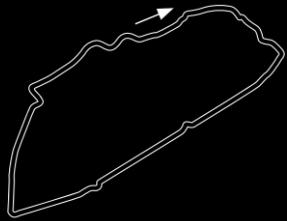


LE MANS



Circuit de la Sarthe

Track length: 13.64 km

Right-hand turns: 12

Left-hand turns: 9



With the Cayenne GTS at Le Mans

Porsche factory driver and Le Mans winner Romain Dumas drives the legendary course in the SUV. Mediterranean flair meets Atlantic low pressure trough.

By Eva-Maria Burkhardt **Photos by** Victor Jon Goico



Start and finish
at Le Mans:
With 16 wins,
Porsche holds
the record at the
24-hour race



With twelve starts,
Porsche factory driver
Romain Dumas
is a veritable
Le Mans expert



The calm before the storm: On June 22–23, the race will take place for the ninetyeth time



The entry pass to the holy of holies, the Le Mans paddock—gone somewhere. The gate stays closed. Romain Dumas cocks his eyebrows skeptically, jumps out of the Cayenne, and smiles as he waves at the woman at the gate. “Ah, Romain!” The gate opens instantly. Who cares about tickets when Dumas comes knocking? Le Mans winner, Porsche factory driver, Frenchman, member of the family. Voilà, come on in!

Dumas blinks into the driving rain, sighs, and remarks with feeling, “Sometimes I hate Le Mans.” A mere 200 kilometers from the coast, Le Mans is no stranger to

Atlantic low pressure troughs. For a native of Alès, in the deep, sunwashed south of France, this is an outrage. The Cayenne GTS defies the gray day because it is painted in Peridot Metallic, inspired by the bright yellow-green to green gemstone. Dumas slides behind the wheel.

Inside the GTS, the weather is academic. The driver eyes the start/finish straightaway before him. He switches the GTS into Sport mode and hits the gas. The SUV is not exactly a lightweight, but it is light on its feet. Dumas enthuses: “The GTS has a ton of power, and it’s incredibly responsive.” With the pits on the right and the grandstand on the left, if you close your eyes you

can almost hear the roar of the crowd—and the deafening sound of 55 race cars in the starting blocks for the 24-hour marathon.



The Cayenne GTS’s eight-cylinder engine is not made for quiet meditation. Ripping down the straightaway, and up the tachometer, the bracing power of 309 kW (420 hp) asserts itself. When Dumas takes his foot off the gas, the engine answers with a hungry babble, and during downshifting the intermediate throttle blip sounds like a promise. The GTS has the most powerful naturally aspirated engine in the model line. It boasts 15 kW (20 hp) more than

the S, and with an additional 15 newton-meters of torque (maximum 515 Nm at 3,500 rpms) even better responsiveness.

Dumas is thrilled by the extremely sporty engine setup: “I can easily play with the vehicle on the track, and accelerate out of the corners—and it gives me a good push back into the seat. Oh, I love Le Mans!” He laughs. His good cheer and self-deprecating humor are just two of the reasons the Frenchman is so beloved.

“What I find even more impressive than the power is the chassis,” says Dumas, whose own Cayenne is an S. “The handling is incredibly sporty and absolutely racetrack-

Ripping down the straightaway, and up the tachometer, the bracing power of 309 kW (420 hp) asserts itself forcefully.



ready. That’s surprising, because the SUV weighs 800 kilograms more than my race-version 911.” For a lower center of gravity, Porsche lowered the body by about 20 millimeters in comparison to other Cayenne models. “Extremely agile in the corners, incredibly fun to drive, superb,” comments Dumas.

The Frenchman has taken part in the 24 Hours of Le Mans a total of twelve times, most recently on loan in an Audi sport prototype. “In 2010, someone said to me, ‘Hey, Romain, maybe you’ll win



No quaint rest-stop, this: The Auberge on the Hunaudières Straight

in your tenth start at Le Mans!' And I thought, 'Huh? My tenth race already? I'm only 32 years old.'"

In that anniversary year, his dream of victory at Le Mans came true. Not in a Porsche, but with a group brand.

Fulfilling dreams seems to be in his DNA. In addition to the long-distance races for Porsche (in 2013 including the World Endurance Championship, of which Le Mans is a part), he starts in French rallies in his own 911. Last year he even participated in the legendary Pikes Peak race in Colorado. Although his 911 belongs to a smaller class, Dumas just missed taking overall victory—0.017 seconds was the vanishingly thin margin.

