


# Back to the track: retired works drivers head to the “Green Hell”

*This article reflects the status at the time of its publication. The content may since have become outdated.*

**25/09/2020** With health and safety a top priority, Porsche Motorsport has drafted in reserve drivers for the Nürburgring 24 Hour. Fortunately, there's an amazing back catalogue to choose from.

Retirement normally conjures up images of slippers and lazy days, long lunches and tinkering with a hobby. Not so for former works drivers Timo Bernhard and Jörg Bergmeister: after hanging up their helmets last year they have been scrambled as eleventh hour replacements for this weekend’s 24 hour race at the Nürburgring, following a decision by Porsche Motorsport to send no Le Mans participants to the Eifel because of COVID-19.

The phone call came on Monday night – less than five days before what is set to be arguably one of the toughest tests of endurance, at one of the fiercest tracks on the planet – and prompted some quick shuffling of commitments.

“Because I’m not employed as a professional racing driver any more I had to think about what my family and three kids will do. I had to make some quick rearrangements,” smiles Bernhard, in a break from preparations at the German racetrack.

“I also got a call in the late evening,” adds Bergmeister. “I said, ‘actually I have some appointments’ but then I very quickly got my permit sorted to drive on the Nordschleife so yes, I was in and I’ll try to help as much as I can.

The last phrase is revealing. Despite being highly decorated drivers with wins all over the globe – including an overall victory for Bamber and a GT class win for Bergmeister at Le Mans – their reasoning for stepping in at the last minute is to help their former team. “We have a responsibility to the company, to give back a little bit when there are situations like this [with coronavirus]. It feels like a good thing to do,” says Bergmeister.

Bernhard agrees: “The company has done a lot for me in the past and I think now there’s a chance to return something. The spirit that we have at Porsche is that we’re not individuals, but a team. I might look slow this weekend because I haven’t done 100 laps before the race – but we’re racers and we’re here for when the brand needs us. We’ll do our best.”

Despite just a few days’ notice, there are certain hurdles that shouldn’t present problems at the race. Firstly, the German pair remain in peak physical shape. Secondly, there is no need to get to know unfamiliar team mates. “With four drivers, there’s not much driving time to get dialled in quickly. But we know each other so well that there’s not a lot of time needed on the human side of things to get ourselves acquainted,” says Bernhard.

Bergmeister agrees: “Also, the car has driven here before so it should be somewhere in the ball park. It will just need a little fine tuning hopefully.” Not that any 24-hour race is easy. Despite their vast experience, both drivers are wary of the very little seat time they will have had in the run up to the race. Bergmeister: “We’ll get 10 laps if we’re lucky. I’ve watched half a lap of onboard so I’ll try to watch the other half later. Maybe I’ll go for the fourth stint. Hopefully it’ll be dark so nobody will see my driving,” he smiles. The pair will share this weekend’s 911 GT3 R cockpit with New Zealander Earl Bamber – a fellow overall winner at Le Mans – and Dennis Olsen (Norway), with the former flying in amid tight health and safety restrictions from Mexico.

An unexpected foursome, but a fearsome one nonetheless, they will face unpredictable weather during the race: the Nürburgring is famous for its changing climes, and the later September date of the race brings more uncertainty.

“I’ve raced there when we changed slicks to wets and back again every second lap. It’s even hailed here before, during a race in May,” says Bernhard. “Many cars are contenders for the win so we stay calm and see what happens.”

If there’s a feeling of fate in the air, it’s because this year has thrown up a nice bit of symmetry.

Bernhard and Bergmeister go a long way back, having started out as factory drivers together in 2002. With almost two decades on the same team, they share a special camaraderie, friendship and history. The pair's very first outing as part of the Porsche factory squad was when they raced together at Daytona in 2002.

"Back then we won our class and the second year we won overall – so no pressure, right?" smiles Bergmeister. "To have the opportunity to race together again now is good, even if it wasn't planned."

## The race

The Nürburgring 24-hour race takes place on 26-27 September and there will be seven 911 GT3 R running in the top SP9 category, all fielded by Porsche customer teams: KCMG, Huber, Frikadelli Racing Team and Falken Motorsport. Unfortunately, Manthey-Racing Porsche will not be part of the action but Porsche remains the most represented manufacturer at the race – roughly a third of the field is made up of 911 and 718 Cayman racers.

## MEDIA ENQUIRIES



**Holger Eckhardt**

Spokesperson Motorsports LMDh, GT, Customer Racing
+49 (0) 170 / 911 4982
holger.eckhardt@porsche.de

**Image Sublines**

Path: Back to the track: retired works drivers head to the "Green Hell"/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Timo Bernhard, Jörg Bergmeister, l-r, Nürburgring 24 Hour, 2020, Porsche AG
Subline: Timo Bernhard and Jörg Bergmeister

## Link Collection

Link to this article
https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/2020/motorsports/porsche-24-hour-race-nuerburgring-retired-works-drivers-timo-bernhard-joerg-bergmeister-22434.html

Media Package
https://pmdb.porsche.de/newsroomzips/9c759498-d63b-4ed3-a14b-8e186b29ac49.zip

External Links
https://www.porsche.com/uk/motorsportandevents/motorsport/

**Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft**
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart