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Thomas Preining on the DTM title, a call from Dr. Wolfgang Porsche and radio traffic in qualifying

- In an interview, the Austrian gives his view on the showdown in Hockenheim
- New champion reveals: “The trophy is at my parents’ house at the moment”
- Preining explains why he has a special sticker on his car

Munich. Thomas Preining (A) produced a gala performance worthy of a champion at the DTM finale at the Hockenheimring Baden-Württemberg: the Porsche works driver secured two pole positions, won both races and became the first Austrian to be crowned champion. In an interview, the 25-year-old from Manthey EMA discusses his first few days as the DTM champion, his closest rival Mirko Bortolotti (I), and a job in Formula 1.

You have been able to call yourself the DTM champion for a few days now. How does that sound?

It is a mega feeling, and one that I am really just enjoying right now. You spend your whole career working towards moments like this. I am super happy that I was able to prove myself on such a big stage as the DTM.

How many messages did you receive after winning the title?

I think pretty much every single contact on my mobile phone wrote to me, as well as a few unknown numbers. It is just great that so many people were pleased for me. On top of all that, there were all the fans at the circuit and my family, who were also in Hockenheim. I will remember that weekend forever.

Who were you particularly pleased to be congratulated by?

Dr. Wolfgang Porsche got in touch. As a Porsche works driver, that is not a call you want to miss. It was a very special phone conversation for me. He was delighted to see his brand on top of the DTM. I am very proud that I was able to repay the faith that Porsche has placed in me. Porsche CEO Oliver Blume also congratulated me on the title.

The first person to congratulate you was non other than runner-up Mirko Bortolotti. How surprised were you by that?

To be quite honest, in the minutes after winning the title, I did not give a lot of thought to who would congratulate me when. However, I find the way Mirko acted very respectful. It is definitely not easy when you travel to Hockenheim with such great hopes and then come up short of achieving your goal. The fact that he came straight over to me in the car after qualifying means I now hold him in even higher regard.

At what point did you start to believe that your fast lap could see you crowned champion?

As a driver, you obviously get a feel for whether or not it could be a good time. At the end of the second sector I noticed that I was really blasting round the track. However, I did not know whether it

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would be good enough for pole or eighth place in the end. The qualifying times in the DTM are simply too close to be able to judge that.

How did you find the all-important qualifying session?

Unlike in the race, you are fully focussed on yourself and push yourself to the limit. As a result, everything is very emotional. For a long time, I did not know what the fastest time was, what Mirko Bortolotti was doing, or what position I was in. Only when my team confirmed the pole position over the radio did it dawn on me that I was the champion.

Six thousandths of a second on Mirko Bortolotti made the difference – would you rather have won the title in the race?

It was obviously unusual to win the title in qualifying. However, I think the tension was unbelievable and it did not detract in any way from the title race. It is incredibly close in the DTM, particularly in qualifying. As such, I think it is a good thing that the top three in qualifying score points. In my opinion you deserve it if you produce a strong performance against the clock.

Among those watching at the circuit were Porsche board members Michael Steiner and Andreas Haffner, as well as Thomas Laudenbach, Head of Porsche Motorsport. Did that put you under more pressure?

I took their visit as positive pressure. It shows that what we at Manthey EMA achieved in the DTM is important to Porsche. I see that as appreciation and it motivated me to put on a good show for everyone at the circuit.

Where has your DTM trophy been given pride of place?

The trophy is still with my parents at the moment, as I would never have fit a trophy of that size on the plane. I will pick it up soon. Before I do so, I must find a suitable place for it. I have never won such a huge trophy before. It weighs so much that I definitely can't just put it on any old sideboard.

As well as winning the title in Hockenheim, what were your highlights this season?

Definitely my win at the Norisring in an eventful race from start to finish. The highlight was my overtaking manoeuvre against René Rast. It feels great when you win a battle against such a fantastic racing driver as him. I also look back fondly at my home outing at the Red Bull Ring. It is cool to drive at home in front of your own fans at such a beautiful circuit. I had never had support like it before.

On the driver's door of your Porsche 911 GT3 R it reads "Don't talk to the bus driver during quali". What is that all about?

My mechanics stuck the sticker on the car during the season. There was once a situation in qualifying, when I had a moan at my engineer. I was on a flying lap when he said something to me over the radio. We usually communicate on the straights, but an issue with the GPS meant he spoke just as I was turning into a corner. That gives you quite a shock for a moment. The team made a joke of it and had that sticker made.

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What did you get up to in the few days after the DTM finale?

I drove from Hockenheim to Weissach and went to work in a simulator. Coming immediately after the biggest success of my career so far, it was perhaps not my most productive day. However, I did my best. After that, I went home. I first lay in, then ordered a pizza with my girlfriend the next day. We also had a few meetings within the team, which we had not had time for on the Sunday – for good reasons. As such, whoever drivers for Manthey EMA will have a few suggestions for improvements from me. Obviously I would prefer to defend the title myself. However, my programme for 2024 is yet to be confirmed.

What other motorsport activities do you have lined up this year?

Last weekend I was at the Formula 1 race in Mexico, where I experienced motorsport in the role of co-commentator for ORF. In a few days I will fly to Bahrain, where I will attend the FIA WEC rookie test in a Porsche 963. I have never driven a prototype like that before, so it will be really cool. Plus, I am off to Macau in November to race at the legendary Guia Circuit for the first time. I am already really looking forward to that.

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