

Porsche Mountain

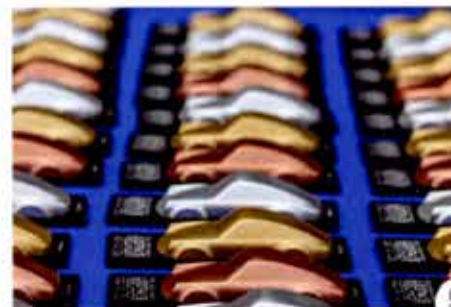
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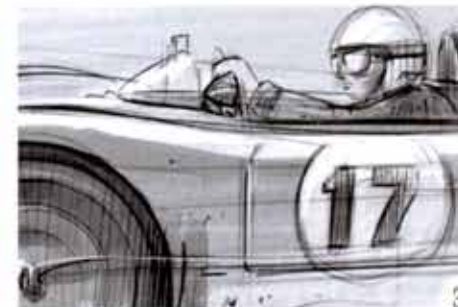




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Back Story

You still hear echoes of it on Pikes Peak race day: "It was better when it was dirt." Of course, that ship sailed many years ago, and even though many might not want to acknowledge it, the race has taken on a new importance in the racing world now that America's Mountain is fully paved. Factory and factory-supported efforts show up each year with a range of exotic machinery to break records and improve technology and brag about their achievements. Happily, that doesn't mean that dirt-road hill climbing isn't still alive—and thriving—in the Colorado mountains.

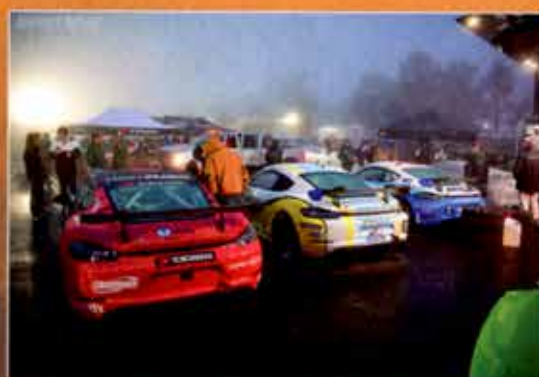
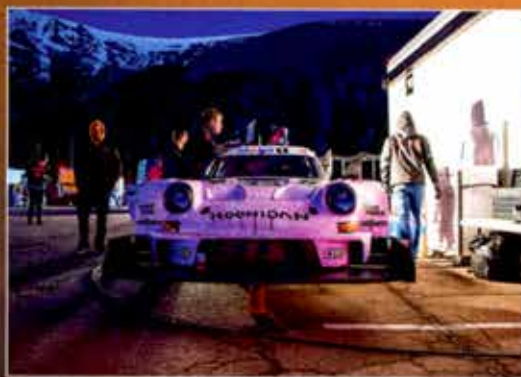
The Colorado Hill Climb Association has been sanctioning races in Colorado and neighboring states since 1971. The events on its schedule in 2022 were in places like Rangely, Lands End (Grand Junction), Monarch, and Temple Canyon. All are on dirt. And one of them—The Lands End, first run in 1916—is the third oldest race in the United States. Only the Indianapolis 500 and Pikes Peak Hill Climb are older.

Most CHCA competitors run grassroots, mom-and-pop-level entries in a variety of classes that allow people to race their loud and fast backyard specials. But it's not uncommon at a CHCA race to see more nationally and internationally known entries, including some exotic machinery driven by various members of the Dallenbach family, Rhys Millen, and Jeff Zwart.

