

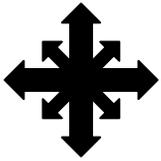
Heavy Shunt Ends ADAC Zurich Nurburgring 24 Hour Race for Thilenius Group



“It was a dark and stormy night” seems an appropriate way to begin the story of my adventures at the 2018 ADAC Zurich Nurburgring 24 Hour race! Finishing just off the podium in 2017 was a tough pill to swallow, so I was hoping for a better finish this year in the SP8 class **Aston Martin GT8** that won the 2017 race. My co-drivers this year were German automotive journalist Jens Dralle and my returning co-drivers from 2017, Tony Richards and Jürgen Kroner. Unfortunately, our race ended at about half distance when I had a major shunt and severely damaged the **GT8**.

Rain in free practice on Thursday foreshadowed the role weather would play all weekend. I logged a 10:52 lap, but found the conditions not suitable for our **Dunlop** tires, it was too wet for slicks and too dry for rain tires. Despite the conditions, the balance of the **GT8** was good and I made some progress by adjusting the ABS and traction control. Conditions improved through the session for Tony, Jürgen and Jens.

The rain moved on before night qualifying. 60 kmph zones and traffic spoiled both of my qualifying laps and my fast lap of 10:11 was well off the pace. Tony took advantage of the dry track to qualify the **GT8** P3 in class with a 9:35. Fortunately, the cautions cleared and there was time available after Jürgen and Jens logged their required laps for another attempt. I roared around the Nordschleife in the dark, laid down a 9:19.838, and briefly had us P2 in class before our teammates in the **Aston Martin Racing GT4 Vantage** edged us by 0.2 seconds!



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Because of the peculiarities of qualifying at the Nurburgring where the SP8 class cars always start in the first race group, there was little incentive to try for a quicker time in final qualifying on Friday morning. Jens lacked experience in the **GT8** and the **GT8** requires commitment in the corners to take advantage of the aerodynamic grip to be quick. To build his confidence, I lobbied the team to give Jens some additional time. He improved significantly.

As final qualifying wound down, the **GT8** dropped from P3 to P5 in class. When the team asked, I confidently told them I could find 15 seconds on a clear track, so they bolted on a fresh set of soft compound **Dunlop** tires and sent me out to improve our starting position. A 60 kmph zone in Schwalbenschwanz ruined my first lap. I had

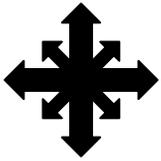


another flyer going on my second lap, but when I came over the crest before Flugplatz at over 130 mph, I found a huge cloud of dust and an Audi TT flipping through the air. I braked hard, steered onto the apex curbing and just managed to avoid the Audi. Concerned I had damaged the splitter on the **GT8**, I aborted the

lap, but truthfully, I did not have much heart to continue the lap after the narrow escape. The Audi driver walked away and I even received a note of thanks from his daughter. Above is a screen shot of me sneaking past the Audi. Yes, it was as close as it looks!

Friday evening, all the drivers went to the **AMR Performance Centre** for the introduction of the **DB11 AMR** hosted by **Aston Martin** President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Andy Palmer. It was an honor to be introduced to the exclusive media and VIP guests alongside **Aston Martin Racing** 'works' drivers Darren Turner, Jonny Adam, Alex Lynne, Marco Sorensen, Nicki Thiim and Maxime Martin.





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Race day dawned sunny and warm with rain predicted to begin after dark. As the quickest qualifier, I had the honor of starting the ADAC Zurich Nurburgring 24 Hour for the third straight year. I jumped up to P3 in class before taking the green flag when the



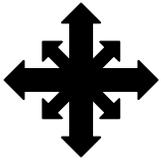
GT4 Vantage that had qualified a few rows ahead of me had a fuel pump problem and held up the other SP8 class cars. For the rest of my stint, I latched onto the back of a GT4 BMW M4. The BMW made a great drafting partner on the long straights and I set the fast race lap for the **GT8** at 9:14.449. After seven laps, I turned the car over to Tony and later got to discuss my stint with **Aston Martin** legend Dr. Ulrich Bez! Tony ran a great stint before handing the car off to Jürgen. The **GT8** and our **Aston Martin Racing** team were running faultlessly when Jens started his first stint. I took over from Jens in P6 for my second stint, running from twilight to dark. I was in traffic constantly and caught the Lexus

in P4 right before I had to pit for fuel. Tony, Jürgen and Jens kept the **GT8** in contact with the other cars in SP8 with solid second stints.

As I prepared for my third stint, lightning illuminated the skies and rain started to fall on parts of the Nordschleife. A majority of the track was still dry, so when I took over from Jens we decided to keep the car on the soft compound **Dunlop** tires. After four laps, the final few kilometers, including Brunnchen, Pflanzgarten and the long Döttinger Höhe straight, became particularly treacherous in the rain. I pitted for a set of full rain tires and topped up with fuel. Knowing we still had over half the race to go, I took a conservative approach; continually adjusting the ABS, traction control and my lines for the shifting conditions. Rain soaked the entire track. Fog rose up from the warm track surface. Lightning flashed across the sky. The spray off the cars hung in the air. Headlights from factory backed GT3 cars flashed brilliantly in the mirrors. Visibility was at a premium. The Nurburgring is tough!

Well into the stint, the rain eased in Hatzenbach. Accelerating hard through the slight left kink, the **GT8** snapped sideways and climbed up the curbing before slapping the guardrail with the left side. Bouncing off the guardrail rotated the **GT8** and it speared across the track into the guardrail on the opposite side of the track. Our race was over. The **GT8** was two feet shorter. The left rear tire and wheel assembly was gone. The right rear suspension was broken. After an ambulance ride and a quick check-up at the medical center, I immediately went to the pit box to apologize to the team.

I reviewed the video of the accident looking for clues to answer the obvious question, "What happened?" The best conclusion I can draw is I got behind in adjusting the traction control to the track conditions. On the laps prior to the accident, I had set the traction control for the extreme wet conditions. The track was damp in Hatzenbach, but



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did not have any standing water. I was taking advantage of the increased grip and had just shifted up while accelerating through the kink at just above 100 mph. I believe I got wheel spin on some paint and the traction control cut power. The combination of wet paint, my slight steering input in the kink and weight transfer off the rear tires from the traction control intervention created the initial oversteer. I counter-steered to correct the oversteer, but was unable to keep the **GT8** from climbing the left curbing and hitting the guardrail. I suspect the contact with the guardrail damaged the left rear suspension resulting in too much toe-out. The suspension damage caused the **GT8** to oversteer violently across the track into the guardrail on the right. Had I reduced the aggressiveness of the traction control to match the track conditions in Hattenbach, it is possible the traction control intervention would have been less severe and the initial oversteer might have never occurred. As I said, the Nurburgring is tough.

I feel horrible my mistake ended our race. Tony, Jürgen, Jens and the entire **Aston Martin Racing** team deserved a much better result. I appreciate all the support I received from my teammates and the **Aston Martin Racing** team through the whole week. On the bright side, after extensive repairs, the **GT8** took part in the **Aston Martin Racing Festival** race at Le Mans in June. Now all I have to figure out is when I will be back!



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