

# Bamber in Le Mans success

**Motorsport**  
By Jared Smith  
.smith@wanganuichronicle.co.nz

**F**OR Wanganui expat driver Earl Bamber, it was both the longest and the greatest day of his racing career.

The 24-year-old joined German F1 driver Nico Hulkenberg and Great Britain's Nick Tandy on top of the podium as their Porsche team won the 83rd running of the iconic Le Mans 24 hour race, completing over 5000km and crossing the line at 3pm on Sunday local time (1am yesterday NZT).

"It's something that hasn't sunk in at all," said Bamber.

"It was awesome that the three of us came together and did this.

"Any day you get to drive such an amazing race car is cool — I can't complain."

Bamber's team victory in the Porsche 919 Hybrid car was historic on a number of fronts.

It was Porsche's first victory since returning last year to compete at the Le Mans 24 hour, having last won in 1998, and it took the manufacturer's overall record tally to 17 victories, pulling clear again of the Audi brand, who had won the last five years straight to move up to 13 wins.

Bamber is the first Kiwi to win the race since 1966 when Chris Amon and Bruce McLaren shared the drive and won in the Ford GT40, ahead of fellow New Zealand great Denny Hulme.

Ironically, yesterday was another Kiwi 1-2 finish as Brendon Hartley co-drove the Porsche car which came runner up with Germany's Timo Bernhard and Australian Mark Webber.

Audi's defending champions Andre Lotterer, Benoit Treluyer and Marcel Faessler finished third.

There were 14 cars in the headline LMP1 (Le Mans Prototype 1) class, representing six industry brands.

This was also an all-rookie LMP1 crew win as Bamber and Hulkenberg, who drives F1 for Force India, had never entered racing's grandest enduro event, while Tandy had done two 24-hour races in the lower GT



**IRON MEN:** Wanganui-born driver Earl Bamber raises his trophy alongside teammates Nick Tandy (left) and Nico Hulkenberg after winning the 2015 Le Mans 24 Hour race yesterday.

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class.

After qualifying third on the grid with a 3m 16s time on the 13.63km track, the Porsche No19 was driven by Hulkenberg for the race start and the final leg to the finish line.

He swapped in and out with Bamber and Tandy multiple times during the Saturday evening, twilight and the early hours

of Sunday morning, French time.

At one point, Porsche No19 dropped down to eighth, while settling into sixth for a long period.

But the 24 hour race is more about keeping it all together to be there at the end.

"At the moment it's going really well, we're fighting really hard," Bamber said at the end of

an early morning stint with eight hours remaining.

"The car's survived the night now, so just took it to the morning, she's still running really, really well.

"Now Nico's out there, he'll do a fantastic job. Still a long way to go."

It proved the case, with Bamber and Tandy sitting inside

the open doors as Hulkenberg drove the car into victory lane.

"I have enjoyed every single stint," Bamber said.

"It has been a long, long day to drive in the evening and then again in the morning. I just had a very short break.

"But I am not tired at all — I am pumped up on adrenalin now.

"I thought I would have heard strange noises in the car. But, of course, you fancy every kind of noise if you are on your way to win Le Mans."

The car consistently drove 13 laps — and occasionally 14 — on a tank of fuel, said Jamie Taylor, marketing manager for Porsche in Auckland.

The Porsche pit crew worked on no less than 90 pit stops across the three Porsche vehicles during the race.

Crucially, Bamber and his team drove with no errors or faults, meaning they won on their own merits.

It shows the incredible adaptability of Bamber, who made his name driving in the Porsche Carrera Cup Asia, before competing in Europe in the Supercup, then becoming a tester for the manufacturer's GT programme and finally getting behind the wheel of the LMP1 in preparation for Le Mans.

"When you first start to drive that car, the first time you put your foot down, you know you've got something pushing you from behind and it's a speed sensation that I've never felt in my life," Bamber said before the race.

"By far the fastest thing I've ever driven on the planet."

The car was developed at Porsche's research centre in Weissach, Germany.

"The Porsche 919 Hybrid has a trend-setting downsizing turbo engine and two energy recovery systems, which all together create a powertrain delivering around 1,000hp," said the manufacturer's press release.

"It works as a racing laboratory for the highest efficiency of future road-going sports cars."

Taylor's Porsche offices in Auckland neighbour Audi NZ. "We've been going at it for the last few weeks, so this morning has been very satisfying."