In fact, this summer, Zwart has run all the CHCA races with his Porsche 3.8-liter GT3 Cup, specially prepared by Joey Seeley of E-Motion Engineering. If success equates with enthusiasm, Zwart is flying high, compiling a near-perfect win record and easily taking this year's Rally 2WD class. Though CHCA association races are open to the public, the spectator base is usually small, composed mostly of friends and family. That matters not for Zwart, who does it just because he enjoys driving sideways on dirt and hearing that throaty Porsche engine echo through the canyons, ridgelines, and forests of Colorado's Rocky Mountains. We hear the fans like it, too.—*Sean Cridland*

PHOTO: Joel Yust
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Porsche Mountain

THE 100TH RUNNING OF THE PIKES
PEAK INTERNATIONAL HILL CLIMB.

STORY BY **SEAN CRIDLAND**

PHOTOS BY **RUPERT BERRINGTON, NICK CRESS,
DEVON DOBSON, STEPHANIE URSO & JOEL YUST**

AFTER A MONTH of near-perfect weather during the testing and practice runs for the 100th running of the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb, the forecast for race day was for clouds, mist, fog, rain—and even snow. Organizers kept a vigilant crew of snowplow drivers working through the night to keep the roads clear in hopes that the daylight warmth would melt whatever ice might have formed. Amazingly, organizers were able to keep the road clear enough for racers to have a chance of finishing on top, even if the course was slower and more scary than usual. Clouds and fog on various parts of the course ensured that no records were set on the 12.56-mile, 156-turn course, but it was a glorious day indeed for the cars we all love: 18 Porsches, a full 25 percent of the field, were entered in the race; Porsche won four of the six classes; and four of the top ten overall were P-cars.





From top: Race day dawned cold and cloudy. At the summit, Jeff Zwart welcomed class winners David Donner and David Donohue. After skipping a year, Zwart once again ran the Ingram family's 935/19, flawlessly prepared by Joey Seeley and E-Motion.



FOR THE INCIDENTAL Pikes Peak fan, every late June brings a flurry of cool photos and amazing videos on social media that demonstrate the drama and danger of the race. But only a small, elite group of drivers, designers, mechanics, and course workers know how much effort it takes to prepare for the spectacle. Even though a run good enough for a podium position on Pikes Peak only takes somewhere between seven and eleven minutes (depending on class), the racers, their crews, and their supporters tend to think of Pikes Peak as a months-long expedition. David Donohue, who has raced the enduros at Le Mans, Daytona, and Sebring, has been quoted as say-

ing that Pikes Peak is harder than any 24-hour race he's ever done.

Once testing begins, teams are required to go through the access gate at 4:00 a.m. The bravest competitors will take their first runs when there is only a glimmer of sunlight, often in frigid and windy conditions. Because the road opens to tourists at 9:00 a.m., competitors are lucky to get three or four runs in before heading back down to Colorado Springs for breakfast, then tuning or repairs.

Strong fundamental design, power, handling, brakes, aerodynamic downforce, and—surprisingly—cooling are necessary for success on Pikes Peak, just like every other road

race around the world. But stresses change on all those pieces when they're run on extreme angles at high elevations. Things that might have worked perfectly at Willow Springs or Virginia International often succumb to stresses met on Pike Peak.

Besides shaking down the machinery, teams attempt to perfect the "voodoo" of appropriate tire pressures, a tricky proposition as the internal pressures grow dramatically in relation to the ambient altitude during a climb of nearly 5,000 vertical feet. Sidewalls at the top are much stiffer than when the car is at the start, and surface temperatures are dramatically colder. The combination of changing grip level and

sidewall stiffness can drive tire engineers and drivers batty.

THIS YEAR'S PORSCHE entries included several very strong professional teams and drivers contesting Time Attack, Pikes Peak Open, Exhibition, and the Cayman-only Porsche Pikes Peak Trophy presented by Yokohama classes.

Donohue was entered in Time Attack in a 2022 992 GT2 RS Clubsport sponsored by Brumos in its first return to racing since the 2013 Rolex Grand-Am season. With logistical support from Porsche of the Main Line, Porsche of Colorado Springs, Yokohama tires, and several other smaller sponsors, Brumos team

David Donohue, who drove for the 2009 Daytona-winning Brumos Daytona Prototype team, was back in Brumos red, white, and blue at Pikes Peak. Though BBI race-prepped the car, Donohue was his own crew throughout race month. The one-off effort paid dividends when he placed first in Time Attack and third overall.



