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DTM champion Bortolotti on the right mindset, tears in the paddock and moments for life

- **Lamborghini works driver awarded the Golden Shoe after his DTM title**
- **Bortolotti: "We kept believing in our strengths"**

Munich. Special recognition for Mirko Bortolotti: After winning the first DTM title of his career, the Italian has now also picked up the Gold Shoe. Bortolotti received the prize at Auto Bild's Motorsport Award ceremony at the Axel Springer Journalist Club in Berlin. This marked the perfect end to an outstanding season for the Vienna resident - winning the DTM title had already been a dream come true for Bortolotti. In an interview, the Lamborghini driver from SSR Performance discusses the three-way battle with Kelvin van der Linde (ZA) and Maro Engel (Monaco), gives insights into how he felt ahead of the deciding race, and reveals his plans for the future.

You received the Golden Shoe at the weekend, in recognition of your DTM success. What does this award mean to you?

I am deeply honoured to receive this award. The season came down to the final race. That is the best evidence of just how high the standard is in the DTM, and that absolutely everything has to fall into place, down to the smallest details, if you are to win the title. As such, it felt fantastic to hold the Golden Shoe in my hands.

A few weeks down the line, how does that DTM title feel?

Absolutely awesome! Even a few weeks later, the feeling is still impossible to describe. I still remember exactly that moment last year, when I finished runner-up and shed a tear or two. Finishing second in the championship in 2023 was a crossroads for me. I took it upon myself to bounce back with a perfect season. And we managed to do that this year. It is hard to put into words how much commitment, dedication, work and sweat have gone into this title. A big thank you must go to everyone at Lamborghini and SSR Performance, who always believed in me.

How did you find the three-way battle with Kelvin van der Linde and Maro Engel?

Both of them are of such a high quality that you really don't want them as your opponents. Kelvin and Maro are absolutely top drivers, which is why the championship was extremely exciting and close all year. Anything can happen in the DTM, so the battle with those two really drove me and gave me extra motivation.

What was going through your head just before the start of the decisive final race?

The tension, the pressure, and everything going on around you make these the very moments you live for as a racing driver, and make our profession so special. I was aware that I had previously secured probably the most important pole position of my career in qualifying. To bounce back from a disappointing Saturday and make it onto the front of the grid was very important and showed how strong our nerves were. However, the races are long and, as a driver, you know you have a lot of work ahead of you. In the back of my head, I knew that I was in a very good starting position. At the same time, everyone knows that, no matter how well prepared you are, there are no guarantees in the DTM. The whole team at SSR performance did an outstanding job all year. I wanted to reward not only myself, but also the team for its performance.

How did that moment feel, when you knew that you were the new DTM champion?

Unbelievably intense! So were the moments leading up to it: to experience all the spectators and the packed starting grid at the DTM finale was very special. That memory will remain with me for the rest of my life. Unless you have experienced moments like that, they are impossible to describe. It was also special to pull some donuts in front of the crowds after the finish, and to feel the support of the fans. An absolute highlight of my career.

You lost the lead in the championship in the penultimate race - how did you feel when you returned to the hotel after that?

I was obviously not happy. I would have preferred to have wrapped it all up on the Saturday, but that is not the way it works in the DTM. Fifth place in the Saturday race was the best we could manage. As such, I was proud to have done my very best again. That was the mindset, with which I went to bed. I told myself that I would give it my all again on Sunday, and if that was not good enough, then I would still have achieved the most that was possible. If that was the title, that would obviously be great. I believe that is the only way you can think in moments like that.

One special image was that of you celebrating arm in arm with team owner Stefan Schlund on the roof of your Lamborghini.

Stefan always had a vision of winning the DTM title with his team. Over the past two years, he has done everything in his power to achieve that dream. He deserves this title as much as anyone else, and I am really delighted for him. The whole team delivered all year, but without Stefan the team would not exist in this form.

To what extent did your experience of finishing runner-up in the championship the previous year help you?

We took another step forward as a team, refused to allow certain situations to knock us out of our stride, and improved as an overall package. After last year's experience, I knew we had to produce a virtually perfect season and could not afford to make any mistakes. However, the season immediately began with pit stop issues in Oschersleben. Despite this, we kept believing in our strengths. That was important in that situation and over the course of the rest of the season. However, even as the new DTM champion, there are still things that I can improve. I do not believe that I will ever get to the point where I believe I can no longer improve.

The DTM title was one of your biggest career goals. What is next for you?

Nothing has been decided yet, but I have always emphasised what the DTM means to me. Even as a young boy, I was a huge fan of the series. I fell in love with the red Alfa Romeo at the Bologna Motor Show in 1994 - that was pretty much where it all started for me. Shortly after that, I got my first kart and my career began. To now be DTM champion is the icing on the cake. If the situation allows it, I will happily defend my title.

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