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Frey and Åhlin-Kottulinsky: The women in the ADAC GT Masters speak out

- Mikaela Åhlin-Kottulinsky and Rahel Frey in a joint interview

Munich: Of the 60-plus drivers in the 2016 ADAC GT Masters, two are women: Mikaela Åhlin-Kottulinsky (23, S, Aust Motorsport) and Rahel Frey (30, CH, YACO Racing). In this joint interview, the two Audi drivers tell us how they were drawn to a career in motorsport and why there is no difference between the sexes in the Super Sports Car League.

Ms Åhlin-Kottulinsky, this is your first season in the ADAC GT Masters. What sets this series apart in your eyes?

Mikaela Åhlin-Kottulinsky (MA): “The ADAC GT Masters is without doubt one of the most demanding GT3 series in Europe. I was aware from the outset that it would not be easy, but to get better, you have to set yourself big challenges. What I also like about the series is that there is always plenty of action. Even the pit stop with the driver change is a very tense affair. You can lose time there, but you can also gain it. I am glad to have an experienced co-driver in the shape of Marco (Bonanomi) – I’m learning a lot from him.”

Apropos Marco Bonanomi, the Audi R8 you share with him is pink. Was that your idea?

MA: “No, I didn’t have any input in the matter. Pink is the main corporate colour of our vehicle sponsor. But when I discovered that our car was to be painted pink and black, I obviously had no objection.”

So your team-mate had no choice?

MA: “No. But he’s happy that he at least doesn’t have to wear a pink racing suit!”

Rahel Frey (RF): “But to be honest, I find the colour pretty cool, and I think most of the other drivers would agree. OK, it probably wasn’t all that easy for Marco to start off with, but surely he’s got used to it by now?”

MA: “Definitely. He’s actually quite proud and talks about it quite a lot.”

Ms Frey, how do you like your green Audi?

Short pause

MA: “No comment is also a comment.”

RF: “Well, green is the colour of my team, YACO Racing. You get used to it eventually, but green is indeed not necessarily my favourite colour.”

Ms Åhlin-Kottulinsky, you’ve come to the ADAC GT Masters later than Ms Frey. Has she given you any useful tips?

MA: “We knew each other before I arrived in the ADAC GT Masters. The first time I drove an Audi R8 LMS 2014 on an Audi Race Experience session, Rahel was my teacher. And in 2015, when I was competing in the Audi Sport TT Cup, she was supporting me then too.”

RF: “When you said the word ‘teacher’, I felt really old. But it’s true – we’ve had a long professional relationship for some time now.”

Ms Frey, unlike Ms Åhlin-Kottulinsky you were not born into a family obsessed with motor racing. How did your relatives and friends react when you expressed an interest in motorsport?

RF: “I was lucky in that my father was very supportive. He himself enjoyed karting, and he bought one for me and my brother. But at that time, I wasn’t set on the idea of becoming a professional racer. My mother was never in favour. For her, getting a good education was always the priority. My grades had to be good or else she wouldn’t allow me to go karting. My friends

were not particularly interested in motor racing, as it's not a popular sport in Switzerland. And that's still the case today."

Do you regret that?

RF: "No. It's difficult to explain to someone who has no interest in motorsport what it's all about and how much hard work it involves. Many people don't regard it as a sport, sitting in a car."

Ms Áhlin-Kottulinsky, your grandfather Freddy Kottulinsky was a famous rally driver. Were you always destined for a career in motor racing?

MA: "According to my family, I was indeed. But to start off with, I wasn't all that keen on motor racing. Just because it figured so large. But then at some stage, my brother decided to sell his kart, and I thought I should give it a try before it was gone. And the more I drove it, the more I liked it."

What would have been your Plan B if things hadn't worked out for you in professional motorsport?

MA: "When I was 18 years old, I was about to quit motorsport and go to university. My most likely career would then have been in engineering. Looking back, I'm glad that I changed my mind."

RF: "As a child, I wanted to be an airline pilot. After I started with karting, I abandoned that dream. I immediately wanted to become Formula 1 world champion. Today, I can say that I am a pilot of sorts – driving a racing car on four wheels."

In a motorsport environment where there is such a clear preponderance of men, do you find that you are treated differently?

MA: "In principle, no. The only thing that comes to mind is, if I'm changing my clothes in the truck, then I hang a sign on the door that I'm in, so that no one bursts in. But ultimately, we're all the same: we get in our cars and we race. It's one of the few sports in which men and women compete against each other on an equal footing – so that's an exciting challenge."

RF: "At our level, there are not many female racers. You get used to being in amongst the men – mechanics, drivers, engineers. You have to expect bad jokes and grid girls – it's all part and parcel of the sport."

Could you perhaps conceive of an exclusively female driver pairing in the ADAC GT Masters?

RF: "I've already experienced this in 2010 in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. I was in a team with two other women. We knew each other from karting and up to that point had always been rivals rather than friends. That was really difficult. We were each thinking only of ourselves and our own success rather than that of the team. But I think now, with a little more experience and wisdom, it would certainly be possible."

Are you on good terms with your co-drivers away from the track?

MA: "Marco and I have definitely become friends during the course of the season."

RF: "I think that happens automatically. You spend so much time together. Philip (Geipel) and I are in constant contact away from the track. It definitely helps to have a team-mate with whom you get along."

MA: "Confidence and trust are very important – we each need to rely on the other."

Do men try to flirt with you at the racetrack?

RF: "We spend so much time at racing circuits, it's inevitable. But we are there to work. We need to lay down clear limits. As a woman in motorsport, you quickly learn how to say no."

MA: "My main target is to drive in the DTM. That's what I'm working towards, so every race weekend I just concentrate on giving my best – and not on flirting!"

MEDIA INFORMATION

Fans wishing to experience the ADAC GT Masters season finale at Hockenheim live at the track can obtain tickets in advance for just 20 euros (including paddock access) from www.adac.de/motorsport.

2016 ADAC GT Masters schedule

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| 15/04/16 - 17/04/16 | Motorsport Arena Oschersleben |
| 29/04/16 - 01/05/16 | Sachsenring |
| 03/06/16 - 05/06/16 | Lausitzring (with DTM) |
| 22/07/16 - 24/07/16 | Red Bull Ring/Austria |
| 05/08/16 - 07/08/16 | Nürburgring |
| 19/08/16 - 21/08/16 | Circuit Park Zandvoort/Netherlands |
| 30/09/16 - 02/10/16 | Hockenheimring Baden-Württemberg |

Further information at: www.adac.de/gt-masters.

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