



## **ABT Sportsline 2022 – Press Release Week 17**

### **Hans-Jürgen Abt ahead of the season opener at Portimão: “In the DTM we can show what’s behind ABT Sportsline”**

Just a few days before the start of the season at Portimão (Saturday from 12:30 p.m. CEST and Sunday from 1 p.m. CEST live on ProSieben), ABT Sportsline has gained another strong partner for its involvement in the DTM in the form of the Austrian leisure and holiday region **ÖTZTAL GURGL**, whose trademark will be featured prominently on all three Audi R8 LMS GT3 evo II cars driven by Ricardo Feller (Switzerland), René Rast (Germany) and Kelvin van der Linde (South Africa). For team owner Hans-Jürgen Abt this is further confirmation of why ABT Sportsline is backing the popular racing series for the 23rd year in a row. In an interview, he explains what expectations the team from Bavaria has for the new DTM season.

#### **The new DTM season kicks off at Portimão this weekend. Is the start of the DTM season still something special after 22 years?**

I think the beginning of every season is special. You’re always fired up after a long winter break. You want to see where you stand and whether you’ve done everything right regarding your preparation.

#### **ABT is the most successful active DTM team. What are ABT Sportsline’s expectations for the new season?**

It is always our goal to fight for the championship. We have achieved this in almost every season so far. We have also done everything again to create the best base for this.

#### **After many years as an Audi factory team, ABT Sportsline was on its own again for the first time in 2021. How did the first year with the GT cars go from your point of view?**

Surprisingly well. It was a team-based DTM season for the first time in many years. I was taken by the high level of professionalism. Everyone worked hard to put together a great racing series. That was definitely the right way to go.

#### **Portimão presents a full grid with a variety of brands and strong teams and drivers. Do you like the current version of DTM?**

You see great, cool motorsport in the DTM: thrilling battles, an extremely competitive grid. These are the best prerequisites for fan interest to reach old heights again. Corona slowed us down a bit last year, but the conditions are completely different now.

#### **So, Gerhard Berger’s decision to go for GT cars was the right one?**

Absolutely! More and more teams are attaching importance to competing in the DTM and not in other racing series. The package Gerhard has put together is a good one. GT3 was absolutely the right decision after the DTM with the Class 1 cars.

#### **Why is the DTM already one of the most popular GT racing series in the world after only one year?**

Because they all want to race against us ... Seriously: The name DTM is simply a centre of attraction. People know about the DTM – for 22 years and even longer. We were a founding





member when it was relaunched in 2000. Since then, the DTM has survived all of its crises and shown that it is a strong German and European racing series that arouses interest everywhere.

**You can see this in the three ABT Audi R8 LMS GT3 evo II cars: there are hardly any cars on the grid on which the trademarks of so many strong partners can be seen. This shows: The DTM and ABT Sportsline are very attractive.**

The DTM spirit works, and we really enjoy sharing this professionally with our partners. On the one hand, we offer joint event experiences. In addition, we want to show that we are a strong team. Our head of sports marketing, Harry Unflath, is doing a great job. With the ÖTZTAL GURGL region, we have gained another strong partner from the winter sports sector shortly before the start of the season. They are rightly convinced that they reach the right target group with the DTM and that the series is a great platform for sponsors. We are proud that ÖTZTAL GURGL has chosen ABT Sportsline and that we will have a strong presence in the DTM together.

**What is the importance of a strong TV partner like ProSieben for the DTM and ABT Sportsline?**

Television has always been an important topic for the DTM – despite streaming and social media. ProSieben has a cool target group and is, in inverted commas, a “younger channel”. You can see that they simply have fun with the DTM. They do a very good job. We also know them from Formula E. They know motorsport and want to establish themselves even more as a motorsport channel in the future. We can be thankful that we are allowed to work with them.

