

## THILENIUS GROUP Victorious in Portugal

Hey! Welcome to 2026 and a new year of motorsports adventures! I kicked off my season February 5-8 at Autodromo International Algarve in Portugal in the **GT Winter Series 6 Hours of Portimão**. **SchnitzelAlm Racing** invited me back to drive the awesome **AMG GT2** with Kenneth Heyer, Wilhem Kühne and Mortiz Wiskirchen.



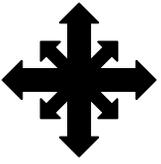
Despite rain flooding the entire country the **SchnitzelAlm Racing** team was able to score victories in both GT2 and GT4 classes.

**SchnitzelAlm Racing**, perennial front runners in the **GT Winter Series**, and I discussed many options about joining the team over the winter. I had been hoping for a chance to drive their **AMG GT4**, but was thrilled when they offered me the opportunity to get back into the **AMG GT2** which I drove in the 2023 Nürburgring 24 Hour. The **AMG GT2** is like an **AMG GT4** on steroids; similar aerodynamics and cornering speeds but with oodles more power (707 hp vs. 544 hp)!

Autodromo International Algarve was a new track for me. Portugal has been inundated in 2026 with more rain in the first month than they normally get in a year and rain

was forecast every day. Somehow, the idea of navigating a new track for the first time in the rain with over 700 hp under my right foot was a bit less enticing than you might imagine, so I hit a friend's simulator to learn the track and get my brain up to speed. Despite my lack of experience on simulators, I am getting more comfortable with the process and it definitely helped me at Portimão. Although, I can say the simulator does not do the track justice. Autodromo International Algarve is an incredible track with elevation changes in almost every corner, more than a few blind crests and undulations that are much more severe in real life.

Fortunately, the weekend started off smoothly with some dry running on Thursday. I normally pride myself on being faster in real life, but I finished the day a bit off my simulator times with a 1:49.16. I felt okay about my progress. Charging into Turn 1 at over 180 mph in the **AMG GT2** is a bit different in real life than it is on the simulator.



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Heading back to the hotel after the first day on track, I was optimistic and looking forward to a second day of practice. I will save you the ugly details, but I spent most of the night battling food poisoning. Needless to say, I was in no condition to drive on Friday and missed a day of practice on what turned out to be a wet track.

My first laps of the Autodromo International Algarve in the wet were in the final practice in the **AMG GT4**. The **AMG GT4** on **Pirelli** rain tires was a familiar and forgiving way to get back on track. The session was interrupted almost immediately by a red flag, but not before I put down a lap that briefly placed us first in GT4 and fifth overall.

My first laps in the wet in the **AMG GT2** were in qualifying. I was nominated to run the first qualifying session with Kenneth and Moritz taking

the second and third sessions. Our final qualifying time would be the average of our three best laps.

