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Sheldon van der Linde: “The clear goal is to defend the title”

- **Van der Linde begins his title defence in Oschersleben**
- **In an interview, the South African discusses the anticipation ahead of the season-opener, his association with the Schubert Motorsport team, and mental strength in the title race**

Munich. When the new DTM season gets underway from 26th to 28th May at Motorsport Arena Oschersleben, the spotlight will be on one driver in particular: Sheldon van der Linde. Last year, the Schubert Motorsport driver became the first South African to win the DTM title. A success that van der Linde is hungry to repeat this season. In an interview, the 24-year-old reveals what makes the opening round in Oschersleben so special, how he copes when coming up against his own brother, and how the ADAC has influenced his career.

How great is the anticipation shortly before the start of the season?

The expectations of the Schubert Motorsport team are obviously high, that much is crystal clear. Winning at our home event in Oschersleben would be a fantastic way to start. We are superbly prepared and I am pleased that the season is finally getting underway.

How have pre-season preparations been?

We have done a lot of testing, particularly in recent weeks. Plus, I regularly drive in the simulator. We have a special simulator for GT3 cars at BMW. Apart from that, I enjoyed the South African sun during a few days with my family in my home city of Johannesburg, in order to ensure my batteries are fully charged for the new season.

As reigning champion, what are your goals going into the season?

The clear goal is to defend the title. However, it is important for us to focus on ourselves all season, and not to be distracted by external factors. There are so many new things in the DTM this year that, in my opinion, we are all starting from scratch again. One of the new changes is that we have Pirelli as the new tyre partner. That could be an advantage for me, as I am also racing on Pirelli tyres in other series this year.

What makes the opening round in Oschersleben so special?

The circuit is very narrow and twisty. As a driver, that means you have to be fully focussed the whole time and have no chance to take a break mentally. That is what makes Oschersleben so special. I still remember my last race weekend there very well. In 2018, I shared a car with my brother Kelvin in the ADAC GT Masters. Second place in Oschersleben was our first podium finish.

What events on the calendar are you particularly excited about?

For me, definitely the races in Zandvoort. That will certainly be one of the highlights of this season. There are not all that many overtaking opportunities there, but the dune landscape makes the layout very special. Furthermore, the big crowds in Zandvoort definitely create an outstanding atmosphere.

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Apart from that, the Nürburgring is right up there for me. I won there last year, ahead of my brother Kelvin.

The DTM is organised by the ADAC for the first time this year. What do you think about the change?

To be honest, at the end of last year I really feared for the future of the DTM. As such, I am very grateful to the ADAC that the success story of the DTM is able to continue. There is no other GT3 racing series anywhere in the world with such a high profile, in which there is just one driver per car. For me, that is definitely what makes the DTM so special.

How important is it to continue driving for Schubert Motorsport?

This is the first time for a few years that I am starting a second season in a row with the same team. I am very pleased about that, and it is very advantageous for me. My engineer knows my driving style well. Inversely, I know what information he needs from me to set the car up better. Plus, I already have a lot of experience with the BMW M4 GT3. I am confident that we are stronger than last year.

In René Rast, you have a three-time DTM champion as your team-mate. Is that an advantage or a disadvantage?

I see it as a positive. It is always good to have such a successful and fast driver in your own ranks. René Rast brings a vast wealth of experience to the team, which we can all use to our advantage. As a youngster, I watched René win the DTM on television – and now we are driving for the same team. That is a crazy development.

What is your standout ability?

I see one of my strengths as my ability to not be affected too greatly by outside pressure. As a racing driver, you can easily be knocked out of your rhythm by external factors. Last year, I led the championship relatively early in the season and was able to cope with the expectations, which rose with every race.

Your CV includes ADAC TCR Germany and the ADAC GT Masters. How important were the two ADAC series for your career?

Without the ADAC, I would probably not be racing in Europe today. My brother and I missed out on the ADAC GT Masters title by one just one point in 2018. Despite that, the series was a crucial step in my career, because it was through that that I received the invitation from BMW Motorsport to attend the DTM Young Driver Test, through which I secured a seat for the 2019 season.

The name van der Linde appears twice in the starters list. How does it feel to compete against your own brother?

It was odd at first, particularly when we were next to each other on the grid. In the meantime, we have become used to it. When we don the helmet and get into the car, it no longer plays any role. This year, Kelvin is definitely one of my biggest rivals. On the track, we fight it out wheel to wheel. However, we have a great relationship and also share a flat in Kempten.

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What do you do away from the racetrack to recharge your batteries?

I like to spend my free time outside. Preferably doing some kind of sport. I enjoy cycling and have played a lot of tennis with my brother for a few years now. That gives me an unbelievable amount of energy.

Tickets for the season-opener at Motorsport Arena Oschersleben, and for the other DTM race weekends, start at 39 euros and are available online at dtm.com. In two of the five price categories, admission is free for children and under 16s when accompanied by an adult. ADAC members also enjoy a ten percent discount when purchasing advance tickets online.

The two DTM races in Oschersleben both start at 13:30 on Saturday (27th May) and Sunday (28th May). ProSieben is showing all the races in the 2023 season live on free-to-air TV in Germany. The qualifying sessions are also streamed live at ran.de. A live broadcast in over 70 countries around the world rounds off the extensive DTM TV package.

2023 DTM calendar

26.05. – 28.05.2023	Motorsport Arena Oschersleben
23.06. – 25.06.2023	Circuit Zandvoort / NL
07.07. – 09.07.2023	Norising
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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