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Timo Bernhard: “It’s time to take the next step”

- Interview with the sports car ace about finishing his professional career
- Bernhard is looking forward to new role as Porsche brand ambassador and Team Principal
- We take a look at Küs Team75 Bernhard’s plans for 2020

Munich: Timo Bernhard (38, GER) has helped shape the sports car scene as a driver for some 20 years, achieving enormous success wherever he competed – in the 24-hour at the Nürburgring, in the ALMS, at Le Mans and in the FIA World Endurance Championship, the WEC – he triumphed everywhere. Since 2016, he has also been involved in the ADAC GT Masters with Küs Team75 Bernhard and began driving for his outfit in 2018. He achieved his maiden victory in the Super Sports Car League this year at the Nürburgring but has just announced his intention to end his career as a professional racing driver.

Your retirement has taken many people by surprise. Why are you bringing your professional career to a close at this particular juncture?

Timo Bernhard: “Well, of course, my decision was the result of a long process but began to take more definite shape at the beginning of August after the 24 Hours of Spa. As you can imagine, the whole thing was and still is very emotional for me, because I am well aware that an era is coming to an end. Ultimately, there were two reasons for my decision. First, I feel that I have achieved all of my goals in professional motor racing, but then again, fresh challenges pop up at some point in life. I’ve now been given the chance to become a Porsche brand ambassador, which is a role that I have always striven to attain and was one of my goals for the time after my professional career. I was very tempted, as I could also see that it was time for our team to take the next step, which simply requires more of my attention. I’ve noticed that the double role I’ve been exercising up until now as driver and Team Principal was limiting me to some extent. I am now simply more able to take care of the team on a day-to-day basis and at the racetrack. And hopefully, I will also have more time for my family, who have so often had to get along without me just recently.”

What will be the biggest change for you?

“If you want to be a top athlete and compete at the highest level, then that has to be your focus both day and night whether it’s a question of fitness, nutrition or technology, but that will cease to be the case in future. I have had to be extremely focused over the past 20 years, especially during the time when I was racing in the LMP1, which was at the highest level that I could ever see myself competing at. During this period, I very often came within 100 percent of what I could do, and that just feels incredible and is hard to achieve. It was an amazing time, but the past two years exercising my dual role has been just as exciting. I didn’t have less to do in actual fact, but simply had other things to do as team boss.”

What will you be doing in your new role?

“Well, for one thing, I’m going to be a Porsche ambassador, moving in very elitist circles, because up until now, only Mark Webber and Walter Röhrl have been involved from motorsport. It’s an exciting role, in which I’ll be covering a lot of areas and not just motorsport. As for our team, we will have a more clearly defined structure. There are currently three main strands to the team. Firstly, there’s our junior karting team which we will bring in-house in future, and my father will take care of things there. Our junior team has already borne its first fruits this year, because a promising young talent, Alexander Tauscher, is coming to the fore with us in the ADAC GT4 Germany. The second strand is GT4 Customer Sport for amateur drivers, which also includes track days and the Porsche Sports Cup.

Klaus Graf is in charge of our GT4 programme. The Pro team is the third strand and competes in the ADAC GT Masters. I am in charge overall but will concentrate on looking after things in GT3. We are also giving the technical side a boost and have taken on someone who is an absolute ace with plenty of LMP1 experience. We have a really good setup in GT racing, which gives us a lot of opportunity for advancement. You normally only find that in formula racing.”

A propos ADAC GT Masters: Looking back at this season, during which you shared a car with Klaus Bachler, how did things go?

“Well, of course, we were not really satisfied with the end result. We had ambition. There were several things that conspired against us. For example, we were involved in several accidents in the first two races, which obviously didn’t help, but what I really liked was that we were well motivated and despite the bad start to the season, had a relatively strong period over the summer with three podiums and our maiden win. The Hockenheim weekend with two finishes in the Top Five was also good. We showed during this strong period that we’re among the top five teams in the series. Unfortunately, we couldn’t be like that throughout the year, which is what we would have needed to do to be in real title contention. That’s the level that we will aspire to reach in the future. But in spite of everything, up until the Sachsenring, we at least still had a chance on paper of finishing championship runners-up which is not an easy thing to achieve given the highly competitive nature of the field.”

How did Matteo Cairoli and Adrien de Leener do in the second Porsche 911 GT3 R?

“Matteo had some excellent moments, producing especially strong results in qualifying like second place in Oschersleben and P3 at the Nürburgring where both our cars started from the second row. Adrien has also come on extremely well. He has been with us for three seasons now and has improved every year but the general standard of driving in the series has also increased, so unfortunately, he hasn’t always received the winner’s laurels that would normally have come his way as a result of the development process. Matteo and Adrien, unfortunately, had a couple of collisions towards the middle of the season that stopped us from securing more points, but then finally, they had one or two strong races with finishes in the points.”

How are things in the ADAC GT Masters set to continue for KÜS Team 75 Bernhard in 2020? Drivers have already been assigned to your first car...

“Yes, that’s right. The team’s first Porsche 911 GT3 R will be driven by Klaus Bachler and Simona de Silvestro. It’s great that Klaus is still with us. He is one of the most underrated drivers around as far as I’m concerned. He is extremely good, very knowledgeable technically and a great team player. It is important to have someone who’s been there before, who knows the car, the series and the tyres. It is also important for Simona to have a team-mate, who, together with the team, will ensure that she quickly feels at home. Simona is absolutely brilliant and greatly impressed me a few years ago in the IndyCar series. She has shown her huge potential on many occasions. It’s a real honour for the ADAC GT Masters to have a top world-class driver competing in its ranks. I think she may even be the best female racing driver around currently. All in all, we’re in a great position and have a definite aim, to produce top performances. There’s a lot of interest in the second car. We could have another exciting, promising driver pairing on our hands there!”

MEDIA INFORMATION

Race calendar for the 2020 ADAC GT Masters (provisional)

24/04/20 - 26/04/20	Motorsport Arena Oschersleben
15/05/20 - 17/05/20	Autodrom Most (CZ)
05/06/20 - 07/06/20	Red Bull Ring (AUT)
14/08/20 - 16/08/20	Nürburgring*
21/08/20 - 23/08/20	Circuit Zandvoort (NL)
18/09/20 - 20/09/20	Hockenheim
02/10/20 - 04/10/20	Sachsenring*

* = subject to agreement with the organisers

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

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