



LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Patrick Long is highly ambitious. His dream of Formula 1 took him to Europe as a teenager. Now he's driving for Roger Penske. **By Andy Hallberg**

Main Photo Richard Dole

Dreams can come true, but having 2000 percent determination behind those dreams helps. There can be no more proof of that than Patrick Long joining Penske Porsche's American Le Mans LMP2 program for this season. The Californian had the ambition that has finally led him to what many people determine to be the prize drive in ALMS.

Long's career is far from traditional. During his karting days, his desire was only to get to Formula 1. Not IndyCar, not Champ Car. It was Formula 1.

To that end, the 17-year-old Long moved to Italy in 1997, then Belgium, to race karts. From there he went to France to attend the famous *La Filière* Racing School.

In 2000, he moved to England to race in Formula Ford, and then Formula Renault, early rungs on the ladder to Formula 1. In between, he returned to the States to win a Barber Dodge Scholarship – but turned down the prize so that he could return to Europe and seek a Formula 3 drive. That's determination.

He was a finalist in the inaugural Red Bull Driver Search that eventually freight-trained Scott Speed to Formula 1. Then came a call from Porsche – and a whole new direction.

"It was a difficult decision when it came up, only because I had devoted my five seasons of single-seater racing both stateside and in Europe mostly to getting to Formula 1," says Long. "F1 was all that was in my mind before the Porsche offer came."

So, aged 22, Pat Long took a whole new approach, and went sports car racing – rarely a steppingstone to F1. Yet he states: "I've never, ever looked back and wondered if I chose the right way or made a mistake."

"I lived in Le Mans when I entered the *La Filière* program, and was around not only the 24 Hours of Le Mans but also the whole culture of sports car racing. Henri Pescarolo is the 'uncle' of the Elf academy, and guys like Sebastien Bourdais and Emmanuel Collard were frequently in and out of where we worked out and trained.

"That opened my eyes to endurance sports car racing," he adds, "and to see guys like Michael Schumacher and Heinz-Harald Frentzen who had gone through the Sauber-Mercedes project and Dario Franchitti and Jan Magnussen doing things like Mercedes-Benz's touring car stuff, I knew that aligning myself with a major manufacturer as early as possible would be something to aspire to."

The Porsche offer was for a junior program in Europe and, while not an easy decision, Pat knew its worth. He did his due diligence. "I must have made 30 phone calls in that stretch of time after Porsche told me I was the guy they wanted, and I needed to make a clear-cut decision on it. They were unanimous in their answers – it was all about working with a successful manufacturer. Not one person had a bad thing to say about my new opportunity, and that was pretty much it for me. I made the decision.

"But thinking about it now, I had nothing else on the table! I had some offers, some partially funded rides in Champ Car Atlantics and the Indy Pro Series and I was discussing some outside hopes of Formula 3, but with that Red Bull thing not working out, I really didn't have much more. I look at kids now who are in the Formula 3, Atlantics or IPS ladder system and they've sort of been there for two or three seasons. And I think to

myself, 'Man, would that have been me, just kind of stalled out at that last step?' So it's pretty awesome that I got picked up when I did."

By then, in order to build a rapport with his various teams' employees, Long had learned to speak Italian, French and, most importantly, German. There's that determination again, this time in a quest to gain integration and add to team spirit.

Long, in 2008, is right where he wants to be. As a "veteran" factory Porsche driver, he has taken a circuitous route over the last five seasons through German SuperCup, European SuperCup (which included a pole position at Monaco in front of the F1 team bosses), then back to America in GT2 in ALMS, and Grand-Am. But now he's pretty much top of the sports car tree. And his boss is Roger Penske.

"Any young racing driver knows what Penske Racing is. Roger runs his three organizations – IndyCar Series, NASCAR and ALMS – under one roof and it's so tight-knit that there's a lot of crossover. It's one unit – not scattered about," says Long. "He wants to know everything that's happening with every team, and if he's not at the racetrack, he's calling in all the time to see what's going on. It's pretty special to have a guy who is that accomplished and has that much going on both in motorsport and in his businesses but who is so interested and so hands-on with our program."

And there's more. The guy who has masterminded 13 Indy 500 wins looks likely to be the guy calling the shots on the radio for Long, and his teammate Sascha Maassen. ↘



Long made an impression in his runs with the Porsche ALMS squad in the long-distance enduros.

