

28.10.2026

An interview with champion Preining: "My DTM mission is not over yet."

- **Porsche driver looks back on emotional moments at the finale in Hockenheim**
- **Preining discusses special congratulations and the dream of a third title**

Munich. Two DTM titles in four years: Thomas Preining (A/Manthey) lifted the DTM trophy for the second time at the season finale at the Hockenheimring, having previously been crowned champion in 2023. After a nerve-racking weekend with many battles for position and moments of high drama, the Porsche works driver clinched the title with a third-place finish in the final race of the season. In an interview, the 28-year-old discusses the emotions after his success, his development as a driver, and a surprise phone call from Dr. Wolfgang Porsche.

You were determined to make more of a conscious effort to really enjoy your second DTM title. Did you manage to do so?

I will never forget the scenes in the Motodrom after the race, with Maro Engel and Marco Wittmann. To have tens of thousands of people cheering for you is an experience that only a very few people ever get to enjoy. The media often portrays the relationship between Maro, Marco and me as being more strained than it actually is. We would probably not all go on holiday together, but we get on well and have great respect for one another. I was obviously aware that they would both have preferred to be stood on the top step of the podium at that point. That gives me all the more respect for them, and the fact that they were still sporting and congratulated me. I believe that moments like that set a good example for the next generation of racing drivers.

How did it come to pass that you exchanged helmets with Marco Wittmann?

Collecting helmets is one of my passions. It is obviously a bit more expensive than it is for footballers, who swap shirts. However, mementos like that are timeless. When you look at your collection in years to come, you remember the good times and bad times with your rivals. When Marco Wittmann won his first DTM title in 2014, I was still racing karts. To be crowned champion twelve years later with Marco as one of my biggest rivals, and then to swap helmets and have earned his respect, is unbelievable. Drivers like Marco Wittmann and René Rast were big role models for me. They have achieved exactly what I used to dream of achieving.

Which messages of congratulations were you particularly pleased to receive?

I received hundreds of messages. Dr. Wolfgang Porsche phoned me immediately after winning the title, even before the press conference in Hockenheim. Not because I owe him for a car, but to congratulate me (*laughs*). He is a big DTM fan and it is obviously rather special when he contacts you personally. We are often in contact, even in difficult moments. For example, he

found some great words after our retirement from the Nürburgring 24 Hours. I was also really pleased to receive messages from former DTM champions like Mattias Ekström, Timo Scheider and René Rast.

The Saturday race in Hockenheim was particularly eventful. You came off the track briefly after the start, and lost a lot of places as a result. What goes through your head in situations like that?

The plan was actually to stay clear of as many battles as possible, and to leave enough space between me and the other cars. Despite that, I still had multiple contacts in the first two laps. On the one hand, I wanted to take as little risk as possible. On the other hand, it was clear to me that I had to finish near the front and could not come home in 13th place. That was a difficult situation. Plus, you always want to end any season with a good result at the finale, which is why everyone was a bit more aggressive. The red flags helped me hit the reset button in my head. Basically, however, it is part of my job as a racing driver to deal quickly with that kind of situation, and to make the correct decisions under pressure.

After those experiences, how did you feel going into the final race on the Sunday?

The whole weekend was incredibly intense. The Saturday once again made it very clear to me that a single moment of carelessness can bring an end to your race in a second. I started the Sunday race from seventh place. In that position, an awful lot can happen, which you cannot actually influence yourself. You play out countless scenarios in your head, what could go wrong and where it could be dangerous. That is far more tiring mentally than when you can just go for it and want to win. As such, I am delighted that we made it in the end.

How has Thomas Preining the racing driver developed between the first title in 2023 and this second title?

I think I have become more complete as a driver. Particularly in rain and mixed conditions, I have improved significantly. My team and I have invested an awful lot of time in developing. I have also improved at the start of races. It goes without saying that experience helps, particularly in the title race and when making difficult decisions. A good example was the chaotic Sunday race at the Sachsenring. In situations like that, it is vital not to make a mistake, to avoid penalties, and yet to still score as many points as possible. From the outside, that often looks easier than it actually is. It is nice to see that all the work and preparations have paid dividends.

You have finished in the top five in the championship in each of your five seasons in the DTM. Why are you so well suited to the DTM?

The format suits me. I would say that I am a strong driver in qualifying. A good grid position is a big advantage in the sprint races in the DTM. Furthermore, you have many tight battles for position and duels, which particularly suit me. The starts are often eventful. You have to position yourself correctly, and accurately assess when you can take what kind of risk. That is definitely one of my strengths nowadays. Another important factor is the cooperation with

Manthey. We have been working together for four years, are constantly developing, and are always becoming increasingly finely tuned. Nowadays, we know each other so well that all it takes to communicate is a simple look. That makes everything much easier.

You are one of only eight drivers to have won at least two DTM titles. How does that feel?

That is an unbelievable privilege. If someone had told me ten years ago that I would be crowned DTM champion once, I would probably have laughed at them. Back then, my career was almost over. Now, I am a multiple DTM champion. However, I am only 28 years old, and my DTM mission is not over yet. It would obviously be awesome to win a third title one day. I really hope that Porsche, Manthey and I can come together to find a way for me to be able to continue in the DTM in the future.

The ADAC has realigned its youth development programme with the "Road to DTM". How important is it to support talented youngsters in motorsport?

Youth development is hugely important, not only in motorsport. However, it is the essence of such an expensive sport. At a certain point, you are often unable to finance the next step of your career by yourself. Unfortunately, we lose many talented drivers as a result. That very nearly happened to me. My career was given a lifeline by the support I received from the Lechner family and the Porsche Junior programme. For this reason, I find the "Road to DTM" a great idea, with which the ADAC can promote its youth development programme even more strongly.

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