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PIERRE-HENRI RAPHANEL: BUGATTI PILOTE OFFICIEL



With a racing career that peaked with Formula One and the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Pierre-Henri Raphanel knows exactly what it takes to control raw power, outstanding performance and high speeds under pressure from behind the wheel. At Bugatti, he has been using that rich experience and deep expertise since 2005, when he became the first — and only — Pilote Officiel of the brand.

''I always knew I was destined for a life on the track and behind the wheel,'' says Pierre-Henri. ''Having started in karting, I knew from a very young age that I wanted to pursue a career interwoven with motorsport.''

2026 BUGATTI AUTOMOBILES S.A.S.

DESTINED TO RACE

Pierre-Henri is unwavering in his intense passion for racing. His first foray came at the tender age of 13 years, with his first go-karting competition. With a focused mind and a natural talent, Pierre-Henri quickly established himself in the karting scene enjoying great success — he won the French Championship and ranked in the Top 6 in the World Championship — often outdriving competitors that were older and with much more on-track experience.

Supported unconditionally by his parents, the early years in karting were after all a family adventure for the Raphanels, with the entire family — originally from the South of France — happily sacrificing weekends to travel the length and breadth of the country to compete in some of the most famous races.

Having dominated karting up to the age of 21, Pierre-Henri was then ready for a new challenge.

Formula Renault beckoned, followed by competitive seasons in Formula 3000 and Formula 3. During the latter, he won the French Championship, including victory at that season's F3 Monaco Grand Prix. The raw speed of Pierre-Henri springboarded him into the rarefied world of Formula One — the most elite motorsport in the world. In 1989, Pierre-Henri achieved the dream of every single racing driver in the world, racing in Formula One around the Monte Carlo circuit for revered the Monaco Grand Prix.

After achieving the pinnacle of motorsports, Pierre-Henri sought out a different challenge, taking his skills into the world of endurance car racing, including the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the Japan Championship GT series. During 14 races at the 24 Hours of Le Mans — the world's greatest endurance race — he secured three podiums with his co-drivers and one class win.

Pierre-Henri would stop racing competitively in the early 2000s, ready to the take the next step in his career, applying his skills, knowledge and passion to a new project that was set to revolutionize the automotive industry. ''The point at which I stopped racing felt like a natural end to that important era — I had no sense of frustration nor bitterness. But, as that chapter closed, another exciting one opened,'' he adds.

THE BUGATTI CHAPTER

Indeed, another chapter was about to start for him when in 2005 — having retired from racing a few years earlier — Pierre-Henri received an unexpected phone call that changed his career outlook forever: ''It was Thomas Bscher — I had not heard from him for a good seven years, when we first met at a Gentlemen's Drivers event'' he recalls. Thomas, who was Bugatti's President at the time, was overseeing pre-series development of a car that would become a modern-day automotive icon: the Veyron.

''He invited me to Molsheim for a presentation to a select group of people on the Veyron. Remember: at the time, not much was widely known about the rebirth of the Bugatti brand and this all-new supercar. Naturally, I was curious to learn more, so I gladly accepted Thomas's invitation and traveled to Alsace.''

And what Pierre-Henri saw that day in Molsheim will stay in his mind forever, igniting his next new love — this time for Bugatti.

''The Veyron was absolutely mind-blowing. It was — and it still is — unlike anything else in the automotive world. I was absolutely mesmerized by the car and the brand. I remember not wanting to step out of the car — I literally stayed seated in it for around seven consecutive hours, I was that awe-struck. I just knew, at that moment, I wanted to be part of this breathtaking adventure.''

THE PIONEERING PILOTE OFFICIEL

From that moment on, Bugatti chose Pierre-Henri as its one and only Pilote Officiel, trusted to represent the brand and showcase the new car and its wonders to customers all over the world.

Christophe Piochon, President of Bugatti Automobiles, explains: ''With the launch of the Veyron in 2005, Bugatti was venturing into a world of performance and speed that no other car manufacturer had explored before. We needed to ensure that we had not only an extremely talented driver who could help us to demonstrate all the car's abilities to our customers, but someone who could also intricately explain both the engineering innovations and tell, with passion, the story of the Bugatti brand. From his very first experience with Veyron, Pierre-Henri immediately understood the vision of our cars and he has been the perfect ambassador for Bugatti ever since.''

It is a role that Pierre-Henri continues to be immensely proud of to this day, some 18 years after his appointment. ''Unlike any other car maker in the world, with Bugatti each new model truly is even more exceptional than the previous one — and believe me I could never have envisaged saying that having first seen the Veyron back in 2005; for me, at that time, the Veyron represented the very pinnacle, but part of Bugatti's ethos and DNA is to continually raise the bar time and time again, and that's exactly what the brand has done following the Veyron with the Chiron[1] family. To be part of a journey as rare and magical is something I couldn't even dream of.''

Despite his long career with Bugatti, it never ceases to impress Pierre-Henri how the brand's hyper sports cars brilliantly balance contrasting attributes, emotive and engineering characteristics that at first value seem impossible to combine at such extreme levels: ''The Veyron — and now the Chiron — are masterpieces of sheer beauty but that lighter side is enriched with a deeper personality that stems from incomparable power and performance. I like to call Bugatti cars 'The Beauty and the Beast' to express how they perfectly balance such performance with agility; power with comfort; and unique external signature sounds with luxurious interior acoustics. The Bugatti savoir-faire is to be able to offer all these very different facets — and many more — within one single automobile, regardless if its cruising at 20 km/h or being pushed to extreme speeds.''

And Pierre-Henri knows what it feels like to both appreciate the beauty, and to find the beast within these cars. In July 2010, he entwined his name with the Bugatti brand forever as he drove the Bugatti Veyron Super Sport to a world record maximum speed of 431.072 km/h in Ehra-Lessien in Lower Saxony, Germany.

''Even after 18 incredible years with the brand, I still can't get used to — and, in fact, I am sure I never will — that feeling that only a Bugatti automobile can achieve. Creating everlasting memories, sharing once-in-a-lifetime moments with people from all over the world — customers and brand enthusiasts — is part of the story that makes Bugatti truly

incomparable to any other brand in the world. I love to not only share with these people the incredible driving abilities of a Bugatti, but also the peerless history and craftsmanship behind the brand.

''No matter where a Bugatti automobile finds itself — on a mountain pass in the Alps, on-track in the Middle East, touring the metropolis that is Tokyo city or embarking on a Californian adventure up to Wine Country — it will perfectly perform all the time. This is the uncompromising ethos that underpins the excellence that the brand is steeped in since Ettore Bugatti founded it. And, on a personal note, deep down in my heart, this is something that really appeals to me: Bugatti is not only about the most elegant and powerful hyper sports cars in the world, it is also a brand with a heritage that is deep and rich, encapsulating an incredible legacy honored everyday by the team in Molsheim.''

In 2011, Pierre-Henri's role was complemented with the addition of another legend in motorsport joining the brand: Andy Wallace became Bugatti's second Pilote Officiel.

''I have had about 10,000 different drives with almost as many different customers creating thousands of Bugatti journeys that will stay engraved forever. As we embark upon a new and exciting chapter for the brand, we will make new memories that will be incomparable to anything else witnessed in the automotive world. To be part of that onward journey means I continue to live my very own dream,'' concludes Pierre-Henri when asked about the future of the brand.

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[1] Veyron: