

How André Lotterer and Neel Jani are mastering the Formula E finale in Berlin

03/08/2020 The grand season finale of the ABB FIA Formula E Championship gets underway on Wednesday, with the first of six races in Berlin. It's not only the members of the TAG Heuer Porsche Formula E Team facing a challenging programme. Drivers Neel Jani and André Lotterer are also facing a special challenge. In the third and final episode of the 'Challenge Berlin' series, Helmut Fink, Jani and Lotterer's trainer, gives insights into the two Porsche works drivers' sporting and mental preparations.

In recent weeks Jani and Lotterer haven't been in action on the racetrack, but have broken much more of a sweat while training for the remaining six Formula E races. The enforced break applied to active motorsport, but not to the physical and mental training in the background. In Formula E, alongside physical fitness, it is mental strength that is really important. It is necessary, especially considering the unique strain of six races in nine days. Lotterer, Jani and Fink have been training together for years and understand each other intuitively.

Teamwork for almost 20 years

At first glance it might come as a surprise that Jani and Lotterer share a personal trainer. This special form of teamwork primarily shows just how much the two Porsche works drivers value each other. Fink especially appreciates the ambition and motivation that the duo has – even after almost 20 years of working together.

“When something needs doing, neither of them makes any excuses. Neel and André are always prepared to work on themselves – and with great enthusiasm,” said the Austrian. Just like the drivers have kept in touch, there has been just as much active communication with their trainer. During the coronavirus pandemic Lotterer and Jani mainly worked out in their home gyms. They sent their training data to their coach via the internet for Fink to analyse from afar so that he could modify the workout plans if necessary.

Routine sport

In addition to physical exertion, Formula E is mainly about maintaining focus and concentration, meaning that drivers need to be especially fit when it comes to endurance. In the main training phase, which usually reaches its peak shortly before the start of a motorsport season, the drivers train five times a week, for about six to seven hours a day. “After it was clear that the Formula E season would be put on hold, we increased the intensity of our workouts again up until mid-July, meaning that André and Neel are well prepared for Berlin,” said Fink.

No travel and a lot of time at home were the perfect conditions for that. The training programme usually starts with several hours of endurance training in the morning, followed by strength training after lunch. This is usually finished off by honing coordination skills. After the coronavirus restrictions were eased, Fink visited Jani in Switzerland and Lotterer in France, for an intensive week of training with each of them.

The advantage of mental strength

The fact that Jani and Lotterer are mentally strong has already been proved by them winning the 24 Hours of Le Mans, where focus and concentration play an important role. To train for that, they both switch to a special sporting discipline, rifle shooting, like in a biathlon. “Every shot is a mental challenge,” explained Fink. Disruptive factors are often integrated, such as solving maths problems or additional endurance training units now and then.

Fink: “Only when you stay in the flow and the feeling is coherent does everything fall into place.” Visualising also plays a major role, and that is mainly practiced when working with the simulator. “Racing drivers create a type of film in their mind. They drive the track virtually, internalise braking

points, for example, and in doing so visualise every detail of the track in their mind," explained Fink. Sim racing is another perfect mental training tool for them, which wasn't neglected in recent weeks thanks to the ABB Formula E 'Race at Home Challenge' and the virtual 24-hour race at Le Mans. "Even a small mistake is punished in Esports racing. Virtual races require a high level of fine motor skills, whereas real-world racing also requires gross motor skills. The external influences in the race car give the drivers better feedback in their bodies," said Fink.

Performance is the main goal

Ultimately one thing matters to every racing driver: winning. In Berlin there will be plenty of opportunities to be up there at the front, with six races in nine days. Fink doesn't believe that the compact format will increase the pressure significantly. "Pressure is always there. When something doesn't go as hoped for, the drivers have the opportunity to do it better the next day. An athlete always wants to perform at their best, so the compact format is more of an advantage than having to wait a few weeks for the next race." Once a racing driver puts on their helmet, the only thing on their mind is fast lap times. Any thoughts about the coronavirus pandemic and the strict safety concept on site will be suppressed while they are in the car at least. Lotterer and Jani are well prepared for their appearances in Berlin, thanks as always to their shared trainer.

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