



ABT Sportsline 2021 – Press Release CW24

Monza premiere for ABT Sportsline at DTM restart

It's hard to believe, but it's true: next weekend's **2021 DTM season opener** in the royal park of Monza (Saturday and Sunday live on SAT.1 from 1 PM CEST) will be the first races for Team ABT Sportsline on the high-speed circuit outside Milan. The trips across the Alps to the previous DTM guest races in "Bella Italia" were always crowned with success for the title defenders from Kempten.

So far, the DTM has **visited Italy seven** times: three times at Adria near Venice, twice at Mugello in Tuscany and most recently twice at Misano near Rimini. And each time, the team led by **Hans-Jürgen Abt** and **Thomas Biermaier** brought trophies back to Kempten and even the biggest one on three occasions.

Even before the DTM era, there was a legendary appearance for ABT in Italy: **Christian Abt** won the night race of the German Super Touring Car Championship (STW) in **Misano** with the Audi A4 quattro in 1999. In the heat of battle, his rival for the title at the time, Uwe Alzen in an Opel, accidentally let him pass shortly before the finish line without much resistance. The jubilation in the ABT pits was correspondingly exuberant and the party after the important victory was a lively one.

The first Italian guest appearance in **Adria** during the 2003 DTM season was also a battle against the high temperatures with over 60 degrees in the cockpits. **Mattias Ekström** and **Laurent Aiello** coped well with this and thrilled the spectators. They came from behind during the final laps and scored a double podium for ABT Sportsline. Afterwards, there was one of the first paddock parties by the ABT house band "Fire & Ice", which was always on stand-by at the DTM races back then.

In 2004, **Mattias Ekström** achieved the **Audi A4 DTM's first victory in Adria**, which also took place in sweltering heat. It was the beginning of ABT's 17-year joint success story as an Audi factory team in the DTM with **four drivers' championships** (2004, 2007, 2008, 2009), five teams' titles (2004, 2007, 2011, 2016 and 2020) and **59 race victories**. In addition, there is the drivers' title in 2002 and a further eight victories as a private team from 2000 to 2003. With a total of 67 victories, ABT Sportsline is the **most successful active DTM team** and second in the all-time leaderboard.

In 2007, **Mattias Ekström** celebrated his **29th birthday** at the DTM round in **Mugello** and of course he got the obligatory cake to the face in the pits. On race day, the air was scorching with 37 degrees in the shade and asphalt temperatures of 52 degrees. Mattias Ekström had to settle for second place, because Mika Häkkinen was the only driver who had already completed his mandatory pit stop when the safety car came onto the track, which was triggered by one of his team mates, which caused wild speculation at the time.

In 2008, **Tom Kristensen** clinched another trophy for ABT Sportsline with third place at **Mugello**. His team mate **Timo Scheider** squandered the victory when he rolled up short on



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pole position and consequently received a drive-through penalty that dropped him to 17th place. Scheider still ended up as the champion.

In 2010, the two-time DTM champion drove “**the race of my life**”, as he later called it, in the rain at Adria. Starting from 15th place on the grid, today’s **SAT.1 expert** overtook one car after the other and finally crossed the finish line as the winner. Mattias Ekström was equally fast, but lost half a minute in the pits due to a loose cotter pin on the gear lever.

In the supporting program, **Hans-Jürgen Abt** took part in the Volkswagen Scirocco Cup’s “**Wings for Life Charity Race**”, where he only just missed the podium. However, “HJ” was very upset that his then ITR board colleague Walter Mertes finished third.

Speaking of Hans-Jürgen Abt: In 2002, the ABT boss last drove a DTM car himself during a rainy test in **Misano**. The outing did not end well in view of the difficult conditions and the mechanics had some extra work ...

In 2018 and 2019, Misano was also the venue for the last DTM races in Italy so far, which included the first **night races** in DTM history in 2018. **Robin Frijns** took his first DTM podium with his typical spectacular overtaking manoeuvres.

Nico Müller won Sunday’s race in Misano in 2020, but was “under investigation” until late in the evening. The subsequent **party** in the Audi hospitality after the confirmation of his victory lasted until the early hours of the morning.

Daniel Abt, who won the **GP3** finale in **Monza** in 2012, also has good memories of Italy.

Now it is up to **Sophia Flörsch** (Germany), **Mike Rockenfeller** (Germany/Switzerland) and **Kelvin van der Linde** (South Africa) to continue ABT Sportsline’s successful DTM tradition at Monza.

Just like Kelvin van der Linde, **Sophia Flörsch** will be making her DTM debut at Monza. Her ABT Audi R8 LMS features the revolutionary “Space Drive” steer-by-wire system from Schaeffler Paravan Technologie GmbH & Co KG, which will be used for the first time in a DTM race at Monza.

Alongside Gary Paffett and Marco Wittmann, Mike Rockenfeller is one of three **DTM champions** on the grid. He celebrated his first DTM victory with ABT Sportsline at **Zandvoort** in 2011 and had a good chance of winning the championship at the time. His serious accident at Le Mans in June 2011 put a spanner in the works for “Rocky”. Two years later, he won the DTM drivers’ title.

