circuit of the Americas, and then multiply that times how many? Brakes take time to warm up. What happens to tire pressures when cold tires at 9,500 feet turn into hot tires at 14,000 feet? Don't forget the trees, the rocks, the sky, and the wildlife. It's a lot to take in. Zwart was with the racers every day to prepare them for the best possible experience.

Pikes Peak is somewhat akin to the Taj Mahal or the Grand Canyon.

Everyone has seen it in photos or YouTube videos, and it looks pretty awesome. But when you get there and experience it for yourself, it's almost more than you can take in—and it's not just the size or number of corners. Drive up through the bottom third of the course and you suddenly realize how many of the corner approaches look the same. Many former winners have had crashes below the tree line. During the week, Travis Pastrana told a story about his first meeting with fellow daredevil Tanner Faust in Engineer Corner several years ago.

"Engineer is always tricky, a very late apex left-hander," he explained. "Like a lot of people, I got confused and came in too tight to the left and too fast. By the time I realized where I was, I slammed on the brakes, shot across the road, and went into the ditch. But my crash was softened



by Tanner's car, which had just gone off there a few minutes before. We got to know each other pretty well while we waited to get towed out."

Engineer has also claimed drivers by the name of Unser and Zwart in years past. During practice this

year, Mike Skeen got crossed up and found himself off course on a steep angle on the inside of a lower-section corner. A photographer shooting that section had a double surprise. Moments after scrambling up a steep hill to escape Skeen's



off-road excursion, he came face to face with a bear.

Once competitors get past halfway at Glen Cove, they start up the section of the course made famous by the 2012 video of Jeremy Foley spending some mid-air hang time and then commencing a horrific series of bounces, rolls, and hits before coming to a stop a thousand or more feet below his take-off point. It's the part of the course known as the Ws.

One famous story has the Unsers taking Mario Andretti up the mountain, then feigning loss of control and careening off the side as Andretti screams in horror. Though the otherwise fearless Mario only saw sky, Bobby and Al knew there was a campground access road for Elk Park and took great joy in the screams of the terrified Andretti.

Then there's the top section. Once the drivers make it up through the Ws, the course reveals its fastest section. Zwart reported hitting close to 160 mph dropping down into the section called Bottomless Pit a few years ago. The only portion of the

Above and top left: IndyCar racer J.R. Hildebrand makes his way through the course after some coaching tips from eight-time Pikes Peak winner Jeff Zwart. **Bottom left:** The Cayman teams prepare for early-week testing on the upper portion of the mountain.



Porsches on Pikes Peak

DAVID DONOHUE and the Caymans were not the only Porsches on Pikes Peak in 2018. In fact, there were a total of 14 Porsches running during official practice. With Robert Prilika's mishap, 13 of them made the race. Frenchman Raphaël Astier ran a very competitive 9:53.718. Veteran Fred Veitch once again ran his 2001 996 TT, setting his best time with an 11:01.060. Rookie George Hess posted 11:49.701 in his 2000 GT3. Akio Kobayashi and Laure Many were among those whose efforts were thwarted by the afternoon weather, necessitating them only running to Glen Cove. Their times were 5:16.186 and 6:09.592 respectively. —SC



PHOTO COREY DAVIS

course that loses altitude, it's also a prelude to several very fast corners up through Boulder Park on the way to the summit dome.

This year, one Porsche driver (not in the GT4 class) nearly tested the bottomless nomenclature. Perennial Porsche competitor and 2017 Time Attack II winner Robert Prilika had a mechanical issue at the fastest portion of the section, careening off the road and skimming along a 100-year-old rock wall, much as a snowboarder would ride a rail, eventually coming to a stop with the driver's-side door resting just over the edge of a 500-foot precipice. Although he was slightly shaken, Prilika was fine and his car was repairable.

On a different day, Kwan misjudged a corner higher up and found his car perched in a boulder field. During a normal race, individual teams might go off on their own to fix what's broken. But at Pikes Peak, all the teams gathered to find out what had happened, how it could be fixed, and whether there was something to learn from the incident.

Several racers commented on having Zwart as a mentor. Baseball pitcher Wilson, known for being analytical and contemplative, likened being coached by the eight-time

winner as akin to learning chess from Bobby Fischer. Pastrana noted that he and Zwart had rallied together, and he learned early on to listen carefully when Zwart spoke, especially on the challenges of Pikes Peak. "There are very few people with Jeff's knowledge of the challenges of this mountain. From the turns to the tire pressures, Jeff has something valuable to say on nearly every aspect of the race." In fact, whenever Zwart spoke, every racer close to him leaned in, knowing there was something to learn.

