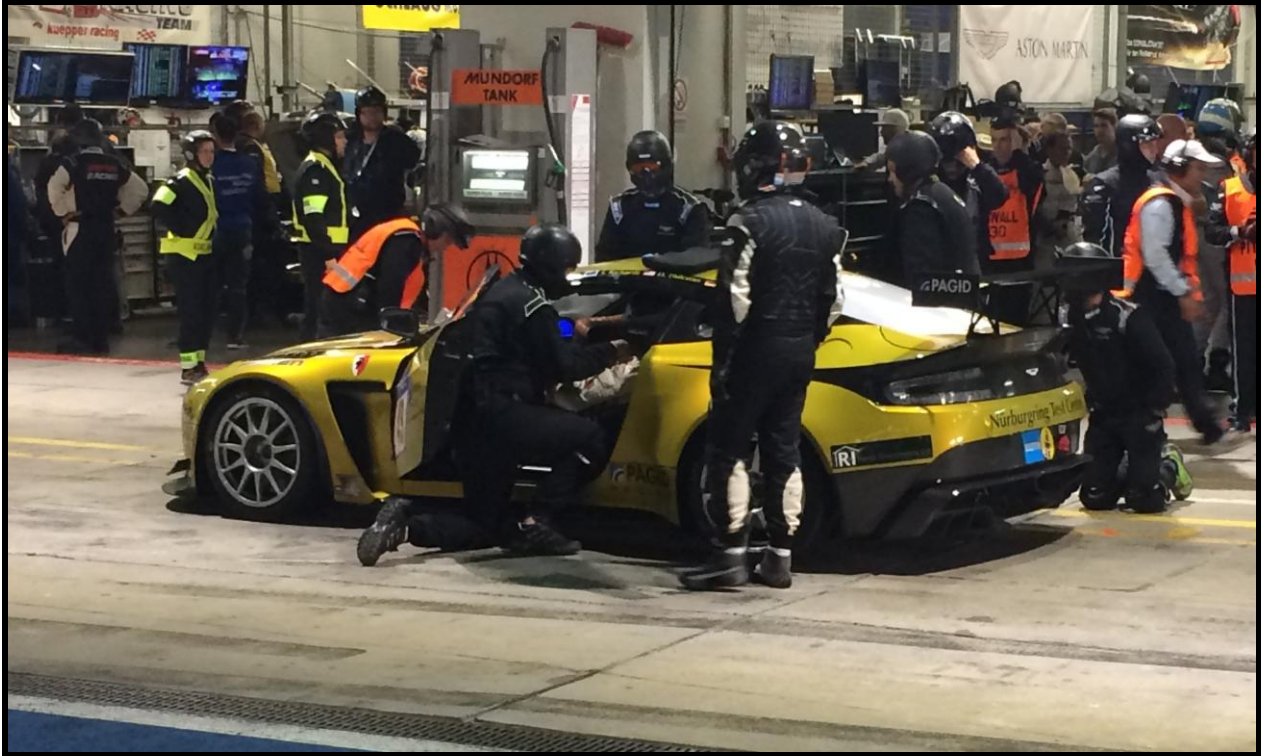


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THILENIUS GROUP and Aston Martin Finish Fourth in 2017 ADAC Zurich Nurburgring 24 Hour Race



Hey! The 2017 ADAC Zurich Nurburgring 24 Hour race, held May 27-28, was my third attempt to get to the finish of the world's most difficult race. Thanks to all the hard work by my co-drivers, Tony Richards, Jürgen Kroner and Wolfgang Schuhbauer, and the crews from the **Aston Martin Test Centre** and **Aston Martin Racing**, I am thrilled to report we brought the **Aston Martin V12 Vantage** home fourth in the SP8 class. Hop on board and enjoy a glimpse into the life of a not-so-famous racecar driver as I take on the challenge of 24 hours at the Nurburgring...

May 23

5:30 AM (T-minus 4 days, 1 hour)

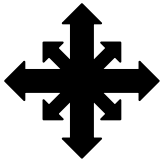
- "Ouch, 5:30 already! What a glamorous life I lead as an international racecar driver." I am off to Germany.

7:00 AM (3 days, 23.5 hours)

- I am through security at Orange County. "TSA is always such a joy, but it I thought it would be worse with the recent attack in Manchester. What do they think that attack will accomplish? It is senseless."

5:30 PM (T-minus 3 days, 16 hours)

- There are no delays in Atlanta. After scoring my last burrito for a few days, I am on the airplane to Frankfurt. I managed to stay awake on the flight to Atlanta, so I should get some good sleep.



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May 24

9:30 AM (T-minus 3 days, 6 hours)

- “Customs and baggage claim in Germany are so much more efficient than they are in Atlanta.” I am in my rental car in no time and off to the Nurburgring.

10:30 AM (T-minus 3 days, 5 hours)

- Travel for racing rarely allows me time to play tourist, but on my way to the Nurburgring, I make a detour through the town of Bad Soden, the ancestral home of the Thilenius family. There is no parade in my honor. Apparently, Bad Soden is one of the nicer (read, more expensive) places to live around Frankfurt, so that goes a long way towards explaining why my ancestors had to leave.

12:30 PM (T-minus 3 days, 3 hours)

- I roll into Nurburg. Three days before the race, the campgrounds are already full!
- I stop in at Rotek Racing to get the latest on the team’s status. It looks like Rotek is closing up shop. “Bummer, I will miss racing with Rotek.” We had a great team in 2015 and 2016 and should have won the 24 hour both years.

2:00 PM (T-minus 3 days, 1.5 hours)

- Pulling in to the **Aston Martin Test Centre** I can barely contain myself. “This place is awesome! How do they make all their cars beautiful from every angle?”

- **Aston Martin** knows how to take care of their drivers. All I have to do is show up and drive!

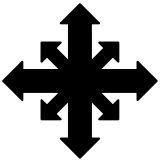
- **Aston Martin** names all their racecars. My **V12 Vantage** is Woody. Over the weekend, I hear two different stories about how Woody got his name. One story has a G rating. The other story is less politically correct...



- “I am so honored to be driving for **Aston Martin** in this race. I hope they don’t figure out Woody is the first, and only, **Aston Martin** I’ve ever driven.”

4:00 PM (T-minus 2 days, 23.5 hours)

- Registration and driving gear technical inspection is quick, painless and conducted 100% in German.



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- The drivers move into the **Aston Martin Racing** transporter, our home away from home for the next few days. The **GT8** is there. The **GT8** is the favorite to win in the SP8 class. Woody may not be able to keep up with the **GT8** on pace, but it is a long race and anything can happen.

5:30 PM (T-minus 2 days, 22 hours)

- I meet Tony and Jackie for dinner at the Dorint Hotel and then drinks in the Cockpit Bar. The Cockpit Bar is a “must-see” at the Nurburgring!

10:00 PM (T-minus 2 days, 19.5 hours)

- Off to bed.



May 25

8:00 AM (T-minus 2 days, 7.5 hours)

- I wake up to the sound of racecars. “The Nurburgring is the world’s greatest snooze alarm; the fast guys come by every nine minutes!”

11:00 AM (T-minus 2 days, 4.5 hours)

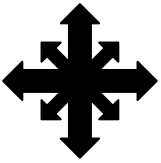
- Following breakfast, the team meets at the transporter to discuss our race strategy. The general direction is to not worry about pace or position until after the sun comes up on Sunday. Half shaft durability is a concern due to the torque of the V12, so we need to stay off the curbs wherever possible. For emphasis, we review video of what lines not to take. It is not lost on me most of the video is from VLN 2 with me driving! “Some people’s purpose in life is to be a bad example!” I like to use a lot of curb; time to find a new line around the Nurburgring.
- The team’s attitude towards me is different than it was at VLN 2. The driver rotation in practice and qualifying is set to give me the best chance to set a fast time. It is cool being the “fast guy”, but I feel some pressure to perform.
- I meet my teammates in the **GT8**. At the risk of sounding like a little kid, it is incredibly cool to say I am teammates with World Endurance Championship drivers Darren Turner and Nicky Thiim!

12:30 PM (T-minus 2 days, 3 hours)

- Drivers’ briefing in the media center. With 160 cars in the race and each car having three or four drivers, it is a big meeting.