The Almost Ran

LEADING THE internet race for social media notoriety at Pikes Peak this year was Ken Block, who just a few years ago made the epic Pikes Peak video, *Climbkhana*, with his Hoonicorn "Mustang." This past May he grabbed headlines again by announcing his entry with the all-wheel-drive, 1400-hp, twin-turbo 4.0-liter, computer-sprung, GPS-guided Hoonipigasus, so-named for its 1971 Le Mans 917 "pink pig" tribute graphic and its Frankensteinian shape.

They say that speed makes almost anything beautiful, but sitting still the Block car was, well, blocky, kind of like one of the lumpy Lego Porsche models so in vogue these days. Its shape was vaguely '60s-era Porsche 911, but its wings, splitters, monster-sized tires, and crazy-wide fender flairs had several people looking at it a little cross-eyed.

Perhaps it was over-conceived and under-developed, but the car didn't run well during the first weekend of June, forcing the team to head back to Los Angeles for further sorting and testing. When it returned for official practice two weeks later, its form hadn't improved much, and then it dropped a valve and scored its case beyond repair. With no replacement parts on hand, the car attracted huge attention while parked at the Pikes Peak Fan Fest in downtown Colorado Springs but was absent from the pits on the day of the race. Block says he'll be back in 2023. If all the problems are resolved, it could be a formidable challenger for overall honors. As any Pikes Peak veteran will tell you, winning the internet is fun, but it's far less satisfying than winning the race. —SC

principal Dan Davis purchased the 992 GT2 RS Clubsport and turned development and testing over to Donohue, who had the car shipped to BBI in California for engine and suspension tuning and a high-downforce body kit.

Donohue's history with Brumos goes all the way back to driving a Porsche-powered Daytona Prototype for the team from 2003-2009, and taking a nail-biting win at the 2009 Rolex 24 at Daytona. Despite a few minor teething problems in early testing this year, the car was solid from the outset. Pikes Peak qualifying is done on the lower portion of the course, where Donohue set a new Time Attack record of 3:55.750.

But he wasn't the only strong entry in the class. Eight-time winner Jeff Zwart and Swedish rookie Gustav Lundh, also in Porsches, qualified second and third in class, nine and eleven seconds back, respectively.

Hall of Famer Zwart was racing again after taking a year off from competition, driving the same Road Scholars/Ingram-backed Porsche 935/19 he drove to fifth overall and second in Time Attack in 2020. Donohue was consistently quicker than Zwart in practice and qualifying, but Zwart's cautious, methodical approach to building speed keeps him in the back of every competitor's mind, no matter how confident they are or what



From top: Block is famous for his over-the-edge driving style, but the Hoonipigasus didn't let him display his talents. Zwart is a pleasure to watch, and his experience shows. Local George Hess III ran well in all the practice runs but suffered a mechanical DNF on race day.





From top: Johnny Lieberman ran a safe race to finish fourth in class. Cam Ingram worked throughout the year on his race craft, and it paid off with a class win. Rookie Loni Unser had a crash a few days before the race but was able to get back on the road by race day.



times they turned in practice. As if he wasn't already busy enough driving and tuning the car with help from E-Motion's Joey Seeley, Zwart also continued his duties as official coach for the Porsche Pikes Peak Trophy class. Besides his words of encouragement at the start line of each practice run, he spent hours each day revealing the secrets of each portion of the mountain to his closely listening students.

Other Porsche drivers entered in Time Attack included third-year veteran Kathryn Mead, French rookie Phillippe Marion, multi-series racing veteran Rob Holland, and Belgian Steve Zimmer. Local driver Andy Kingsley made enough modifica-

tions to his 2002 Porsche 911 that it was classified in the Unlimited class, a group that is almost always won by one of the low-slung prototypes like the Italian-built Wolf hill-climb specials.

