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Timo Bernhard: From Nordschleife record to the sprint track

- Porsche driver returns to the Nürburgring for ADAC GT Masters after breaking lap record
- Bernhard looks back on his first races in the Super Sports Car League
- Podium as minimum target for second half of the season

Munich: Timo Bernhard (37, GER, KÜS Team75 Bernhard) has had a busy few months, making his debut in the ADAC GT Masters, driving a Porsche 911 RSR in the 24 Hours of Le Mans, setting a new lap record on the Nürburgring Nordschleife at the wheel of a Porsche 919 Hybrid Evo and preparing for the 24 Hours of Spa with his own team. The Porsche works driver's record lap on the famous Nordschleife made headlines in the sporting press around the world. He is now due to return to the circuit in the Eifel for the next round of the ADAC GT Masters on the weekend of 3rd - 5th August.

The two-time winner of the general classification at Le Mans was out of luck this year when his Porsche 911 RSR had to be retired after sustaining major damage to its suspension. By contrast, everything went according to plan in the 'Green Hell'. Bernhard's time of 5:59.55 minutes was the fastest ever clocked on the 20.8km circuit, generally considered to be the most challenging in the world. "The Nordschleife is really familiar territory for me," says the 37-year-old. "But I got to see it from a new perspective in the 919 Hybrid Evo which packs more than a thousand horsepower. The lap was a good one anyway, but getting it to come together in that way is no easy matter. It was important to extract the maximum and to stay completely focused, so as not to allow any mistakes. The physical effort countering the centrifugal forces was also immense. But we prepared well and approached the record attempt just like a race weekend."

In the second half of the year, Bernhard will be concentrating his efforts on competitive outings in the Porsche 911 GT3 R. On the previous three race weekends, the best result to emerge was a P4 at the Red Bull Ring. "It was clear to me from the start that there would be a period of adaptation," says Bernhard, who has spent most of the past ten years in Le Mans prototypes. "There are drivers in this series who compete almost every weekend in a GT3 race. That should not be underestimated. Compared with them, I'm obviously going to have a deficit in terms of practice."

The races so far have had their highs and lows for Bernhard and co-driver Kévin Estre (29, FRA): "At Oschersleben, we had some bad luck. We were solid in qualifying. In the first race, I was in sixth place when I got shoved off the track. But seventh in the second was OK. At Most, however, absolutely everything went wrong. We subsequently analysed the weekend and identified some things that hadn't worked. We learned a great deal in the process. At the Red Bull Ring, we were really good all weekend. In the first race we were the best of the Porsches in P4; in the second, we were in seventh place when Kévin spun, which is obviously something that happens."

Bernhard has also noticed an improvement in performance from the second Porsche 911 GT3 R entered by his team, which is driven by Klaus Bachler (26, AUT) and Adrien de Leener (29, BEL): "The improvement compared to 2017 is enormous. Klaus is doing a very good job and has really helped Adrien. Unlike us, they had a good weekend at Most and almost got into the points. Although the general level of performance has increased across the field of entrants, the car is now much closer to the front-runners. I would be quite happy if we were to finish in the points."

The two-time WEC champion wants to carry forward the momentum of Spielberg into the next races: "Our performance was on a steep upwards curve there. I enjoyed that. That's why I'm confident about the upcoming races. The Nürburgring and Hockenheim are traditionally good tracks for the Porsche. As for Zandvoort and the Sachsenring, I haven't driven there for ages.

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However, Kévin can already look back on one win in a Porsche at Zandvoort. By contrast, the Sachsenring is a track that hasn't really suited the car in the past. We are working hard to be up with the leaders in the second half of the season. Our target is clearly the podium and – who knows – maybe even a bit more.”

Calendar for the 2018 ADAC GT Masters

13/04/18 – 15/04/18	Motorsport Arena Oschersleben
27/04/18 – 29/04/18	Autodrom Most (CZ)
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

Further information can be found at www.adac.de/gt-masters

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