2:00 PM (T-minus 2 days, 1.5 hours)

- Radio checks. It seems like every team I race with has different radio wiring and again I am getting my helmet updated. In the States, there are IMSA and NASCAR plugs. In Europe, they use the IMSA type plug but wire it differently. In



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the United Kingdom, they use MRTC. Not all the systems are compatible. Updating my helmet is a pain, but communication in the 24 hour is critical.

4:30 PM (T-minus 1 day, 23 hours)

- Wolfgang starts free practice bedding brakes.
- I record a 10:13.983 on my single practice lap with lots of traffic and a 60 kmph zone. "The car is much better than the driver at this point! I need to get ahead of the car for qualifying. I don't feel much like the 'fast guy' right now." My new seating position was good, but the lap belt kept working loose and I need to do a better job anticipating the rev-limiter.

9:30 PM (T-minus 1day, 18 hours)

- Night qualifying. "How cool is it being the 'fast guy'? Very! I got a new set of **Yokohama** tires for qualifying and the team did their best to set me for a fast time. My first lap was okay at 9:34 with a bit of traffic. My second lap was much cleaner, but I hit traffic in Kesselchen, the worst possible place to lose momentum before the long uphill climb."
- My 9:34.552 qualifies us P4 in class and all the drivers record their required two laps. We are qualified!

11:00 PM (T-minus 1day, 16.5 hours)

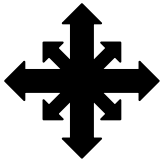
- Team debriefing. What a great start to the weekend. I have not had any significant problems other than the belts working loose. Drivers are happy. Visibility at night is good. The **Aston Martin V12 Vantage** is consistent and on pace.
- Since we are qualified, we decide to skip the second qualifying session in the morning. I hate passing up track time, but SP8 class cars start in the first starting group regardless where we qualify and the risk-reward just is not there. If my time does not hold up for P4, it will only cost us a spot or two on the grid.
- The **GT8** is on the provisional pole, but may have an engine issue.



May 26

9:30 AM (T-minus 1 day, 6 hours)

- I am off to breakfast while the second qualifying session is underway. "Every fiber of my being wants to be on track. I know I could get P3 with a clean lap, but saving the car gets us closer to our goal of finishing the race. Still sucks!"
- The #41 Lexus ISF jumps us in qualifying and we slip to P5. The #69 Lamborghini Huracan takes P1 from the **GT8**.



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12:00 PM (T-minus 1 day, 3.5 hours)

- Another race strategy meeting. As quickest qualifier, I get to start the race. My goal is to find some clear track, get into a good rhythm and protect the car. Oh yeah, they also want me to use less curbing and get better fuel economy too.

3:30 PM (T-minus 1 day)

- I spend the rest of the day in the **Aston Martin** lounge above the pit lane with Peter Cate, one of the drivers in the **GT8**. The ADAC 24H Classic for vintage cars and the top 30 qualifying to set the front of the grid for the 24 hour follow WTCC qualifying. I have all the food and drinks I could want to go along with video feeds and live timing and scoring. This is the way to watch a race!

May 27

12:00 PM (T-minus 3.5 hours)

- I sleep in as long as I can before heading to the transporter for a team meeting. Our plan is to run single stints during the day and go to double stints at night.

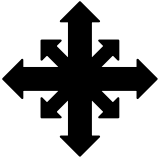
1:30 PM (T-minus 2 hours)

- I buckle in for the push to the grid. To save fuel we keep the engine off. The steering is incredibly heavy without assist. I am getting my arm workout in today.
- On the bright side, pushing to the grid means I do not have to worry about stalling the car. From my first session in the **V12 Vantage**, I have struggled to get away from a standing start without stalling. If there was a clutch pedal, it would be easy, but the engine calibration and dual clutch transmission make launching the car smoothly almost impossible. It is hard to look cool when you repeatedly stall a dual clutch transmission car in the pit lane!
- Thousands of people fill the grid. I am too nervous to walk around much, but I do make a couple trips to the restroom. The drivers pose for photographs, sign autographs and shake hands a lot. Everyone tries to keep it light, but the butterflies are there. In moments like this, I am alive!



