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ADAC GT Masters Champion Jules Gounon: “I could not be happier”

- The 2017 ADAC GT Masters champion talks about his title win
- Gounon reveals moments of doubt, setbacks along the way and the secret of his success

Munich: Corvette man Jules Gounon (22, FRA) is the 2017 ADAC GT Masters champion. In this interview, the Frenchman looks back on his success and describes how his team – Callaway Competition – has become like a second family for him.

It's now almost two and a half weeks ago since you won the ADAC GT Masters title. Has it sunk in yet?

Jules Gounon: “It took quite a while before it really dawned on me that I had won such a major championship. At first, I couldn't really process it. This title win means a lot to me – especially when you remember that I had to go to the hospital after a crash on the final weekend of the 2016 season. I was thinking then that I probably wouldn't have many more such opportunities to win the title. I was devastated. Looking back, I was probably not ready to take the title, because it was my very first season in the ADAC GT Masters. But this year, I felt optimally prepared. I am very pleased that I've been able to justify the confidence that Callaway Competition have shown in me. I could not be any happier at the moment. When Ernst Wöhr and Giovanni Ciccone signed me in early 2016, they were taking a big risk because, at that stage, I was a nobody.”

Congratulations will certainly have come in from all sides after you clinched the title. Which of them surprised you the most?

“Yes, there really were a lot. I was very pleased to receive them. It took me two or three days to thank everyone. They included some of the great names in motor racing, which was obviously very gratifying. But what surprised me the most was how many fans – including many children – came up to me at Hockenheim to congratulate me and ask for an autograph. I hadn't expected this at all, and it was a completely new experience for me. All people are the same, as far as I am concerned – I don't think that we as racing drivers somehow have star status. So that experience was something rather special.”

Looking back at the season, what would you say were the high and low points?

“After the difficult Sachsenring weekend, where our points lead had been significantly reduced, we arrived for the grand finale feeling rather down. We were under pressure. But when I qualified in pole position for Saturday's race, that came as a huge relief. I managed to put in a really good lap, and I was very happy about it. It then became clear that things were about to go better for us at Hockenheim. The rest of the weekend was just fantastic. Zandvoort was another key moment. With my regular co-driver Daniel Keilwitz being injured, we had to replace him at short notice. I was afraid that might be the end of our title challenge, because I couldn't be sure at first how well Renger van der Zande would perform as our substitute, since he was unfamiliar with the Corvette. But after we won Saturday's race from pole position, I knew I could do it.”

On the subject of team-mates, you had no fewer than three, namely Daniel Keilwitz and his replacements, Renger van der Zande and Albert Costa. Did that make the season more difficult for you?

“I think it did a bit. I first had to build up confidence in my co-drivers, because it was difficult to assess how they would perform. We also had to rapidly find a setup that suited both drivers. And on the other hand, I drove a lot less in the free practice sessions to allow Renger and Albert to get used to the Corvette. That meant I had less preparation ahead of qualifying and had to post fast laps straightaway. But on reflection, everyone did a really great job.”

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What was the secret of success on the way to winning the title?

“I started out in motor racing at a relatively late stage and I’m still in the process of learning. One key factor was that my self-confidence grew over the course of the season. When I first entered the ADAC GT Masters as a newcomer in 2016, I often felt unsure about whether I would be able to compete on the same level as Christopher Mies or Philipp Eng – drivers I had only ever seen on television. This year’s successes, including the victory in the 24-hour race at Spa in summer, have boosted my confidence. Another decisive factor was our consistency. We made virtually no mistakes in the races, and I avoided taking any unnecessary risks because I always had the title in the back of my mind. There were only two occasions on which I failed to finish in the points. At Oschersleben, I got hit by an opponent and sustained a puncture which sent me into the gravel bed. And then, at the Sachsenring, our radiator was damaged by a flying stone.”

How much credit goes to the team for your title win?

“A massive amount. I am deeply grateful to Callaway Competition for taking me on as a completely unknown driver last year. The team has become like a second family for me. That was especially noticeable after the accident last year, when the entire team visited me in hospital to encourage me and offer me their support. They brought along a lot of presents, and no-one said a word of reproach. It was quite moving – I had tears in my eyes.”

How is your spoken German coming along? How much have you picked up from the team?

“A fair amount, but still not enough to get by in a conversation. But I am thinking about moving to Germany to learn the language. Unless you actually live in a country, it’s very difficult to learn the language.”

While we’re on the subject of the future, what have you got planned, and most importantly, will we be seeing you again in the 2018 ADAC GT Masters?

“This coming weekend, I’ll be competing in the eight-hour race at Laguna Seca in California and then driving a 40-year-old Greenwood Corvette in the historic 24 Hours of Daytona in Florida. I would also like to compete in the 12 Hours of Sepang in Malaysia in December. But after that, I’ll be going on holiday. It’s been a really intense season – both emotionally and physically. I’ve driven in almost 30 races this year. I would very much like to defend my ADAC GT Masters title in 2018, driving the car with the number 1 on its bonnet. But it’s still early days, and nothing has yet been decided.”

2018 ADAC GT Masters Calendar

13/04/18 - 15/04/18	Motorsport Arena Oschersleben
TBD	Motorsport Festival Lausitzring*/Most*
08/06/18 - 10/06/18	Red Bull Ring (AUT)
03/08/18 - 05/08/18	Nürburgring
17/08/18 - 19/08/18	Circuit Zandvoort (NL)
07/09/18 - 09/09/18	Sachsenring
21/09/18 - 23/09/18	Hockenheimring Baden-Württemberg

*Subject to promoter agreement

Further information available from www.adac.de/gt-masters

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