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Maro Engel: “For me, the DTM is like Formula 1 with a roof”

- An interview with the Mercedes-AMG Performance driver on his special relationship with the DTM
- Engel reveals the crucial influence Formula 1 world champion Nico Rosberg had on his career, and why we are “experiencing the best DTM racing now”

Munich. Maro Engel cannot fail to catch the eye in this year’s DTM: the 38-year-old is at the wheel of a Mercedes-AMG GT3 with a yellow and green “Mamba” design that never fails to delight fans. With the exception of the Sunday race at the DEKRA Lausitzring, the Monaco resident has finished in the points in every race so far. Engel has his sights set firmly on the front of the field again at this season’s sixth event, at the Sachsenring from 8th to 10th September. In an interview, the driver from Mercedes-AMG Team Mann-Filter discusses laps in a kart with DTM legend Bernd Schneider, friendships in motorsport, and his excitement ahead of the Sachsenring.

You are one of the most experienced DTM drivers. How did you get into motorsport?

One of the reasons was Nico Rosberg. We used to go to the same kindergarten in Monaco and are still good friends to this day. Nico’s father gave him a kart for his birthday, and my dad asked whether I would like one too, so that we could drive together. That is how it all started. We are still regularly in touch and it is nice that we both made it into professional racing – even if Nico was obviously more successful than me, as a Formula 1 world champion.

What influence does your eye-catching car have on you?

The Mann-Filter Mamba enjoys cult status, and I was delighted when I found out that I was going to be driving in the DTM with this legendary livery. It is awesome how many fans wonder around the circuits with our yellow flags, caps and t-shirts. There is nothing better than to see the kids’ eyes light up at the autograph sessions. As a young boy, I used to run round with an autograph book at DTM events, and always hoped to get a cap from one of the teams.

How would you sum your season up so far, after the first ten races?

Unfortunately, the most recent race weekend at the Lausitzring was not a good one for us. Apart from that, we have had a good season so far and have usually made the most of what we have. We had a tough start in Oschersleben, but battled hard. The highlight was obviously the weekend in Zandvoort, where I won the Saturday race. We were also strong in the rain at the Nürburgring, but unfortunately the yellow phases cost us a better result there.

How important is consistency, if you want to be challenging at the top of the table?

Consistency is key to being among the front-runners in this fiercely-competitive series. Everyone knows that you cannot win every weekend in the DTM. That makes it all the more important to score as many points as possible, even in difficult races. I hope we will have more opportunities to start from further

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up the grid in the remaining races. When you start from the midfield, you always face a tough and risky battle to make up places.

You are now in your seventh season in the DTM. What can you remember of your debut 15 years ago?

I look back fondly on my first season, because that is when I met my wife Steffi. She was working in the media department in the DTM and my memory of that is obviously my highlight from the 2008 season. We have been married six years now and have a five-year-old daughter.

Do you remember any other highlights?

From a sporting perspective, it was also a special year for me. I had my first professional contract and the DTM obviously also gave me the opportunity to show what I was capable of on such a big stage. I had followed the series since I was a child. In Bernd Schneider and Ralf Schumacher, the field included two drivers who played significant roles in my childhood.

To what degree were they both special to you?

When I was karting as a young lad, Bernd Schneider took me under his wing and explained which line I should take. He was very passionate about that. As such, it was very special for me to drive alongside him in the Mercedes-AMG squad in Bernd's final DTM season in 2008. And it was also a great honour and a challenge to be the team-mate of Ralf Schumacher, who I knew from my childhood. Especially as we were both in a year-old car.

Back then, like today, you were driving for the manufacturer with the star. How important is that relationship for you?

My rookie season in the DTM also marked the start of my time with Mercedes-AMG. I am very proud that this year is my 16th season as part of the Mercedes-AMG family, and that I am able to represent it in the DTM. It is rare to find such a close relationship nowadays, which makes it rather special. I enjoy a lot of trust and, over time, have met a lot of people in the company who are working hard to achieve our success.

What role does the DTM play in your career?

The DTM has always been renowned for the highest standard of motorsport. For me, it is like Formula 1 with a roof. This is where the best drivers, teams and manufacturers in GT racing go head to head. I always want to compete against the best. That is what I find so appealing. With the prototypes from the 2000s, the Class 1 cars and today's GT3 sports cars, I have driven three generations of DTM cars. In my opinion, we are experiencing the best racing now. In the past, you had things like DRS to help you overtake in the DTM. I am not a fan of that, and am happy that we no longer have them.

The level of competition at the top of the DTM is higher than it has been for a long time. How does the competitive side of things affect friendships?

I have made some good friends in motorsport. The camaraderie is pretty good nowadays, although we are all rivals once we take to the track. You spend almost the whole year travelling to racetracks with many drivers, and consequently make some close friendships. In the DTM paddock, for example, Luca

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Stolz is one of my closest friends. We have raced with each other for many years, so you get to know each other well.

For the next two races, the DTM is returning to the Sachsenring for the first time for 21 years. What do you make of the circuit?

I am a big fan of the Sachsenring. The layout and fast corners make the track unique. And it is a real test, with its blind crests and big changes in elevation. Plus, you are in a region that loves its motorsport. As such, I am really looking forward to the weekend. In the DTM, you experience the festival atmosphere at the circuit – the fans get nice and close to the drivers and cars. That is what makes the series so special.

Tickets for the weekend at the Sachsenring are available online at dtm.com. Admission is free for under 16s when accompanied by a paying adult. ADAC members also benefit from a 10 percent discount when purchasing tickets online in advance.

The two DTM races at the Sachsenring both start at 13:30 on the Saturday (8th September) and Sunday (9th September). ProSieben is showing all of this season's races live on free-to-air German TV. Qualifying sessions are also streamed live at ran.de.

2023 DTM calendar

26.05. – 28.05.2023	Motorsport Arena Oschersleben
23.06. – 25.06.2023	Circuit Zandvoort / NL
07.07. – 09.07.2023	Norisring
04.08. – 06.08.2023	Nürburgring
18.08. – 20.08.2023	DEKRA Lausitzring
08.09. – 10.09.2023	Sachsenring
22.09. – 24.09.2023	Red Bull Ring / A
20.10. – 22.10.2023	Hockenheimring Baden-Württemberg

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