3:00 PM (T-minus 30 minutes)

- Hydrate. Helmet on. Belt in. More handshakes. It is hot. The grid clears. The V12 roars to life. Radio check.
- “No way am I going to stall the car on the grid in front of 200,000 fans.” I use the combination of cold tires, Woody’s big V12 and an aggressive stab at the throttle



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to get off the line with some serious wheel spin. The team approves, "That is how you launch the car!"

- The pace lap is crazy! Fans are everywhere around the track! I wave to the crowd and give the corner workers the thumbs up. We are all in for a long night.

3:30 PM (Start)

- Coming down the Döttinger Höhe straight, I try to build heat in the tires and am flat out long before the Hohenrain chicane leading to the front straight. As the field takes the green, I gap the two SP8 Mustangs and hang onto the lead pack.
- The hot weather is hurting our top speed. I catch the #41 Lexus anticipating I will be able to motor by on the Döttinger Höhe, but all I can do is hang in the draft. "That's not good." I take the #41 Lexus under the brakes in Turn 1 for P4 in class and pass the #32 Lexus when he slows with mechanical issues. "P3! Yeah, I know I am not supposed to care this early, but I do. It is a race after all."
- There is too much understeer in the slow corners, so I ask about a tire pressure adjustment. The foot box is hot! My left foot keeps melting to the dead pedal.

5:00 PM (1.5 hours in)

- After seven race laps, I pit from P3 and hand the car over to Jürgen. We fall to P4 with the stop. Jürgen runs a great stint to keep us in contact with the #41 Lexus and ahead of the Mustangs.

6:30 PM (3 hours in)

- Tony takes over from Jürgen. We fall to P5 on the stop, but Tony soon has us back in P4.

8:00 PM (4.5 hours in)

- The crew calls in Tony at the end of his stint to turn the car over to Wolfgang. The combination of the heat and the language barrier confuse Tony and he pits from the backside of the Grand Prix circuit instead of on the front straight, costing us a couple minutes. It is our first mistake, but we maintain P4.

9:00 PM (5.5 hours in)

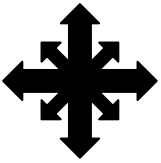
- Wolfgang pits. Jürgen starts his second stint. Auxiliary lights installed.
- The heat is taking a toll on the drivers, so we may delay our plan to go to double stints. I hang out in the pit box so I am ready when they need me.

10:00 PM (6.5 hours in)

- Jürgen has a front tire fail on the Döttinger Höhe. A quick stop for a new tire does not hurt us too badly, but we fall to P5.
- Laps later, Jürgen has both front tires go down at the same time. We suspect debris cut down the tires. The double failure strands the car on track until the safety workers tow the car out of harm's way. The **Aston Martin Test Centre** crew locates the car and installs two new **Yokohama** tires on the side of the track. The double failure cost us many laps.

11:30 PM (8 hours in)

- I take over from Jürgen to run a night double stint. The race has been chaotic so far. It does not get better. One of the Glickenhau cars hits me in the right rear and the #70 GT4 car hits me in the right front. I spend the rest of my stint dodging cars and debris. The close calls are making me gun-shy when I need to be aggressive.



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May 28

2:00 AM (10.5 hours in)

- On the last lap of my double stint, the car pulls slightly left entering the chicane on the Grand Prix circuit. I noticed, but the car felt fine exiting the chicane and entering the Nordschleife. In the fast downhill right in Hatztenbach, it was all I could do to keep the car off the guardrail. “Oh crap!” The left front tire failed and the realization sets in; I have more than 20 Km to go on a flat tire. The vibration in the chassis and steering wheel is horrendous and it gets worse when the team asks me to slow to 40 Kmph to avoid damaging the car. I turn on the hazard lights and do my best to stay right. Sometimes the right is the safe place to be and sometimes not. In the dark, I know I am almost invisible to fast traffic. The closing speeds are ridiculous. Every time I see headlights in my mirrors, I put my head back against the headrest and try not to think about what would happen if a GT3 car hit me going more than 200 Kmph faster. This is the most difficult lap I have ever driven.
- I make it to the pit lane. I am spent, mentally and physically. My hands are raw. I have burns on my heel and knee from the floorboard and center console. My calf starts to cramp from dehydration. I barely have the energy to take off my helmet, but the crew is there with water and the team physio sends me to the transporter to eat and hydrate before I head back to a shower and sleep.
- Fortunately, the tire failure only damages the brake cooling ducts. The ducts are repaired in a flash and Tony heads out for his night double stint.