What is his motivation? Money? He rolls his eyes. "In my private races, I blow whatever I make as a factory driver." He lives his



Romain Dumas has a vision: Overall victory with Porsche

racing dream to the fullest. "My ultimate dream," says Dumas, now dead serious, "is to win the 24 Hours of Le Mans in a Porsche." In 2013, the first stage victory would be a class win with the 911 RSR, followed by overall victory in 2014 in the new Le Mans prototype currently being developed in Weissach. Porsche & Le Mans, Le Mans & Porsche: for Romain Dumas, they are two sides of the same coin.

"When I was little, my father sat me in a Porsche 917, a Le Mans race car. He shut the door and I thought, 'Wow, is this a plane?'" The impression has not worn off to this day. "I'm a Porsche fan. It's the number-one brand in the world. Even this SUV carries the race-car genes." And Le Mans? "If you're a race-car driver and a

Frenchman, you want to win the greatest long-distance race in the world.”

As a sixteen-year-old, Dumas won a junior competition here. He stayed, went to school in Le Mans, found friends and sponsors, got his driver's license. Since that time, every year he has picked up his racer's license at the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO), the organization behind the race. “Le Mans is my second home,” he says simply.



This is his tenth year as a factory driver. He has celebrated many long-distance victories in Porsches—four times each at the Nürburgring and Spa-Francorchamps, and once at Sebring: “They're all great, challenging circuits, but Le Mans is something special, the best of the best, legendary. The history alone!” When Dumas starts his thirteenth Le Mans in the 911 RSR on



June 22, it will be the ninetieth running. To call it a classic would be an understatement. “And it's not just the course that's unique, but also the atmosphere—the huge crowd and media contingent, the pressure that weighs on the teams,” says Dumas.

Just under 13.6 kilometers long, the course for the 24-hour race consists of sections of the permanent Circuit Bugatti as well as closed public roads. Among the legendary sections is the nearly five-kilometer Hunaudières Straight. Before two chicanes were added for safety reasons in 1990, the fastest cars topped out at over 400 km/h here. When no 24-hour race is underway, the road is populated by small cars and commercial traffic driving between Le Mans and Mulsanne. They pass the Auberge des Hun-

Alone, the spray is not so bad; but if it rains on race day, visibility is nil

Only at a full stop does he take his hands from the wheel: Dumas always uses the paddles





The eight-cylinder engine is the most powerful naturally aspirated engine in a Cayenne

audières without even noticing. And yet in the third week of June, the electric air will rattle the windowpanes as race cars whiz by in a blur at up to 350 km/h. “The circuit simply has everything a driver could wish for,” says Dumas. “The long straightaway, tight chicanes, the narrow road by Arnage, and high-speed corners like in Indianapolis.” And his favorite section? The Porsche curves. PR talk? “Oh, no,” says Dumas with a flourish, “if you want to take these very fast curves perfectly, you have to be completely focused every single time. It’s a blast.”



A gravel bed and tire wall are the stage for a film that’s not yet running; the marshals are temporarily unemployed, and it’s raining cats and dogs—Dumas does not push the GTS to its limits. But he still changes gears with the paddles on the steering

*“When I was little,
my father sat me in a Porsche
917, a Le Mans race car.
He closed the door. I thought,
‘Wow, is this a plane?’”*

wheel: a pull on the right paddle shifts up, the left paddle shifts down.

The Frenchman parks in the pit. He has a train to catch. The high-speed TGV will deliver him to Paris, where he’ll catch a flight to the next race. But Dumas does not rush. He closes his eyes as his fingers rest on the Cayenne’s paddles. “I always shift this way,” he explains. “It’s exactly how I shift in my race car.” ●

CAYENNE GTS

Engine: V8

Displacement: 4,806 cc

Power: 309 kW (420 hp)

Maximum torque: 515 Nm at 3,500 rpm

0–100 km/h: 5.7 sec.

Top track speed: 261 km/h (162 mph)

CO₂ emissions: 251 g/km

Fuel consumption

City: 14.8 l/100 km

Highway: 8.5 l/100 km

Combined: 10.7 l/100 km