As a long-standing Audi Sport driver, **Kelvin van der Linde** knows the Audi R8 LMS better than almost anyone else.

Quotes before the DTM races in Monza

Thomas Biermaier (Team Principal of Team ABT Sportsline): “Monza will be a very special weekend for us: For the first time since October 2003, we are again competing in the DTM as a private team. This brings back many fond memories of our first years in the DTM with the Abt-Audi TT-R that we developed and entered ourselves. It’s clear that we want to be just as successful with the Audi R8 LMS as we were back then, when we won the title against the factory teams from Mercedes and Opel. I’m very excited about the first DTM weekend with the GT cars. The grid is impressive, there are many good teams and drivers and great brands. As a motorsport fan, I would definitely tune in to SAT.1 at 1 PM CEST on Saturday and Sunday.”

Kelvin van der Linde (ABT Audi R8 LMS #3): “I’m confident for the Monza weekend. We worked well during the test at Monza. The team and the car are well set up for the first race weekend, which will be my debut in the DTM. I was also at the season opener of the GT World Challenge Europe in Monza a few weeks ago. I’m as well prepared as possible. Now we have to see how the competition does in qualifying and in the race. It is important for us to collect as many points as possible and to be very consistent in the championship. I think we have everything to be successful this year.”

Mike Rockenfeller (ABT Audi R8 LMS #9): “I’m very much looking forward to Monza. The DTM is finally getting underway! There are a lot of innovations this year. For me personally, I’m driving for Team ABT Sportsline again after many years and with a completely new car, the Audi R8 LMS. I’m curious to see where we stand. You can never say much after testing. Accordingly, I’m glad to finally be in race mode. I can’t wait to drive in the first practice session.”

Sophia Flörsch (ABT Audi R8 LMS #99): “I’m really looking forward to the season opener at Monza. Mid-June is a very late start to the season, which we’ve worked towards and waited for long enough. Monza is also a track that I like very much. It will be interesting to see where we are as a team in general and Audi as a manufacturer in terms of the Balance of Performance. But, I think Monza is a good track for the Audi. I’m looking forward to the first race weekend and trying to make the best of it in the heat, as it looks like it will be very warm, and to start the season well and positively, with a grin on my face.”

Did you know that ...

... **Sophia Flörsch** has given her Audi R8 LMS the nickname “**Johnny**” – a tribute to Johann Abt and the 125th anniversary of the company?

... **Kelvin van der Linde** calls his Audi R8 LMS “**Lucia**” and **Mike Rockenfeller** generally doesn’t name his race cars?

... **Kelvin van der Linde** celebrates his **25th birthday** at Monza on Sunday?

... **Schaeffler** board member **Matthias Zink** and **Remus** CEO **Stephan Zöchling** have announced their attendance at the DTM season opener?

... **ABT boss Hans-Jürgen Abt** will also be on site in Monza?

... ABT Sportsline has already raced **in Italy** this year? At the E-Prix in Rome at the beginning of April, Lucas di Grassi was the dominant driver in the first race on Saturday, before he had to retire due to a technical problem while running in the lead shortly before the end.

... the ABT Sportsline team has had **three Italian drivers** in its ranks so far? Paolo Coloni in Formula 3, Emanuele Pirro in STW in 1998 and Edoardo Mortara in the DTM.

... **Mike Rockenfeller** moved with his wife Susi and his three children at the beginning of June, but continues to live on the Swiss side of Lake Constance?

... **Kelvin van der Linde** lives in Altusried near **Kempton**?

... **Car & Car** has its headquarters near Monza. The leading Italian car dealership for elegant super sports cars has been ABT Sportsline's sales partner south of the Alps since 2010.

... ABT Sportsline always is offering fans the opportunity to talk to Sophia Flörsch, Mike Rockenfeller and Kelvin van der Linde during a **virtual meet & greet** on Sunday mornings during the race weekends?

... ABT Sport Marketing Director Harry Unflath has succeeded in signing the **SÜDPACK** company as another renowned partner for the DTM campaign shortly before the start of the season at Monza. SÜDPACK was founded in 1965 by Alfred Remmele and has since developed into a leading international film manufacturer for food, non-food and medical packaging. The SÜDPACK logo will be seen on the two ABT Audi R8 LMS cars of Mike Rockenfeller and Kelvin van der Linde at Monza.

... ABT partner Schaeffler produced a **fascinating film** with Sophia Flörsch, which has been released on social media just in time for the start of the DTM season?

ABT dates for the media

Facebook live from the ABT pit with Sophia, Mike and Kelvin at Monza
Saturday, 18/06, 17:30 hrs @abtmotorsport

Virtual Meet & Greet with Sophia, Mike and Kelvin for fans & media via Zoom
Sunday, 19/06, 08:30 hrs
Zoom link: <http://bit.ly/ABTDTMMonza2021>

Text/photos at: www.abt-sportsline.com/company/media/press-releases

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