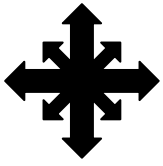
5:30 AM (14 hours in)

- I could sure use another couple of hours of sleep, but my next stint is coming up and I need to be there by 6:00 AM.
- In the night, Tony drove a brilliant double stint to get us back up to P4 before turning the car over to Wolfgang.
- The **GT8** continues to lead in SP8.

6:30 AM (15 hours in)

- I take over from Wolfgang. The exhaust has developed a leak, probably a result of being towed with two flat front tires earlier in the race. The leak makes the V12 sound great, but it is costing us about 20 to 30 Kmph in top speed. Traffic has thinned a bit and I finally find a good rhythm. Our fuel economy target is 13 liters per lap. I do the math and know I am burning more fuel than I should, about 13.5 to 14 liters per lap. With two laps to go, the call comes for me to save fuel. I start short shifting on the last green shift light rather than the first yellow. I meet the fuel economy target, but the crew asks me to





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save fuel again. Now I am a little worried, so I shift even earlier and try to carry more speed in a couple corners by using fourth gear rather than third.

- I run a 9:29.619 to set the fast lap while saving fuel. After I set the fast lap, Tony said the crew came up to him and said, "I asked David to save fuel and he goes faster, so I asked him to save fuel again." Realistically, the fast lap was probably more due to traffic than the fuel saving, but I will take the accolades. More importantly, we were back up to P3 in class.

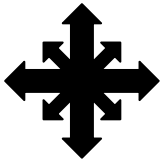
10:00 AM (18.5 hours in)

- Tony takes over from me and has a great stint going until a GT3 car pushes him into the barriers in Adenauer Forst. Tony is gutted, but is able to drive the car back to the pits. The contact bent the left front tie rod and damaged the body. In no time, the **Aston Martin Test Centre** and **Aston Martin Racing** teams have the bodywork patched up, the tie rod replaced, the alignment checked and we are back on track in P4 with Jürgen at the wheel.



11:30 AM (20 hours in)

- My last stint is my best so far. My eyes are finally looking far enough ahead. Changing my shift point has messed up my flow in a few corners, but my pace and fuel economy is good. I take over P3 and put 8 minutes on the #45 Mustang running in fourth.



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1:00 PM (21.5 hours in)

- I make my last pit stop for tires, fuel and driver change. When I come to a stop in the pit lane, smoke pours out of the back of the car. It appears the exhaust leak cooked a gasket on the transaxle and most of the fluid went away. I had no indication in the car there was any issue. The car was shifting perfectly. "This sucks!" Our only hope is to let everything cool down, add some fluid and run the last lap to the checkered flag. I wanted a podium finish so badly. "@%\$&*(!"

3:00 PM (23.5 hours in)

- Jürgen buckles in to take the car to the finish. After 23.5 hours of dry track, it starts to rain. We put Jürgen on rain tires and send him earlier than we wanted to avoid being caught in the pit lane by a red flag. The rules of the 24 hour are clear; you must take the checkered flag on the track to classify as a finisher. Get caught in the pit lane when the 24 hours elapse or fail to finish the last lap and it is as if you did not even show up. The Nurburgring is hardcore. I like it.

3:30 PM (24 hours in)

- Checkered flag! We made it! P4! The **Aston Martin GT8** wins!



Mission accomplished. Finishing the ADAC Zurich Nurburgring 24 Hour race is immense. I am so honored to be a small part of the racing heritage at **Aston Martin** and could not be more proud of the effort put forth by my co-drivers and the **Aston Martin Test Centre** and **Aston Martin Racing** team.

About THILENIUS GROUP

THILENIUS GROUP, LLC based in California provides vehicle dynamics engineering, motorsports and sports marketing services. With over 30 years experience engineering vehicle dynamics at the OEM level, motorsports and sports marketing, THILENIUS GROUP can help you reach your goals. Information about THILENIUS GROUP services is available at www.thileniusgroup.com . Latest updates available on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ThileniusGroup and Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ThileniusGroup>.