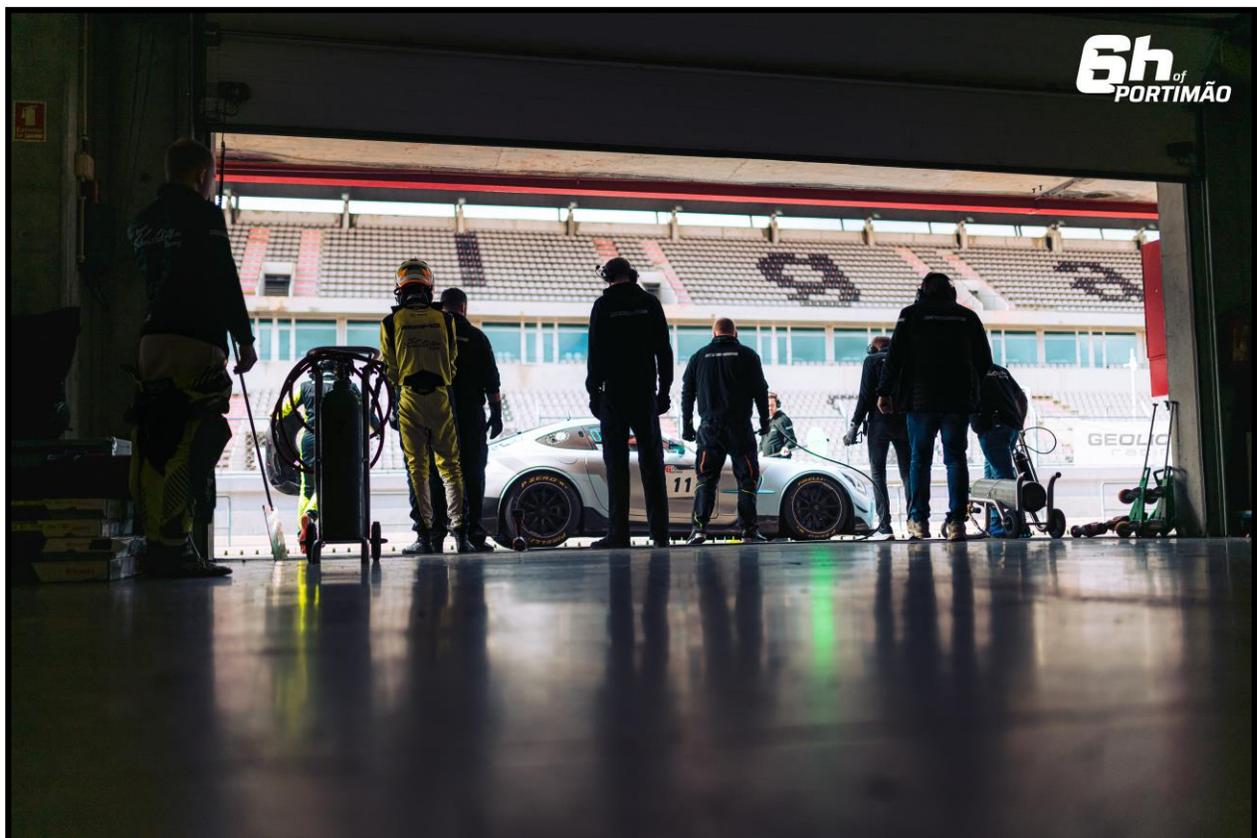
In the wet, the **AMG GT2** is a much different animal than the **AMG GT4**. The balance between the amount of grip and amount of power is tilted much more toward power. I was conservative on my anti-lock brake and traction control settings on the slippery asphalt and discovered when the traction control engaged it was reluctant to let go. It took me a few laps to figure out the best strategy when the traction control engaged was to pull an upshift. The upshift would reset the traction control and simultaneously reduce the amount of torque at the wheels. It was a challenging session. I had a harmless spin in Turn 5 when I left my braking a bit late, but showed improvement on most laps before turning the car over to Kenneth and Moritz. The track dried throughout

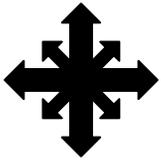


qualifying. Our time placed us 11<sup>th</sup> overall, gridding us just ahead of the GT4 class pole sitting **SchnitzelAlm Racing AMG GT4** in 13<sup>th</sup>.

The forecast for race day looked mostly promising, dry early with a chance of rain in the final hour. When the **SchnitzelAlm Racing AMG GT2** and **AMG GT4** cars were rolled out to the grid, the track was still damp from overnight rain. The team decided to go with an aggressive tire strategy and put both cars on **Pirelli** racing slicks. Starting on the dry weather tires was the right decision for the **AMG GT4** which led the race overall in the first hour after the leading cars had to pit for slicks.

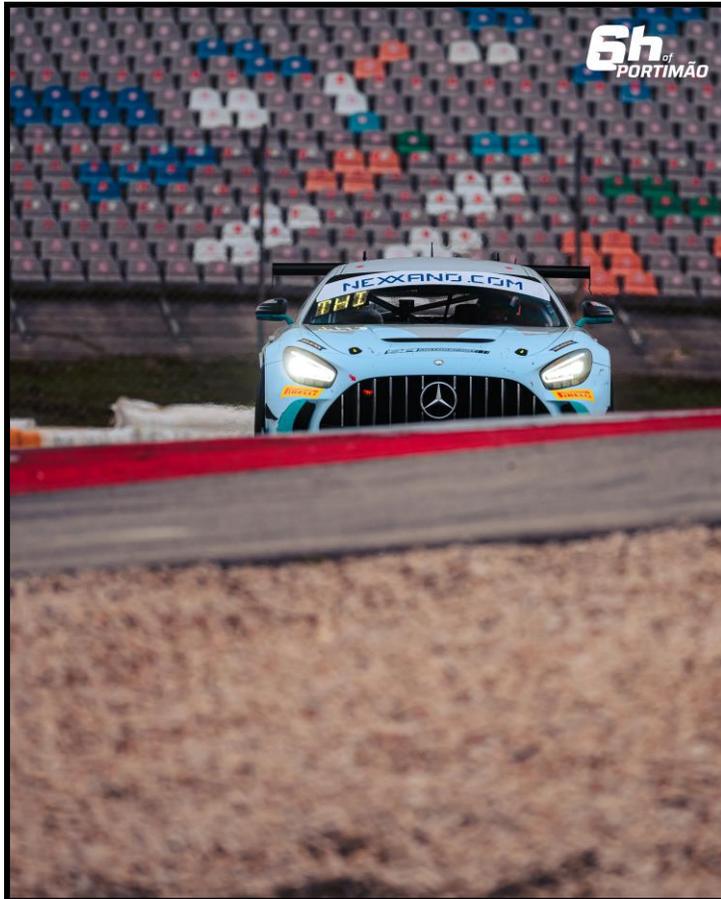
Starting the **AMG GT2** on slicks did not have the same result. The key to driving a wet track with a dry weather slick tire is building enough heat in the tire to keep the rubber in the proper operating range. The **Pirelli** GT2 tire is based on their GT3 tire. GT3 cars have a large amount of aerodynamic downloading which builds heat in the tires. When the green flag fell, Kenneth quickly discovered that without the aerodynamic loading of a GT3 car the tires dropped out of their operating temperature range and he had almost no grip. It was painful to watch on the timing screens as the **SchnitzelAlm Racing AMG GT2** quickly fell to dead last behind all of the GT3, GT4, Cup 2 and Cup 3 cars. Kenneth did a masterful simply keeping the car on the track while the track dried. As all of the cars that had started on wet weather tires began to pit, Kenneth moved forward and was in 10<sup>th</sup> at the end of the first hour.