IN THE PIKES PEAK Porsche Trophy Cayman class for Cayman GT4s, Cameron Ingram led every testing and practice session, qualifying with a time of 4:32.060, just under two seconds faster than his closest rival, local George Hess III. Ingram moved to Colorado Springs for the month of May this year and was driving the course daily in his rental car looking for the perfect line, memorizing landmarks, plus attending Zwart's

coaching sessions. During his rookie season race in 2021, weather closed the top half of the course, keeping him from finishing on the summit. For 2022, Ingram redoubled his efforts, continuing his tailored fitness workouts and accumulating nearly 15,000 track miles.

Other entrants in the class included *Motor Trend* on-air personality Johnny Lieberman, third-year veteran Charles "Chas" Wirken, and Canadian rookie Gilles Nadeau. But there was a Pikes Peak rookie who captured as much attention from the press as all the others combined, and for good reason. Twenty-four-year-old Loni Unser lived up to the family name, qualifying third in

class with a time of 4:42.331.

The daughter of Johnny Unser and granddaughter of Bobby, Loni politely answered press questions about her family heritage and smiled for fan photos but was all business behind the wheel. While new to Pikes Peak, Unser has been carrying on the family business in several professional starter series, including the highly competitive Global Mazda MX-5 Cup, where her team manager is Formula W racer Shea Holbrook.

Unfortunately, she had a mishap near the end of the official practice week when a washboard road surface combined with the quirks of her Porsche's ABS braking launched

Unser's crew had to replace the entire front clip, many of the braking and cooling system components, most of the glass, several other smaller body pieces, and re-wrap the car in just two days, but they got the job done and she finished a brilliant second in class in her rookie start.



David Donner and his 911 Turbo S were the revelations of the month. With the only changes made for safety considerations, and running on DOT tires, Donner was consistently near the top of the timing charts in every testing and practice session. Running early on race day, Donner schooled the field, finishing second overall.

her onto the boulders at the outside of Cog Cut corner, the second to last from the top. Tossing the car into the rocks wasn't good for it, nor was dragging it off, and there was severe damage to the front clip and undercarriage, leaving her participation in the race doubtful. Thankfully, her team and the crew at Porsche of Colorado Springs collision center worked around the clock for two days to piece the Cayman back together, including scavenging some pieces from a car on their sales lot and overnight trucking several other pieces in from Los Angeles. Completely rewrapped with its black and red graphics, the car looked flawless on race day.

THE OPEN CLASS featured one of the most interesting Porsche entries in the race. Driven by 13-time winner Rhys Millen, the Porsche racing car was conceived and built from the ground up by E-Motion's Joey Seeley, with sponsorship from Pennzoil and support from *000* magazine and the Edwards Collection. Though innovative in design, all of its features were competition proven by Seeley's previous entries. The car was well sorted by the time it arrived in Colorado Springs, having done several test days at The Thermal Club private track facility in Palm Desert. Zwart, after taking the car for a guest drive at Aspen's Woody Creek Raceway, said he was so impressed

by its performance he almost didn't want to get out. With the car boasting well over 1000 horsepower and with great handling, he reckoned it could be the best Porsche ever to race on the mountain.

Oddly, its largest variable was the driver himself. In all his years of stunt driving, off-roading, racing the mountain, Global Rallycross, and Formula D drifting, Millen never, ever, raced a Porsche. While E-Motion dialed in its suspension and tire setting during the early testing and official practice days, the sessions were as much about Millen learning how to drive a rear-engined German sports car. Millen qualified with a time of 3:48.079.

