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The Path to Victory Begins Upstairs

Sven Müller had to wait six years for his great triumph in Formula racing. To win, he first had to lose his fear of losing.



Wolken ziehen über den Circuit of the Americas in Austin/Texas, 24 Grad im Schatten, im Auto knapp 40. In weniger als einer Stunde starten 27 Fahrer aus 14 Nationen auf der Rennstrecke. Einer von ihnen wird sich den Gesamtsieg des Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup holen: Sven Müller. Nach 31 Minuten und 8,105 Sekunden steht fest, dass er den finalen Lauf der Serie nicht gewonnen hat. Aber Platz acht reicht, um die Saison 2016 mit geballter Siegerfaust zu beenden. Nie zuvor ist Müller so vorsichtig gefahren, noch nie hat er so viele FClouds settle over the Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas. It's around 75 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, 104 in the car. In less than an hour, twenty-seven drivers from fourteen countries will test their mettle on the track. One of them will take home overall victory in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup: Sven Müller. After 31 minutes and 8.105 seconds, the race is over. Although Müller didn't place first in this race, eighth place was enough to end the 2016 season with his fist raised victoriously in the air. Never before has Müller driven so cautiously or let so many drivers pass him. Just one point separated him from his dream. And now he's on the top step of the podium.

Before the race, Müller was focused. In the past, he would never step into the car without playing his current favorite song—a ritual of sorts. Now, he's discontinued the practice. He centers himself to prepare for a perfect start. Over the past few months, he has driven the 3.43-mile circuit in Austin time and again: a few times in his Porsche 911 GT3 Cup and countless more on his sofa in Bingen am Rhein, Germany, with a game console controller in his hands. He wasn't nervous before the start, he reports after the race, just very focused on victory.

The next day, Müller is a bit sore, though not nearly as much as three years ago after his first laps on the Nürburgring. "Back then I was so wound up that I sat completely wrong in the car, and after ten laps I was in unbelievable pain." He chuckles at the words "back then." On the other hand, if you drive your first go-kart at the age of six, race for a European championship at the age of twelve, join the ADAC Formel Masters before the age of nineteen, and then move on to Formula 3, it's no stretch to talk about "back then."

Focus

Müller was part of the Porsche junior team and has been a Porsche works driver since the beginning of the new season. It was a dream come true for the Mainz native. However, things didn't always go as smoothly for him as they did last year. He dropped points here and

there and sometimes had a spell of poor luck, but his courage never deserted him. In spite of many setbacks, the twenty-five-year-old never lost sight of his goal. "I always wanted to win," he says as he raves about his title win in the Porsche Carrera Cup Germany a week before the race in Texas. "That was an incredible feeling, and it confirmed to me once again that racing is my life." The sentiment has been with him for years—at eighteen he had the words "Racing is life" tattooed on his upper arm.

The pursuit

If he'd never learned to lose, he wouldn't be able to win today—of that, Müller has no doubt. It was his drive that first brought him to Porsche's attention in 2013. "The ability to pace himself tactically, be satisfied with second place on occasion, but always hang tough at the front no matter what—Sven perfected these capabilities during his training for the professional ranks in our junior squad," says juniors coach Sascha Maassen. Only a driver with those skills would be able to make up eighteen places in a race (a feat Müller pulled off twice in the Carrera Cup) and turn looming defeats into furious come-from-behind wins. Before Müller, no driver in the twenty-seven-year history of the Carrera Cup Germany had managed to win ten of sixteen races in a single season.

Müller was scarcely a shooting star. He had to wait six long years for his two championship titles in Formula racing. Six years during which he stopped dreaming of Formula 1 and came to feel more and more at home in GT racing. "I had some low points, but I also learned to just keep attacking," he says.



Porsche work driver Sven Müller

Strength

The new Müller is a winner because he's physically and mentally fit, and because he knows that a race is primarily won not on the track, but in the mind. Nothing can distract the driver and no error can derail him. Weaknesses must be converted into strengths. "I call my mental coach before and after the races. He always finds the words that build me up and help me focus." Even in his first year as a Porsche junior, his basic speed was always fast. "After that I wanted to go even faster. But that all-consuming ambition came back to haunt me in 2015—it just wasn't working." So he worked on perfecting not only his mental constitution, but also his car (with the help of his team). "The car has to be 100 percent on the money. I'm a sensitive guy and like some oversteer with a very aggressive front axle," explains the trained mechatronics technician who, if things hadn't worked out with his driving career, would have joined his father's car company. What, ultimately, was his recipe for success in the third and final year of the junior program? "Perfect preparation, good fitness, precise knowledge of the car, close collaboration with the engineers, a lot of confidence in the car and in myself." And an inner tranquility that the passionate cyclist and motorcyclist gets off the track through the unexpected hobby of fishing. Nice and slow. Nice and quiet.

Time off

"Fishing is my nicest hobby," says the son of a Swiss mother and German father who likes to visit his grandfather in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Grand-père started taking him to the lake as a four-year-old. Müller speaks of him just as lovingly as he does of his mother, Anouk, his father, Michael (a former twenty-four-hour race-car driver), and his younger brother, Benedikt. Müller owes not only his perfect French to his grandfather, but also his love of nature and the ability to enjoy silence. "I enjoy sitting on the water and fishing. For me, there's nothing finer." His brown eyes light up as he speaks of "pleasure"—not "killing time." He speaks of "staying grounded," not "soaring." Of calmness and patience. And perhaps it is precisely these qualities that make a winner: not letting losses knock you down and keeping your feet on the ground when you win. Just punch that fist in the air with joy and keep fighting when the next race comes around.



Sven Müller's favourite hobby

Developing young talents at Porsche

Since 1997, Porsche has been training young people to be professional drivers. What began twenty years ago with the UPS Porsche Junior Team has become a highly successful model: all nineteen up-and-coming drivers who drove in the one-make series as Porsche juniors have made the leap into the professional ranks. Timo Bernhard (GER), Marc Lieb (GER), Patrick Long (USA), Michael Christensen (DNK), and Earl Bamber (NZL) are now Porsche factory drivers. The Porsche Motorsport Junior Program is based on two modules: Module 1: Each season, Porsche selects one to two juniors for the Porsche Carrera Cup Germany through a rigorous evaluation process with extensive fitness and stress tests. The finalists who emerge from this phase then complete a test program in the Porsche 911 GT3 Cup. The best candidate receives a contract as a Porsche junior and support to the tune of €150,000 (roughly \$160,000) for the Porsche Carrera Cup Germany.

Module 2: The most successful drivers in the international Porsche one-make cup series are nominated each year by the respective organizations of the Porsche Carrera Cup and invited by Porsche Motorsport for a two-day evaluation. The evaluation doesn't focus exclusively on fast lap times; the drivers also have to demonstrate their technical understanding and analytical capabilities in tuning the 911 GT3 Cup. The winner here is awarded €200,000 (around \$212,000) in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup as a Porsche junior.

Info

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