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## Markus Pommer / Valentino Catalano: Success at the first attempt

- **First season together in the Prototype Cup Germany ends with the title**
- **Markus Pommer and Valentino Catalano have a past in Formula racing**
- **Next: America**

Munich. Markus Pommer (33/Untereisesheim) and Valentino Catalano (18/Westheim, both Gebhardt Motorsport) came into this season's Prototype Cup Germany as top favourites, and ultimately lived up to that billing. Pommer even managed to successfully defend the title he won last year alongside Gary Hauser. "I think backing up the title in a completely different constellation – with a different team and different team-mate to last year – is worth a lot and important for the rest of my career," said Pommer. Two days after winning the title, Catalano was also "just mega happy". Team principal Fritz Gebhardt was proud of his team: "They are both great racing drivers. Valentino, the younger of the two, has developed really well over the course of the season, but still has potential for more. Markus, who is significantly more experienced than Valentino, is quite simply a guarantee of success, as he has once again proven emphatically this year."

### Overall package prompts title defence

For Pommer, returning to defend his title was definitely a risk. However, he was so impressed by the overall package offered to him by Gebhardt Motorsport that he was hungry to accept the mission. "They always say that, as a champion, you can only lose if you remain in the same series. However, the combination with Valentino, the fact that the team is based just 20 kilometres from where I live, and the long-term opportunities gave me the feeling that defending the title would be a good choice. Now that it has worked out, I am also rather proud to be part of the positive development at Gebhardt Motorsport."

### Reasons behind the success

So, why did the Gebhardt pair come out on top in the end? "I believe there were a lot of fast drivers in the 2024 Prototype Cup Germany, but we were the ones who made the fewest mistakes. In my opinion, that was the crucial reason for us finishing above everyone else," said Catalano, looking back at the season. Furthermore, the 18-year-old and the 33-year-old formed a very good pairing, as the older of the two can confirm. "Despite the age difference, we got on really well from the word go, and have also worked together excellently. Valentino is very mature for his age. He is determined, fast, teachable, willing to learn, and did not make any mistakes. Even in the heat of the title race, he did not do anything rash. I also think that he has developed as a racing driver this year."

Catalano is only too happy to repay the compliment. "I had to adapt my driving style this season, because Gebhardt had a slightly different set-up philosophy to my team from last year, DKR Engineering. Markus used his experience to help me with that. Even if I did not often ask for advice, it feels good to know that I could do so if I wished, and that he would happily help me. He knows exactly how to get on with team-mates in the team sport that is LMP3 racing, and is really extremely happy to help. Plus, Markus can adapt very quickly to new circumstances, such as a change in weather

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conditions during a race. And he has a great technical understanding. With this in mind, it was always good for me if we both gave similar feedback to the engineers, as I then knew that I could not be too wrong,” grinned Catalano, who also described Pommer and himself as being extremely analytical. “We would both rather check the data three times than just once.”

Neither of the two drivers has been able to find a real weakness in the other. “I think I am a little more relaxed than Markus, but I would definitely not call that a weakness. Especially as he was always fast and flawless every time he sat in the car,” said Catalano.

### Formula experience en route to LMP racing

Pommer’s automobile racing career began back in 2007 in ADAC Formula BMW Deutschland; after that, he worked his way through various junior Formula series. His biggest success came in 2014, when he won the title in the ATS Formula 3 Cup. Although he actually won a race the following season in the stronger FIA Formula 3 European Championship, he decided to switch to GT racing in 2016. He remained true to this discipline until 2020, particularly in the ADAC GT Masters, in which he was often still in contention for the title right down to the final or penultimate race weekend. In 2021, he moved into the European Le Mans Series (ELMS), in which he drove an LMP2 racer for the BHK Motorsport team. After two years in the ELMS, Pommer wanted to raise his profile in Germany, which led him to switch to the Prototype Cup Germany. In winning the title last year, the 33-year-old proved that this was the right decision.

Catalano also started his automobile racing career on the Formula scene. He ended the 2020 season of the French Formula 4 series as the top Junior in fifth place overall, before switching to ADAC Formula 4. Just one year later, he moved over to LMP3 racing and lined up in the ELMS. This was followed by the Asian Le Mans Series, before shining with four pole positions in last year’s Prototype Cup Germany. As a reward, the 18-year-old was included in the squad of drivers receiving support from the ADAC Stiftung Sport foundation this year.

### Good start to first LMP season together

The newly formed Gebhardt duo made a promising start to the season, when Pommer secured the first pole position of the year at the opening round at Spa-Francorchamps. However, he was unable to convert this performance into points, as bad weather resulted in the race weekend in the Ardennes being cancelled after the first qualifying session. “Although it may sound odd, Spa was one of my highlights of the season,” said Pommer. “Pole position showed us that we can compete at the front. The fact that I picked up another pole position at the next race weekend in Lusatia proved that our car was not only really fast in the rain in Spa, but also on a dry track.”

When asked about the highlight of his season, there is only one possible answer for Catalano: “Race one at the Sachsenring, when we won to move to the top of the table. In doing so, we took a big step towards the title. We were able to turn the tide in the title race in our favour at the crucial moment. I knew that, if we were given the opportunity to be crowned champions, that we could take it. If we avoided making any mistakes, our rivals would have to be better than us. Personally, I was not at all nervous before the final race. Instead, I felt great.”



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### Hockenheim not the perfect home outing

However, 2024 also had a clear low point for the two champions, between Spa and the Sachsenring: “A leak in the fuel system meant we were unable to start race one in Hockenheim, the home circuit for Valentino, the team and me, to which we had also invited a lot of guests. In that moment, I thought our title ambitions were over,” Pommer admitted. “After Hockenheim, it was clear to us that we desperately needed to launch a fightback at the Nürburgring, in order to close the gap to the championship leaders.” And that is precisely what Pommer and Catalano did. As double race winners Ralf (49/Salzburg) and David Schumacher (22/Salzburg, both US Racing) were not eligible to score points as guest starters in the Eifel, the points for a third and a first place went the way of Pommer and Catalano, who found themselves back within striking distance of leaders Danny Soufi (21/USA) and Torsten Kratz (53/Mönchengladbach, both Konrad Motorsport) just in time for the season finale.

### Off to America for the end of the season

They have now brought this season’s Prototype Cup Germany to a successful conclusion, but another highlight still awaits the champions. They will line up with their LMP3 cars in the VP Racing SportsCar Challenge, which features on the support programme of the Petit Le Mans in Atlanta. This time they will not be sharing a car, but will both contest the two 45-minute races on their own. “I am hugely looking forward to it, particularly as I have never driven in North America. It will be a new experience, which might perhaps also be an option for the future,” said Pommer, who studied Real Estate Management and works for his father in a real estate company. “I usually work a normal full-time job. However, it is obviously not a problem if I need to have time off for motorsport.” Catalano is not a full-time professional either, by the way. “I did my vocational diploma this year and am currently doing a one-year apprenticeship in my grandfather’s company. After that, I would like to study automotive engineering or aircraft engineering.”

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