**70 years after your father Johann Abt’s first race, ABT Sportsline’s motto is more than ever “from the racetrack to the road”. How important are successes in the DTM for the ABT Sportsline company?**

This is a very important topic for us. We want to show that we build great cars, stand behind our products and do everything with full commitment. We simply know that the spark from motorsport is transmitted. That’s part of the DNA of many companies – even if that might be changing a bit right now due to electric mobility. But we still see the DTM absolutely as an environment in which we can show what’s behind our company ABT Sportsline. Many of our customers are happy when they see on TV, Saturdays and Sundays, that one of our cars is winning – and with it, there is also a little piece of them.

**What is more important: victories or the championship title?**

The important thing is to be competitive and in such a good position to be able to fight for victories. Wins are the first requirement to win a championship in the end. When it works out, you are especially happy. We have already won many championships in the DTM, even if the last one was some time ago. But you can also be proud of the many runner-up positions, because they also show that we were always competitive, that we were always right there at the top. That has always been the most important thing for me personally. In the end, in motorsport, the luckiest driver often wins the title.

**The last time ABT Sportsline was the DTM champion was in 2009. Does it hurt that the title has been narrowly missed time and again since then?**



*From the racetrack to the road.*



Yes, of course it hurts. But it is also a new incentive for the next year in order to eliminate one or two mistakes. You have to keep at it and act with the team in such a way that the base is created to be able to become champion at all. We are talking about 29 cars in this DTM season. It's not even granted to finish in the top three. It's a long season. Whoever drives the smartest might end up winning the championship.

**With Ricardo Feller, René Rast and Kelvin van der Linde, ABT Sportsline has three of the strongest drivers in the DTM this year. Doesn't that also harbour a certain danger? In the end, there can only be one champion ...**

I prefer to have the three in my own team and not to race against them. That's a very simple calculation. It's important that they push each other, that they deal well with each other, that they are open with each other, exchange data and work together on the strategy. That's how you can be successful. It's also clear that we have to give everything as a team when you have three drivers that are so strong.

**How would you describe the three of them?**

Ricardo is a typical Swiss. I have the feeling that he is very relaxed in his approach. But I think he has the necessary aggressiveness in the car. With Kelvin, we know he has it. And he is strong in qualifying. René has a lot of experience. He already has three DTM titles under his belt, but he certainly receives some pressure from the two young drivers. We also know that he is a very good analyst. He can always set the car up perfectly for himself. I think the three of them fit together very well.

**ABT Sportsline will start this year with Audi's evo II. What can this model do better than its predecessor?**

The R8 has always been a good car in terms of its basic philosophy. They have now improved the stability, the balance between understeer and oversteer. It's more balanced now. In the DTM, it's still a lot about the tyres. We are happy with the upgrade from Audi Sport customer racing.

**DTM with GT racing cars only works with the "balance of performance". What does ABT want from the DTM organisation in this respect?**

This will always be a tricky issue and you will never find the perfect solution. Basically, the DTM has to create the conditions for all of the cars to be at the front at every circuit. After all, the cars work differently on the different tracks. In addition, we still have the handicap weight system. There is something wrong with the balance of performance if someone wins on Saturday and is still far ahead the next day. It is important to recognise this and create a reasonable balance between the brands, otherwise it will be difficult. The issue will run through this year as well, but there is no other way with the GT cars, and other racing series also have this issue.

**Last year, the Audi teams were at a disadvantage in terms of pit stops, due to the regulations. Has this been solved for 2022?**

Yes, I think so. Above all, people are no longer under such extreme pressure during the pit stops. Everyone should be able to live with the latest framework.

### **A future pillar of the DTM will be the DTM Electric. What is ABT Sportsline's position on this?**

We are not yet deeply involved in the topic, but we welcome the step. You have to be careful not to have too many weaknesses at the beginning, because a new racing series usually has weaknesses. You have to make sure that the sport doesn't suffer. But if you can do that, DTM Electric can have a great future.

### **Last question: How often will fans see Hans-Jürgen Abt at the DTM in 2022? After all, your personal Twitter account is still @coolmandtm – that suggests that your heart still beats especially for the DTM ...**

Yes, absolutely, otherwise I wouldn't be there. With Thomas Biermaier as the team principal, we have a very good team on site. But I always like to come by to observe what is happening and hopefully also to contribute a little bit. So, there are already a few races planned for this year – including Portimão. I'm already very excited to see what comes out of it.