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Kenneth handed the **SchnitzelAlm Racing AMG GT2** over to Willi. Willi delivered a solid stint running consistent lap times in his first race in the **AMG GT2**. Because the team had chosen to start on slicks, we were out of phase with most of the field and our position on track varied widely with pit stops. Kenneth has us 8<sup>th</sup> overall after the second hour and we were 13<sup>th</sup> at the end of the third hour with Willi behind the wheel. Moritz took over the driving duties from Willi and posted the fastest lap for the car at a blistering 1:44.608, quicker than many of the GT3 cars in the race.

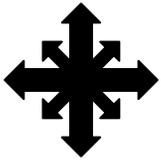


After waiting patiently, I took over from Mortiz. Foreshadowing what was to come, I rolled out of the pitlane and saw mist on the windshield. The team assured me rain was not due for some time, so I put my head down and went to work finding speed. My first lap was 1:48.713, 0.43 seconds quicker than I had run in practice and matched the times I had run on the simulator. Ultimately my fastest lap was a 1:47.397 while battling through traffic.

Towards the end of my stint, the clouds rolled into the circuit. Mist on the windshield in Turn 1 soon transitioned to light rain and eventually to a partially and then fully wet track. While I had temperature in my **Pirelli** slicks, the grip was reduced, but manageable. I kept my race engineer, Günni Aberer, abreast of the situation and

as the rain began to fall in earnest we decided to pit for a driver change and rain tires.

Unfortunately, we waited one lap too long to pit. I lost tire temperature and the grip disappeared. I went into survival mode, adjusted the brake and traction control, put the car into third gear and just tried to get the car back to the pitlane in one piece. I made it through 13 of 15 corners before losing the rear end in Turn 14. All the counter-steering I could manage was too little and too late. I went to throttle to try to spin the car on the asphalt, but only succeeded in driving the car uphill onto the grass inside the track. The car stalled when I lost momentum and got stuck in third gear. I refired the engine, but I did not have the grip to drive uphill in the wet grass. My only option was to engage reverse and back down the hill. In the **AMG GT2**, reverse can only be engaged from neutral and neutral can only be engaged from first gear. It took me a few attempts and stalls to convince the transmission to downshift to first gear so I could get neutral and



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then reverse back onto the track. Some grass and flowers were harmed, but there was no car damage from my off-track excursion.

I was upset with myself, but my **SchnitzelAlm Racing** team took it in stride and installed a set of **Pirelli** rain tires while I buckled Moritz into the cockpit to take the car to the checkered flag. Team owner Thomas Angerer let me know I should apply for a job at the track mowing the grass and crew member Ben Piepho commented that I was the first driver that has ever brought the team flowers in a pitstop, but I deserved some ribbing. My single lap in the rain on slicks gave me a fresh perspective on the stellar job Kenneth did at the start. I have no idea how Kenneth held onto the **AMG GT2** in those conditions!

In the last hour, the rain came back with a vengeance, but Mortiz brought the **SchnitzelAlm Racing AMG GT2** home in 12<sup>th</sup>, one position ahead of the **SchnitzelAlm Racing AMG GT4**; securing the victories in both the GT2 and GT4 classes!



## 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, road racing motorsports and sports marketing, THILENIUS GROUP can help you reach your goals. Information about THILENIUS GROUP services is available at [www.thileniusgroup.com](http://www.thileniusgroup.com). Latest updates available on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ThileniusGroup](https://www.facebook.com/ThileniusGroup) and on X at [@ThileniusGroup](https://twitter.com/ThileniusGroup) / X.