AFTER FOUR DAYS of practice, race day arrived—as did the weather forecast everyone dreaded: rain at lower elevations, snow on top. The morning dawned in shades of gray, with fog and mist enveloping everything below mid-mountain. It cleared up when it was time for the motorcycles to make their runs, but the clouds returned. A decidedly gray cast shaded Romain Dumas' already gray VW I.D. R as it bulletted away from the start. Luckily, the road was dry to the top as he set a new course record of 7:57.148, the first ever below eight minutes. Just a few minutes later, David Donohue turned in a time of 9:37.152 to set a new record in Time Attack I.

At Pikes Peak, the start order is determined purely on qualifying times; classes don't run together. Eventually, it was time for the first of the Caymans. After a week of seesawing back and forth, IndyCar veteran J.R. Hildebrand narrowly outqualified Travis Pastrana. But with a course containing 156 corners, even the smallest mistakes can multiply. Pastrana ran a 10:33.897 to Hildebrand's 10:39.301. Skeen, whose crew brilliantly patched up his battered GT4, was third in class with 10:40.659. Thomas Collingwood, Dr. Alex, and C.J. Wilson all had respectable finishes on their first attempts on Pikes Peak.

At about 2 p.m., the weather moved in. At first it was flurries on top, and then rain at midway and walnut-size hail on the bottom, sending crews, fans, and organizers running for whatever cover they could find. Eventually, it was decided that the race would run only to

Above: Any closer and Robert Prilika might have tested the name of a corner aptly named Bottomless Pit for its 500-foot drop.



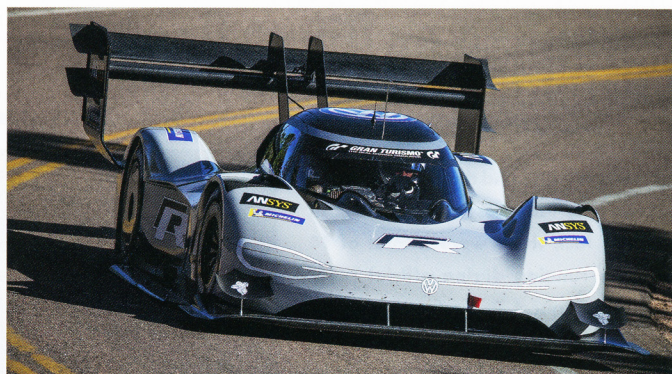
The race was interrupted and then shortened when walnut-size hail sent competitors, officials, and fans running for cover.

PHOTO DIETER INZENHOFFER

Record Setters

WITH HIS EIGHT CLASS WINS ON PIKES PEAK, Jeff Zwart knows a thing or two about what it takes to go fast up America's Mountain, not just in driving terms but also in technology, handling, power, and logistics. Here's what he had to say about Romain Dumas' record time of 7:57.148: "From everything I saw leading up to the race, it was apparent that VW were going for the overall record, their claim to be shooting for the electric record notwithstanding. But nobody saw them doing it by that large a margin—and the first to go under eight minutes. To put it in driver's terms, modern race cars typically make advances in tenths of seconds over a whole lap. Romain and the VW took a tenth of a second on every one of the 156 corners!"

When we spoke, Zwart was effusive in his praise of the VW effort, but also of recent records set by Porsche at tracks like Spa and especially the Nürburgring, where former Dumas teammate Timo Bernhard set a



time of 5:19.546 in a Porsche 919 Hybrid Evo, obliterating the time set by Stefan Bellof in a Porsche 956C in 1983. "Records like these are very special," said Zwart. "It's hard to imagine we'll see margins like these ever again."

Of course, that's what everyone said when Sébastien Loeb set the former Pikes Peak record of 8:13 in 2013. —SC

Below: Known for his acrobatics, professional daredevil Travis Pastrana kept his foot on the floor and his car on the ground for the entire week, enabling him to win the GT4 class.

mid-mountain. Till Bechtolsheimer and Nicholas Kwan were both DNFs, wishing they'd made it to the top but claiming to have had great experiences. Miraculously, but also in Pikes Peak's character, the skies once again turned blue as the drivers descended from the mountain, some with their victory flags flying, to high-five the fans waiting in droves along the roadside.

WHILE IN EVERY competition there are exultations and disappointments, anyone who's spent time at the Pikes Peak pits after the race knows that it's as much about accomplishment and friendship as

it is about winning. Far from the individual isolation of Formula 1, Pikes Peak is about a common goal, a shared set of challenges, and the chance to spend a few more minutes together before returning to a day job or setting off on the next adventure. For the Cayman GT4 Clubsport drivers, that was no less true. Winner Pastrana flew off to his next

gig that night, while J.R. Hildebrand kidded that at Indy, if you don't attend the banquet you don't receive your winnings. Like almost all the racers, Porsche Motorsport president Daniel Armbruster promised to be back in 2019.

Porsches, hill climbs, and America's Mountain: what could be a better combination? ●