Last, but far from least, was local racer David Donner. Donner's family history with Pikes Peak is long and illustrious ["Pikes Peak Legacy," *Panorama*, April 2017]. While many of the big-money teams that have come to the mountain have overlooked Donner in favor of drivers of more national repute, Pikes Peak veterans know that he's a threat in any car he's driving. Prior to this year's race, Donner had accumulated seven wins. For 2022, he reunited with *000* magazine, with whom he won Time Attack in 2020, the Montana-based Edwards Collection, and Champion Porsche of Pompano Beach, Florida to field a 2022 Porsche Turbo S to go after the

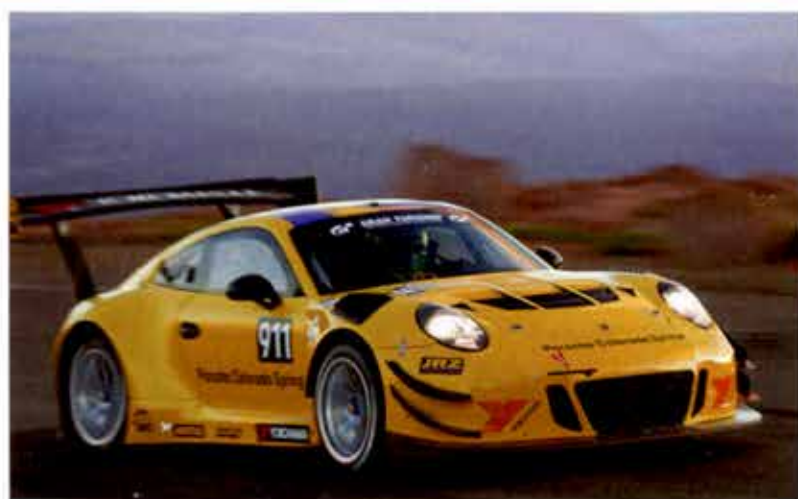


Fred Veitch gave rides to media and politicians to acquaint them with the race. Veteran Rod Millen returned after several years and finished within seconds of his son Rhys. The younger Millen adapted well to his first drive in a Porsche despite some teething troubles in testing.





From top: David Donner, who has competed in 26 events on the hill, prepares for what will become his eighth win on Pikes Peak. Gustav Lundh navigated difficult race-day conditions for a fifth-place finish in Time Attack class.



production car record set by Rhys Millen's Bentley in 2019, with a time of 10:18.4333.

While there is no official class for production cars, the Pikes Peak Hill Climb organization does recognize such records, providing the cars entered work within a commonly agreed set of parameters and safety modifications and run on DOT-approved tires. Donner's car had its interior stripped and a full roll cage and proper racing seat installed. It also had a custom fuel cell, a full fire suppression system, and a freer-breathing racing muffler but still sounded much like a street car. Otherwise, all features on the dashboard were fully functional, even

the stereo (but without speakers) and the heating/defroster system.

With some impressive racing Porsches in the Open and Time Attack classes, Donner turned more than a few heads when his times in testing and practice came in very close and sometimes faster than the race cars. He qualified just seven seconds behind Donohue, 14 seconds behind Millen, and two seconds faster than Zwart, with a time of 4:02.939, a new production qualifying record.

RACE DAY BROUGHT variable conditions, with fog, mist, and a light rain at dawn interspersed with the occasional spot of blue sky. Shifting

winds blew the clouds around and brought visibility changes throughout the day, with different sections sometimes better or worse depending on the amount of sun shining through or dense fog hanging on the ridges. Even so, everyone who didn't crash made it to the top.

Fittingly for such an arduous event, the chosen pace-car driver for the day was Renée Brinkerhoff, recently returned from the Antarctic leg of her World Rally Tour. After driving in horrible conditions on every continent, a little snow and fog was nothing for her, and she enjoyed being around the hubbub of the race.

Donner was the 14th car out, setting a time of 10:34.053, the fastest

to that point. It was not a production-car record but was incredibly fast given the conditions. According to Donner, "Looking at the weather all morning, I knew that visibility was going to be an issue, and the surface was going to be slippery no matter what, so I turned on the windshield defroster." Though he encountered the same mountain fog as everyone else, the production element of his car kept the inside of his windshield completely clear. As far as seeing the road, it's his home track and he could probably drive it on a cloudy moonless night and set similar times.

