

By
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Sports

Tennis, Anyone?

The Porsche Tennis Grand Prix has long been a favorite with the world's best woman players. The tournament's new director, Markus Günthardt, has big plans for the event: He aims to make this athletic highlight a unique experience—and a brand in its own right.

A new model: Markus Günthardt with the Cayman S that will go to the winner of this year's tournament



With its bright orange hues, the poster for the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix is eye catching. Pleased, the tournament's new director, Markus Günthardt, praises the work of the graphic designers as "young and dynamic." It sounds like a minor detail, but then, Günthardt is a perfectionist. The new boss aims to make the annual gathering of the best players in women's tennis near Stuttgart—which will take place October 1–9 this year—into "a truly special experience that is much more than merely a first-class sports event."

If anyone can achieve this ambitious goal, it's Günthardt. The Swiss former Davis Cup player brings a unique combination of qualities to the job, including a laid-back manner and sensitivity and tact, paired with determination. His credentials are equally impressive. He proved himself at the Eurocard Classics from 1990 to 1995 and, along with Ion Tiriac, was in charge of the Masters Tournament in Stuttgart in 2000 and 2001. Günthardt also made his mark during a five-year stint as director of the Women's Grand Prix in Essen, and most recently, of the men's championships in Madrid.

A long-time fan of the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix, Günthardt is thrilled with his new job. "I've known the tournament practically from day one," he says, "but I never would have dreamed that I'd be director here one day." He has spent the better part of a year preparing for his new task. He arrived in Filderstadt for last year's tournament armed

with a pen and notebook. He explored every nook and cranny, asking questions, taking notes, and speaking to practically everyone involved in any aspect of the event. Business as usual? On the contrary. "This is the first time I've taken over an event that has grown 'organically,' so to speak," Günthardt says. His respect for the tournament's history is evident when he says, "This is a tournament with a very healthy foundation, unquestionably a first-rate athletic event."

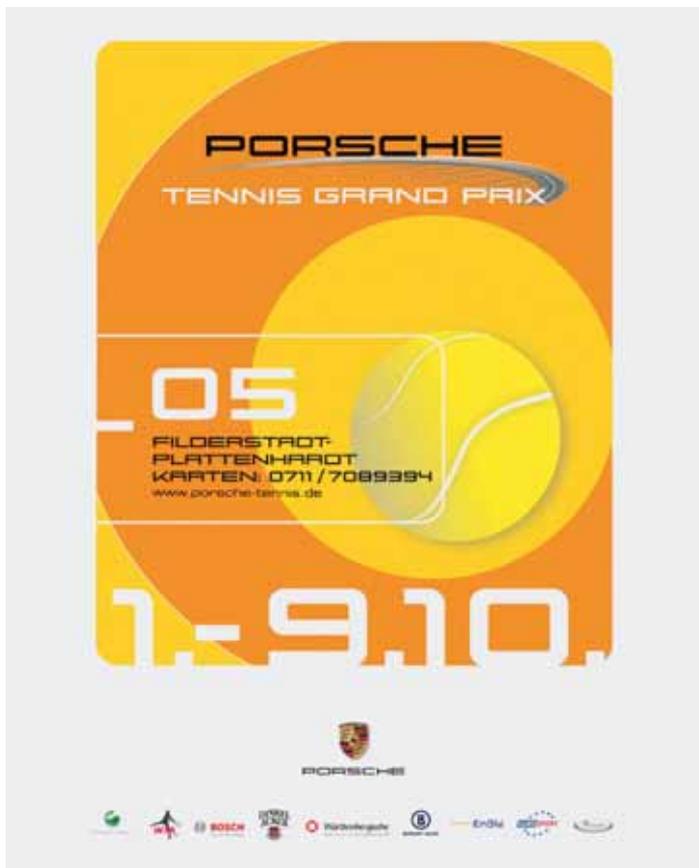
Indeed, for years the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix has been one of the most popular among the women's tennis elite—and not only because the champion stands to win a Porsche (a Cayman S, this year). The familiar, friendly atmosphere in Filderstadt is just as important. In 2006, the tournament will be held for the thirtieth time—a long tradition only few in the global tennis circuit can match.

The new boss has quickly settled into his new role as a "member of the Porsche family." Only the best is good enough for Porsche, and the Tennis Grand Prix is no exception: Filderstadt has always prided itself on presenting first-rate tennis. Along with the tournament's athletic director, former top player Anke Huber, Günthardt aims to make sure it will stay that way. That doesn't mean the new boss hasn't made any changes, however. One improvement is that, for its twenty-ninth edition this year, the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix is finally getting its own logo. Designed by Porsche stylists, it clearly ▶

A new experience: Filderstadt has a long tradition of first-class tennis; the framework has been updated



A new look: The new tournament director is pleased with the new “young and dynamic” poster



A new winning team: Markus Günthardt and Anke Huber join forces to make the tournament a special experience



“The challenge is to preserve the unique charm that makes the tournament special while at the same time introducing current standards.”

indicates Günthardt’s new strategy. “The Tennis Grand Prix is a product in its own right,” he says, “a new brand within the Porsche family, and we need something to market it with.”

The logo will help sell more than just the event itself. It is featured on apparel that will be sold as souvenirs at the annual tournaments. It also figures in the “Classic” line, appearing on polo shirts, ladies’ T-shirts and athletic-wear jackets—with no date. Looking to the future, Günthardt says, “One day, we’ll have an exclusive brand, and our own boutique where people can buy nice clothes, things that are a pleasure to wear.”

With its top-notch tennis, Filderstadt already has us coming back for more—but as of this year, we’ll have even more reason for doing so. Those with discerning palates will be spoiled at the Porsche gourmet restaurant (reservations required; *à la carte* menu), and the Porsche Vinothek is bound to be a favorite with wine connoisseurs; both are making their premiere this year. A fascinating spectacle awaits guests taking a break for a bite to eat in the newly designed spectators’ area: They can watch specialists at work just a few feet away, stringing the rackets of some of the world’s best players. The total tennis experience is completed by the sports commentators of the Eurosport channel; both spectators in Filderstadt and viewers at home can watch them interview players live at Center Court.

In another first, the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix will market its own game this year, giving fans the opportunity to buy an attractive souvenir and contribute to a good cause at the same time. All proceeds from sales of the game will go to Kobra, a charity organization devoted to the prevention of sexual abuse and providing therapy for sexually abused children and teenagers. The players are also in for a completely new experience in Filderstadt, where a brand-new restaurant, lounge, and recreation/entertainment area featuring the latest electronic gadgetry will make it even harder for them to leave. Klaus Gunsilius, chef at the Porsche cafeteria—who has made a name for himself catering large-scale, exclusive events—and his team will be in charge of food and drink.

There’s no doubt about it: Things are definitely moving in Filderstadt. “We have loads of ideas,” says Günthardt. “The challenge is to preserve the unique charm that makes the tournament special while at the same time introducing current standards.” But for all the innovations he has already introduced on the way to making the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix into a brand in its own right, the new director doesn’t yet consider his mission accomplished. “Next year, for the tournament will be held for the thirtieth time, and a lot is going to happen,” he promises. “We’ll come up with a few surprises.” ◀