

Norbert Singer's greatest song

If any car deserves a 1400-page ode, the Porsche 962 is it. **Damien Smith** straps himself in for a 24-hour endurance read

Remember Drake Olson? Not sure we did. Briefly a rising star in IMSA, Olson made a single start in a works Rothmans Porsche 962, sharing No3 (chassis 002) with Vern Schuppan at the 1986 Le Mans 24 Hours. Following a pair of trouble-free stints from the Australian, Olson took over in seventh place but lasted all but half an hour before he was forced to pit with hydraulics dramas, then not long after stopped for good on the Mulsanne with a broken gearbox. Schuppan was switched to No2, Olson to the hospitality suite to entertain guests.

That Serge Vanbockryck tracked him down to Alaska, where he runs a flying business ferrying intrepid mountaineers, skiers and snowboarders, to complete a six-page profile says a great deal about why that much overused word 'definitive' does indeed stand up to rigour in this (slip)case. A three-volume, 1400-page, hernia-inducing 'book' (that little word seems inadequate), *Ultimate Works Porsche 962* is the fifth in Porter Press's 'Ultimate' series and a mighty companion to the sister two-volume Porsche 956 opus written by the same author.

You'll have noticed the price matches the heft, but if you really love these cars - and so many do, as we've seen this year at the Goodwood Members' Meeting and at The Classic at Silverstone - there's a mind-boggling amount of detail to get lost in.

The first volume is entitled *The Works Years 1984-88* and deals with the genesis of a car that not only succeeded the 956, but crucially opened up the US IMSA market to Porsche and its epochal 1980s endurance racing campaign. As with its older sibling, photos of windtunnel models and side profile



Ultimate Works
Porsche 962
Serge Vanbockryck
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illustrations document the conception, birth and development of a model that famously raced at the cutting edge in one shape or another for more than a decade. Details of a centrally mounted delta rear wing as an alternative to the familiar long tail is one typically diverting cul-de-sac, before Vanbockryck plunges into the race histories.

A former journalist whose passion for these cars was sparked by covering Group C races in period, Vanbockryck's easy style and wry humour ensures the pace is always kept at a decent lick as he inevitably strays beyond the 'works' boundaries of his theme. Customer teams, cars and drivers were always central to the ethos of the 956/962, and they weave in and out between the Rothmans cars, while the nitty-gritty of thorny Group C politics is explored in depth. As a reference tool for the era as a whole, it



Longevity was in the 962's DNA: this is the Joest Porsche 962C in the Le Mans 24 Hours, 1993



Perish the thought in 2022... but the Rothmans livery was a good fit for '80s Porsche curves

would be a much-used addition to your (steel-reinforced) automotive bookshelves.

The second volume is *The Joest Years 1989-94*. While the curtain fell on the works team at the 1988 Fuji 1000Kms, an encore to the Shell-liveried Le Mans attack, factory Porsche involvement never ceased. The team that was the scourge of the Rothmans cars at Le Mans in 1985 became the de facto works in the final years of Group C and there's plenty to get into, especially Porsche's adoption of the racer-turned-road-car-turned-racer Dauer 962 GT that added a surprise seventh Le Mans win to the 956/962 roster in 1994. Again, the politics of the era are ingrained, so watch your blood pressure when dipping into the bits involving Jean-Marie Balestre, Max Mosley and Bernie Ecclestone - although a letter to Porsche from the last-named is surprisingly conciliatory and respectful in tone.

The final volume is simply called *The Cars and People* - and it's a feast of minutiae.

"So many love these cars, as we've seen this year at Goodwood and The Classic at Silverstone"

All 22 works 962s are covered in the kind of detail only car restorers and Group C addicts might need (hello, Henry Pearman). We all like an at-a-glance tech spec to accompany words about a racing car. But here, along with all the obvious touchpoints, such elements are listed as the lubricants used, which gear ratios and wheel bearings, the make of shocks and springs run - even the choice of brake pads. And not just at birth, but for each race the chassis took part in. Copious notes accompany other key details such as who designed and made the specific monocoque and when it was delivered for racing. Studio shoots of key cars break up the intensity, but the signature clean and

elegant Porter page layouts ensure you never need a lie-down to give your eyes a break.

Then it's on to the profiles of significant people: Norbert Singer, Peter Falk, the big-name drivers we all associate with Rothmans Porsches, of course they are all here. Then there's the obscure corners occupied by Olson and his ilk. Over the page is Canadian-based Dutchman Kees Nierop. As Vanbockryck admits, the fact a picture could be found of him in Rothmans overalls at all is a small feat of wonder. Nierop's works 962 claim to fame is he didn't even get to drive one because Price Cobb crashed 002 that they were due to share during practice at Le Mans in 1987 before he'd had a chance.

He was switched instead to the 961 which also ran in the tobacco brand's colours and, sharing with Claude Haldi and René Metge, was on course for a 10th place overall finish when he missed a downshift and crashed. Still, he gets six pages here.

All this and so much more, for £850. Then there's the collector's edition for £1750 and the owners' edition - complete with genuine works 962 conrod - for £3000. We know: different world. But then what an astonishing achievement this is. ●

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