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## **René Rast: “I see my future in the DTM”**

- **The 2019 DTM Champion in an extensive interview before the season’s finale**

**Neuburg a. d. Donau, September 25, 2019 – Audi driver René Rast secured an early DTM title win in the season’s third from last race. In an extensive interview, the 2019 DTM Champion reveals why, in spite of his early success, fans should not miss the finale at Hockenheim on the first weekend in October, what records he is interested in, what the secret of his success is and how he spent the days following his title win.**

### **How does being a two-time DTM Champion feel?**

It’s a great feeling – and totally different from what I felt when I won my first DTM title in 2017. The title at that time came somewhat unexpectedly. The surprise was immense. This year, I was able to mentally prepare myself because I was touted as a favorite. Even so, it’s an awesome feeling. It’s one of the biggest motorsport moments in my life. When I entered the DTM I didn’t expect to clinch two titles within the space of three years.

### **How was the party following your title win at the Nürburgring?**

It was one of the coolest parties I’ve seen at Audi Sport so far. We partied really hard at the Audi Hospitality until about three, three thirty in the morning.

### **How did you spend the days after your title win?**

Fortunately, in a relatively quiet way. Most of the interviews were conducted telephonically. That’s why I was at home a lot and able to spend some time with my family.

### **How many congratulation messages did you receive on your smartphone?**

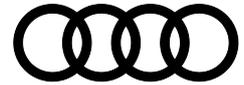
I didn’t count them, but it must have been several hundred – especially via WhatsApp or text. That’s just the way people communicate today. Calls are not being made as much anymore as they used to be. Of course, there were many messages on Instagram and Facebook, too. It’s nice to see that.

### **Did you receive any congrats that particularly surprised or pleased you?**

Someone like Lukas Podolski, who congratulated me after my 2017 title win, was not among them. A couple of Formula One drivers – but nobody I wouldn’t have expected.

### **Do you have the sense that your popularity has significantly increased since you entered DTM?**

Definitely! You can tell that the perception along the race track and in the media has changed compared to 2017. Such changes happen gradually following major events. There was quite a



big boost after my 2017 title win. I noticed another one after my accident at the Lausitzring last year and after my six consecutive victories there was yet another real boost.

**You've got good prospects of breaking many DTM records. Does that interest you?**

I'm only interested in records when they concern me personally. I didn't use to pay a lot of attention to records in the past but when you get closer to the benchmarks it starts to become relevant. Especially the 23 victories that Mattias (Ekström) clinched for Audi, plus a third DTM title. Only Bernd Schneider and Klaus Ludwig have won more than two titles. If you have the chance of becoming one of the three most successful DTM drivers of all time it's a goal worth pursuing.

**What was decisive for the 2019 title win?**

Our consistency in qualifying: We were always in contention at the front when it mattered. On the one hand, we scored the additional points and on the other, obviously, we achieved a good starting base for the race. That we had the performance to always be in contention at the front was the key to success. But we also had the consistency in the race. We made only few mistakes this year. Everything was working perfectly.

**What were your highs and lows in the 2019 season?**

Hockenheim, where, following the safety car period, I pushed forward from the far rear of the field within just a few laps, was a highlight. Just like the Norisring: Winning the race after stalling the engine at the start was special. The collision on the first lap at the Norisring – and retiring while leading the race at the Lausitzring – were negatives.

**In the first test with the new Audi RS 5 DTM, did you expect this car to be so strong?**

That wasn't necessarily to be expected. During the pre-season tests last winter, we always looked strong and also more reliable compared to the competition, but at that time we didn't know how much the competition had truly shown yet. The thought that they might rev up some more – which is exactly what they did in the first race at Hockenheim – was always in the back of our minds. That's when we saw how fast BMW suddenly was.

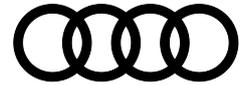
**Where do you see Audi's greatest strengths compared to the competition?**

Toward the end of the season, clearly in qualifying where, after some point in time, we didn't give BMW any chance anymore. In the race, we often had the best car, too. In terms of pace, we've been dominant from about mid-season onward – combined with higher reliability. This is especially reflected by the manufacturers' points. We worked very hard for this in the winter.

**How do you generally like the new DTM cars?**

I like them very much! They're really great fun! More power always pleases a driver. The cars are more difficult to drive and definitely pose a greater challenge. And that's exactly what we want: for the drivers to increasingly move into focus and having to fight more and more.

**We've seen many thrilling DTM races this year. Even so, is there anything you'd change about the DTM?**



I can't think of anything spontaneously except perhaps even more power output and even less downforce. That's something you always wish for as a race driver although you have to make sure that the tires are still able to cope with that – otherwise it turns into a tire management race like most recently in Formula One. All of a sudden, you find yourself driving ten, fifteen seconds slower at the beginning of the race because otherwise the tires won't last. Nobody wants to see that.