### **Quotes before the DTM season opener at Portimão**

**Thomas Biermaier (Team Principal):** "We are happy that the new season is finally getting underway after the long winter break. The expectations are always high for us. Wherever we compete on a racetrack, we want to win or fight at the front. It is clearly our goal to win races in the DTM this year, as well as to fight for the championship with all three drivers until the very end, if possible. We have always been close in the last few years. But being close wasn't enough to bring home the big trophy. That is clearly one of our goals this year. We have often been defeated by René (Rast) recently. That's why we thought it would be best to bring him into our team. I think the combination with Kelvin (van der Linde), Ricardo (Feller) and our team is promising. I'm already very excited to see how the three of them will perform at Portimão and where we stand compared to the competition."

**Kelvin van der Linde (ABT Audi R8 LMS GT3 evo II #3):** "I haven't ever raced at Portimão. I've only been there for testing. It's a new challenge. We had some good test days there. The car felt very good. So, I'm positive for the race. The goal is to start the season with strong points. After we came close to winning the championship last year, anything other than aiming to win the title would not be enough – not only the drivers' title, but also the teams' title for ABT. We have a great bunch of drivers and will work well together this year, sharing data and trying to bring the titles home to ABT Sportsline."

**Ricardo Feller (ABT Audi R8 LMS GT3 evo II #7):** "It feels really cool to be in the DTM. It was always a dream of mine. This dream came true and I am super happy with Team ABT Sportsline. I'm really looking forward to the first race in Portimão. I've never raced at the circuit, but I tested there for one day and really liked the track. It has a lot of medium-speed corners and elevation changes. It's quite cool."

**René Rast (ABT Audi R8 LMS GT3 evo II #33):** "After one year in Formula E and only watching DTM, it feels good to be back in the car competing against all of these guys. I do not have any expectations for Portimão. We do not really know how competitive the others are. We think we are in the mix. Obviously, I am hoping that I can score my first points in the GT3 era of the DTM as soon as possible, but it will be difficult. I will give my best to really

maximize what we have. The ultimate goal is always to win the title. We will try to bring the title back to Kempten.”

### Did you know that ...

... two former ABT DTM drivers, **Timo Scheider** and **Mike Rockenfeller**, will be working as experts for the TV channel ProSieben at Portimão?

... ABT sports marketing director **Harry Unflath** celebrated his 60th birthday while skiing in the Alps shortly before Easter?

... ABT Sportsline is contesting a race at **Portimão** for the first time?

... ABT partner **Schaeffler** is giving fans the opportunity to compete with Kelvin van der Linde in a simulator at the DTM races this year?

... the **ABT DTM Photo Challenge**, in which there are valuable prizes to be won, will kick off at Portimão? More information: [www.abt-sportsline.com/motorsport/dtm-photo-challenge](http://www.abt-sportsline.com/motorsport/dtm-photo-challenge)

... **Kelvin van der Linde** and Ricardo Feller have already won races with the new Audi R8 LMS GT3 evo II? Van der Linde won the opening round of the GT World Challenge at Imola, Feller the opening round of the ADAC GT Masters at Oschersleben.

... all three ABT drivers will be competing in the **Nürburgring 24 Hours** at the end of May?

... Kelvin van der Linde spent Easter together with his brother Sheldon in Marbella?

... **Ricardo Feller** will contest the ADAC GT Masters and the Nürburgring Endurance Series in addition to the DTM in 2022?

... Ricardo Feller still finds time to help out at **his father's car dealership**?

... **Kelvin van der Linde** contested his first rally at the end of 2021 and is planning more rally participation this year?

### ABT events for the media

#### ABT Media Talk on Zoom with Thomas Biermaier, Ricardo Feller, René Rast and Kelvin van der Linde

Saturday, April 30, 4:45 PM (CEST)

Zoom link: [bit.ly/ABTMediaTalkPortimao2022](https://bit.ly/ABTMediaTalkPortimao2022)

Text/photos at: [www.abt-sportsline.com/company/media/press-releases](http://www.abt-sportsline.com/company/media/press-releases)



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