Then came the Pikes Peak Cayman class, running slowest to fast-

Dan Davis, Brumos owner, waves the starter's green flag for David Donohue as he sets off on a fast run through dense fog, shifting clouds, and varying road conditions on his way to third overall and first in Time Attack. It was the first time an official Brumos entry had raced in any event since 2013.



Robin Shute took his third King of the Hill title in four years driving his Wolf TSC-FS. Rod Millen, who last won the race overall in 1999 driving this same Toyota Tacoma race truck, returned after a several-year absence, redeploing the vehicle from dirt to asphalt suspension and tires, to place eighth overall, just 14 seconds shy of his son's time in a race car with the latest technology.



est. Ingram won convincingly with a time of 11:22.691 over second place Loni Unser, who performed well, cautiously driving up the hill in 12:55.774. Local George Hess had competitive split times on the lower portion of the course but cut a tire halfway up and had to retire.

Then came the rest of the racers, now running fastest to slowest, supposedly giving the top qualifiers the best conditions. Unlimited class driver Robin Shute in his Wolf TSC-FS hill-climb special eclipsed Donner's time, setting a 10:09.525, to take his third King of the Hill honors. Third place overall and first in Time Attack was Donohue's Brumos Racing entry with a time of 10:35.830, a second and a half back from Donner. Donohue mentioned that he had issues with traction control on the bottom of the course, but once it was off, he was free to drive for speed.

Millen eventually mastered driving the E-Motion Porsche racing car, but conditions didn't favor its wide tires and high horsepower. He finished sixth overall with a time of 10:52.664 and won the Open class. Quite good, all things considered. Jeff Zwart, driving the beautiful 935/19, was seventh overall and second in Time Attack with a 10:58.928. Amazingly, 71-year-old Rod Millen, driving the Toyota Tacoma racing truck that he drove to course records back when the course was all dirt, bolted on some slicks and finished eighth overall and third in class with a time of 11:06.152, just 12 seconds behind his son.

After drifting through the final fogbank to the summit with visibility of about four feet, several drivers crossed the finish line scared out of their wits, one pleading that the race needed to be red flagged. To

those already on top, the reaction was, "You're *here* aren't you? We just drove through the same thing." Fan favorite Randy Pobst, driving a race-modified Tesla Model S Plaid, said that to clear his windshield he had to loosen his belts and rub it with the back of his hand. Many of the finishers, including class winners, described finding the top only by looking at the white lines on the side of the road and recognizing the occasional guardrail.

THE RACE WAS interesting all the way through to the final runners as everyone watched the skies, expecting either a major snowstorm or a parting of the clouds that might have given one of the slower qualifiers a clear road and a fast time. But it never happened, and the poor visibility was consistently inconsistent for everyone. There were a few mechanical DNFs, but there were few crashes. Amazingly, Levi Shirley missed the line at Engineer Corner, rolled into the ditch, did a complete flip before landing on his wheels, steered back onto the road, and continued to the top, finishing with a time of 13:44.532. Even after his off-course excursion and complete rollover, six cars finished with slower times, despite staying on the road and receiving no style points for acrobatic displays.

The high points of the day were Donner's amazing pace and Donohue's third overall with the Brumos-liveried car. Donner's feat was all the more amazing because anyone of means can buy the same car at their Porsche dealer, though presumably they'd keep the upholstery and stereo speakers in the car. For racing fans everywhere, it was great to see the iconic Brumos colors racing again, even if it might be a one-off. Still, it's safe to say that everyone hopes to see the white-red-blue number 59 racing again in almost any series. And finally, all the other manufacturers are on notice. For production-based cars, Pikes Peak, stormy or not, really is Porsche Mountain. ☺