**Can you understand the excitement among the fans that came up about the issue of team orders after Brands Hatch and the Lausitzring?**

Sure. No fan wants to see team orders and we as race drivers actually don't want to see them either – that's not why we contest races, so I totally understand the fans. But you also have to understand the interests of the manufacturers. They want to be as sure as possible of deciding the championship in their favor at the end of the year. That's always been the case in DTM and it's not a question of committing to a particular driver at the beginning of the year. At Audi, every driver has the chance to compete for the championship win. The fact that, in the first half of the season, as a driver you have to put yourself in a position of being able to benefit from the help of the others is frequently ignored. That team orders are subsequently issued in the last third of the year is clear. Even though the fans don't like it: It's simply part of motorsport today, as we just saw again in Formula One, too. But, obviously, it's nicer to be able to drive as freely as we did at the Nürburgring.

**In the title race, you not only had to prevail against BMW driver Marco Wittmann but also against Nico Müller. Is battling against a driver from the same brand different?**

I'd say that battling against a driver from the same brand is always a little more difficult because you cannot, may not or do not want to drive as hard as you would against the drivers from another manufacturer. You always have to practice a certain amount of restraint and can't fully display your aggressive potential. I feel that – perhaps except for the Norisring – we resolved this pretty well this year.

**Before the race at Brands Hatch, SAT.1 co-commentator Timo Scheider claimed that the relationship between you and Nico Müller was tense. Is that true?**

I don't know where Timo got this information from – it's pretty far-fetched. When Nico and I read that we just laughed. Obviously, we don't spend our vacations together. But we talk a lot on the race weekends, joke or sit next to each other during the drivers' briefings or autograph sessions. At Spa, we even contested a race in the same car. Nico and I are professional enough to be able to separate private things and the job. Between the two of us, everything in the title race was very relaxed and cool.

**DTM CEO Gerhard Berger emphasized on several occasions that you would also have had what it takes to race in Formula One. Does that please you? Is Formula One still relevant for you?**

I'd like to have an opportunity to drive a Formula One car once. I've said that several times before. But only to see what the thing is like to drive. And to get a feel for it. I think a full season is pretty unrealistic because on the one hand I'm too old for it and on the other the cockpits are of course highly coveted. A lot of people are standing in line for one. That would involve a lot of



money and a large 'dowry.' That's why my chances are very small. If I were to get an offer I'd of course discuss it with (Head of Audi Motorsport) Dieter (Gass). But that's very far away.

**Do you see your future in the DTM?**

Definitely! I feel very comfortable in the DTM. I enjoy it a lot. That's why I see my future in the DTM.

**Two of your fellow Audi drivers – Nico Müller and Robin Frijns – are racing in Formula E. Is the electric racing series relevant for you, too?**

Yes, it was already relevant last year. But together with Audi, we decided to fully focus on the DTM. However, for the future, Formula E is no doubt an option.

**You engage very intensively with the DTM even between the races. Is that one of your strengths?**

Yes, I think so. Preparation is very important in the DTM. There are many small details that matter. The more you prepare yourself the more things you can check off your mental to-do list before the weekend.

**What does your preparation for a DTM race typically look like?**

It begins relatively early, usually two or three days after the previous race weekend, starting with video analyses. That gives you a rough overview of what happened on the respective race track the year before. What was important? What was the key to success? That gradually brings back memories. Then you start looking at the data where you didn't do so well the year before, where you can improve in order to keep from making the same mistakes again. You start discussing the setup with the team. One thing builds upon another in this context. Of course, this also includes the work in the simulator at Audi, at Team Rosberg and at my home, too.

**What does your preparation for the finale at Hockenheim look like? Following your early title win, are you tackling that with greater ease or just as meticulously as before the other races?**

Definitely with greater ease. Following the championship title, there's no more pressure. Obviously, we'd still like to win the teams' championship. But I'm looking forward to having a DTM weekend without any pressure whatsoever for a change. Subjectively, I've never had that before.

**Are you looking forward to the competition with the Japanese?**

I think that's going to be mega cool! I've been looking forward to this all year. And now I can enjoy it without any pressure.

**Are you keeping track of the Super GT in Japan? Do you know the drivers and cars that will be racing at Hockenheim?**

Of course I know Jenson Button and am in touch with a couple of the other drivers. But I'm not really deeply immersed in the Super GT. I'm very excited to see what'll happen at Hockenheim.



**Why should the DTM fans travel to Hockenheim although the championship has already been decided?**

Because this will be the first meeting between the DTM and the Super GT. For the first time, we're going to have six manufacturers in the race. That'll no doubt be a very special event. Plus, the races at Hockenheim are always worth watching. The Parabolika with DRS is always a highlight. The weather is expected to be pretty good, too. That's why it should become a cool weekend.

**At the end of November, the first joint races of the DTM and the Super GT will be held in Japan. Are you looking forward to them?**

Yes! I've never been to Fuji, never been to Japan. I'm excited to see what's awaiting us there. That'll no doubt be another cool event toward the end of the year to which we can travel without any pressure and see what the Japanese might be doing better than we are. We can probably learn something again.

**What is René Rast currently driving privately?**

An Audi Q7.

**Can you imagine driving an electric car from Audi at some point in time?**

I'd at least like to give it a try.

**How does the DTM Champion prefer to spend his free time?**

With the family. Obviously, I also do some sports on the side. But I do prefer spending time with my family in order to unwind a little from all the motorsport stress.

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