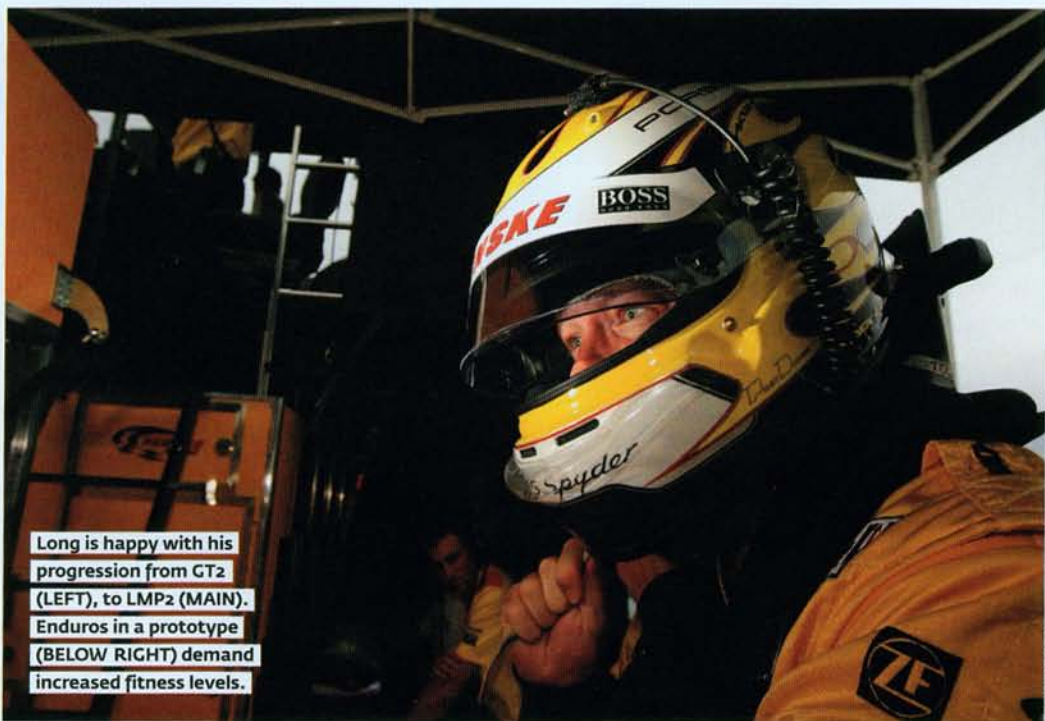
Michael L. Leventhal

"That's pretty special in itself," smiles Long. "I've watched him on the radio with Sam Hornish this last couple seasons, and especially the 500 in '06, when the call he made meant they won the race. He's got a lot to bring to the table. It's inspiring to watch how he runs a strategy."

So, is the single-seater dream still there? Long is only 26 after all. And if there's a team that could provide him with, let's say, an Indy 500-winning car, he's surely in the right place.

"I've been asked that question quite a lot," he says. "Farther down the road, I've always said that I hope to compete in the 500 one day. It's something I'd definitely love to do one day."

"But to be honest, it doesn't really cross my mind, only because I've got so much on the plate right now, like getting integrated into ALMS prototype racing, and what I've got to do to bring myself up to my 'A' game against not only my teammates but also other manufacturer drivers who are much more accomplished and experienced. I haven't even thought



Long is happy with his progression from GT2 (LEFT), to LMP2 (MAIN). Enduros in a prototype (BELOW RIGHT) demand increased fitness levels.

Richard Dole/LAT



Jeff Brubaker/LAT

"I've never, ever looked back and wondered if I'd chosen the right way"

Patrick Long

about the Le Mans 24 Hours or anything outside of the ALMS, so right now it's all about the LMP2 project."

Long's teammate in '08 will be Germany's Sascha Maassen, a three-time ALMS class champion, and that's also something Long is looking forward to. They won their class when Long joined him and Jörg Bergmeister at the Le Mans 24 Hours back in 2004.

"I think he's a guy who is very, very calculated in how he attacks his racing," says Long. "For me to have someone like that looking over my shoulder and up on the pitbox with the radio when I'm in the car is really, really special. I've had teammates in the past where their primary objective is to demoralize their teammate, whether he's young and green or old and accomplished. But I just feel as though I've got the right guy in Sascha."

"The first time I went to Le Mans, I shared a car with him and Jörg. Both of them had been on the podium at Le Mans before and had numerous years in GT racing behind them, and Sascha really just took his time to explain to me things in a real unconventional way that made a lot of sense, so that's really cool."

Most observers felt that Long was a shoe-in for the prototype drive when Penske Porsche joined the ALMS ranks, but, surprisingly, he wasn't part of that original squad, instead remaining in the GT2 class, and dovetailing a Grand-Am program with Ruby Tuesday. Did he feel that he'd missed out?

"No, not by any stretch," he says. "I used it; my task at hand was to be the best that I could in whatever program Porsche asked me to go into, and there was definitely an established ladder. I felt as though I was just really getting into my groove in GT and endurance racing, and the guys who were chosen for the first full-time drive in '06 were people who were much more experienced and had been with the company longer."

"I feel as though they had not only their best interests at heart but also my best interest. And going into the 2008 season as a full-time LMP2 driver for Penske Porsche is very, very different than what I'd have felt going into '06 or even '07 in this position. It's a combination of wanting to be where I'm needed, and where my progression as a driver has led me."

"This is where I want to be." **R**

STEPPING UP, PUMP IT UP

The faster his cars, the more demanding Long has become of his fitness regime

Patrick Long's focus on being where he wants to be in racing has seen him move to Europe as a teenager, learn three languages, earn a contract with Porsche, and now a contract with Penske. No time to let up though. This is a new game and a revised routine. He's still aiming high.

"I'd say that in the last 12 months my fitness has gone in a direction that it's never been in my whole career," he says. "I've had huge guidance from Porsche's doctors and fitness team, and they've brought me to a point where I can now go 24 hours in a GT car in the hottest of weather and feel fine. Tired but not tattered."

"But this off-season I've wanted to take it to another level from what I've done in the last 12 months: I moved from California to Florida and pretty much devote my whole week to fitness. Business has taken a second priority, whereas fitness and business might have had a 50-50 ratio for me over the last few years."

"I want to be the best in every area," he adds. "The G-forces, the stopping abilities, the downforce that this car creates is up there with any single-seater – including F1 cars. The guys I'm up against have had years in the cars so their bodies have had that natural time to progress. I've got to kind of fast track the fitness process, because this isn't a learning year for me. This is a year to come straight in and perform, and there will be no excuses. I want to be overprepared on that side."



Michael L. Levitz/LAT