

Thomas Preining: From Porsche Junior to new DTM champion

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23/10/2023 With the switch to FIA GT3 vehicles in the DTM, Porsche has been represented in the racing series with its customer teams since 2022. At this year's final doubleheader event in Hockenheim, works driver Thomas Preining clinched the drivers' championship title. The trophies for the best team and most successful manufacturer go to Manthey EMA and Porsche. For 25-year-old Preining, this marks the pinnacle of a motor racing career that began in 2017 in GT racing as a Porsche Junior. Since then, he has climbed the entire career ladder of the sports car manufacturer's young driver initiative.

Winning the DTM last weekend at the Hockenheimring, Thomas Preining ticked off his big goal of the season. The 25-year-old Porsche works driver travelled to the final two races of the year in Germany's Baden region as the championship leader holding a ten-point advantage. Preining's victory in the first race on Saturday and his pole position on Sunday at the wheel of his No. 91 Porsche 911 GT3 R were

enough for the Austrian to extend his lead and secure the long-awaited championship crown. In the final rankings after this season's 16 races, Preining topped the standings with 246 points over the Italian Lamborghini works driver Mirko Bortolotti (213 points), followed in third place by the Switzerland's Ricardo Feller with 179 points. At the same time, the Austrian played a major role in Manthey EMA's overall victory in the team classification and first place for Porsche in the manufacturers' category. "This is a dream come true for me," admits the first Austrian title holder in the history of the DTM. "It feels fantastic to have achieved this goal."

In the Porsche brand's DTM debut season last year, Preining had a chance of winning the championship title as a driver in Porsche brand ambassador Timo Bernhard's Team75 Bernhard. However, an accident caused by another rival during the penultimate race at the Hockenheimring destroyed his big dream. Preining wrapped up the year fifth in the drivers' championship. "This crash cannot diminish the positive impressions of the 2022 season," said the Linz native at the time. "We had a great DTM debut and that makes me very proud."

For the 2023 season, Preining switched to the Porsche customer team Manthey EMA for its first season in the DTM. Scoring second place in the fourth race of the year on the Dutch circuit in Zandvoort, he moved to the top of the championship leaderboard for the first time. After the fifth DTM weekend at the Eurospeedway Lausitz, Preining initially had to relinquish his lead but reclaimed it at his home race at the Red Bull Ring with a sixth and third place in time for the season finale in Hockenheim. On the German Grand Prix circuit, he achieved the best possible result with two pole positions and two race wins and scored a resounding championship victory. "We knew that it would be difficult to seal the deal on the final weekend," admits Preining. "So all the better that we managed to achieve the maximum result of two pole positions and two race wins."

Thomas Preining inherited motorsport passion from his father

Thomas Preining, born on 21 July 1998 in Linz, Austria, came to racing at an early age: his father Andreas enjoyed success in the motorcycle world championship between 1989 and 1994 with eleven top-ten finishes in the 250cc class. When Thomas was six years old, I bought him a mini motocross bike," recalls Papa Preining. "He showed no interest whatsoever and the motorbike sat untouched in the garage for two years." When the family went go-karting during a holiday in Mallorca, the then seven-year-old was immediately hooked. After winning several titles in the junior category, Thomas was crowned European Junior Kart Champion in 2014. He then advanced into the international ADAC Formula 4 Championship, where he finished fourth in the overall standings in 2016 after two race wins. "My big goal back then was clearly Formula 1," remembers the Austrian. "I focussed completely on that." However, financial constraints hampered further progress in the single-seater classes – which motivated Preining to turn his attention to GT racing with the same determination.

Porsche Junior shootout launches Preining's GT career

In autumn 2016, Thomas Preining received a well-deserved confirmation of his talent and dedication to motorsport: an invitation to the shootout for the Porsche Motorsport junior development programme. During the selection process, the young Austrian beat more than 100 applicants at the Lausitzring and was named Porsche Junior for 2017 and 2018. For this, he received extensive support from Porsche Motorsport, which also included sports medicine and scientific training, media seminars, mental training and much more. "As a Porsche Junior, you have a coach to support you," explains Preining. "In my case, it was Sascha Maassen, to whom I am incredibly grateful – as a young newcomer you have no idea how to act with sponsors, engineers or even board members."

The support quickly paid off: Preining finished the 2017 Porsche Carrera Cup Deutschland as the second-best rookie in sixth place overall. In 2018, he took a commanding title in this one-make championship with ten wins from 14 races. At the same time, he attracted attention driving for Lechner Racing achieving third overall in the 2018 Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup. "I don't know of any racing car that demands more from you than the Porsche 911 GT3 Cup," reports Preining. "In these two one-make cups, I learned first and foremost self-development. The tight regulations offer little leeway for the setup. You're not allowed to set up the car exactly as you'd like it to be. Instead, you have to adjust your driving style to influence the balance of the car. There's no other series where you learn this skill as well as in the Porsche Cups." In 2018, the talented youngster also celebrated an overall victory at the 24 Hours of Dubai.

In 2019, Preining contested the ADAC GT Master as a Porsche Young Professional for Herberth Motorsport and also tackled the GTE-Am class of the FIA World Endurance Championship WEC with a Porsche 911 RSR fielded by the customer team Gulf Racing. At the 6 Hours of Fuji, the 1,000 Miles of Sebring and the 24 Hours of Le Mans, he and his teammates clinched fourth place. In the 2019/2020 season, Preining also supported the Porsche TAG Heuer Formula E team as a test and development driver.

In 2021, the young racer signed on as a Porsche works driver and again contested the ADAC GT Masters, this time with teammate Christian Engelhart and the Team75 Bernhard squad. For 2022, he advanced to the DTM together with the team of the two-time outright Le Mans winner – and in July 2022 secured first place at the Norisring – scoring Porsche's first victory in the history of the former touring car series, which is now contested with GT3 sports cars. "When I took part in the Porsche Junior shootout in 2016, I quickly realised what kind of career this youth talent development initiative could offer me," explains Preining. "I think it is by far the best path out there for aspiring racing drivers. With Porsche, you can make it to the World Endurance Championship – and to the DTM, as well. In my opinion, its reputation across Europe is right behind Formula 1."

The 2023 DTM champion has big goals for the future

Had he not chosen a career in professional motor racing, the 25-year-old could have followed a completely different path: “I’m very interested in architecture and building houses,” he reveals. “I like to see progress and love to create something.” After winning the DTM title, Thomas Preining would like to fulfill another big dream: “I’m eager to win all the important 24-hour races – Le Mans, Daytona and Nürburgring, because very few have achieved that by now…”

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