

Daytona's 50th Birthday Celebrations: Champagne on ice

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Classic Driver



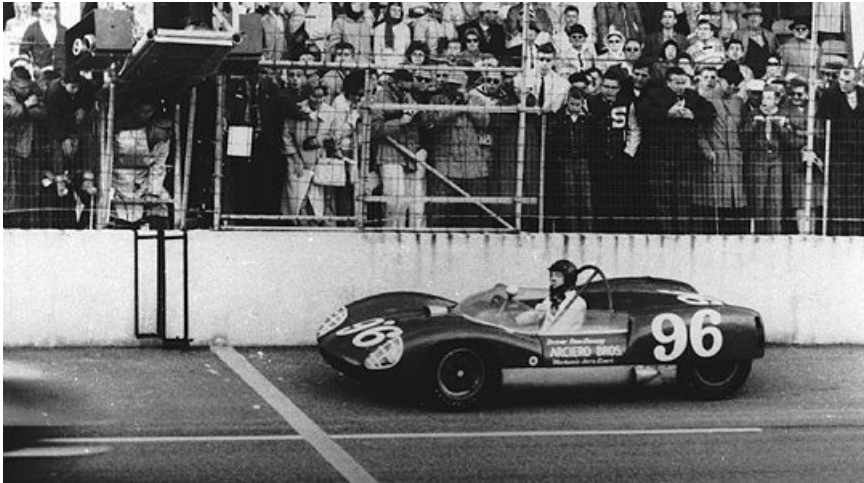
It's just three months to go till January 2012 marks the 50th anniversary of the Daytona 24 Hours (these days named the Rolex 24 at Daytona), widely recognised as one of the most challenging endurance races in the world.

In celebration of this motorsport milestone, the organisers of the Daytona 24 Hours, along with title sponsor Rolex, are aiming to gather together as many of the race winners – both cars and drivers – as possible. The latest participants to be confirmed include the No. 6 Lola T70 Chevrolet fielded by Roger Penske, and driven to victory in the 1969 race by Americans Mark Donohue and Chuck Parsons (top). The victory, the first for Penske at Daytona International Speedway and the first for Chevrolet in an international endurance race,

was beset by problems but - when accidents and mechanical failures took out the pre-race favourites - Penske's drivers were the last men standing.

Also confirmed for the 50th Anniversary Overall Champions display is the first Porsche ever to take the chequered flag at this great race (the first of 22 overall wins for the German marque): the No. 54 Porsche 907 of 1968 driven by Vic Elford (GBR), Hans Hermann (GER), Jochen Neerpasch (GER), Rolf Stommelen (GER) and Jo Siffert (CHE).

The Arciero Racing No. 96 Lotus-Climax 19B (below) that captured the inaugural 24 Hours in 1962, and the No. 98 Toyota Eagle fielded by Dan Gurney's All American Racers Toyota team and winner of the 1993 Rolex 24 at Daytona, will also be part of the display.



Meanwhile, in the 2012 race, several of the new Ferrari F458 Italias, built specifically for Rolex Sports Car Series competition, are expected to compete, following a Ferrari tradition at Daytona that dates back to 1962 (the photograph below, right, shows NASCAR legend 'Fireball' Roberts and the 250GT SWB he drove that year). And a version of the Audi R8 LMS race car also built specifically for the GRAND-AM Rolex Sports Car Series is expected to have its competition debut at Daytona.





Given Classic Driver's interest in all things horological, we can't cover the 24 Hours of Daytona without mentioning the famous watch, the steel Rolex Cosmograph Daytona (named "the world's rarest watch" by WatchTime magazine).

Rolex began its long association with the Daytona International Speedway in 1959 and, in 1963, Rolex launched its new 'Cosmograph' line; but it was not until 1965 that the name 'Daytona' was added to the dial as a tribute to the great Florida race.

For more information about the Rolex Cosmograph Daytona, see www.rolex.com.

Text: [Charis Whitcombe](#)

Photos: Rolex

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