



Motorsport

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IN PROFILE



TIMO BERNHARD



Timo Bernhard couldn't have imagined what an extraordinary and successful career he would have when he signed his Porsche Junior contract on May

19th 1999. He still has the letter he received with the invitation to the Porsche young driver selection event. "I went along, but had no expectations at all," he remembers. Nevertheless, his efforts shone brighter than those of other candidates, securing the then eighteen-year-old the chance of a lifetime.

"To be honest, I didn't really know what was in store. At that time in my career, I didn't think beyond the next race. Gradually, however, I came to understand what a big opportunity I'd been given and what the Porsche legend really meant."

Despite not appreciating the gravity of his situation, Porsche had always held a strong attraction for the young German. "The brand

meant something special to me. Porsche people are passionate. There's always the sense of being part of a family."

Today, Bernhard is the longest-serving Porsche works driver and the only one to have achieved champion status in all categories of the 'Porsche Pyramid'; he won Porsche Carrera Cup Germany in 2001, took the GT title in the American Le Mans Series in 2004 and won the LMP2 class there in 2007 and 2008 in the RS Spyder.

He was also the first driver to conduct a function test of the 919 Hybrid. "I was involved in the development of the car from the beginning. Driving it for the first time in 2013's 'rollout' was a very proud moment."

Bernhard (together with his team mates, Mark Webber and Brendan Hartley) took the World Endurance Championship title in 2015 and 2017. He also fulfilled his biggest dream by claiming the overall victory in the

24 Hours of Le Mans with Porsche in 2017 after achieving the same feat with Audi Sport North America in 2010.

"When I started at Porsche as a junior in 1999, I wouldn't have dared dream that I might get the opportunity to fight for overall victory in Le Mans, let alone be good enough to pull it off!" he laughs. "Winning the two World Championship titles and taking overall victory at Sarthe has been the absolute high point of my career at Porsche so far."

As a five-time overall winner of the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, Bernhard recorded another highlight in June 2018: he shaved 51.58 seconds from the previous track record of his idol, Stefan Bellof, with a time of just 5:19.55 minutes at the wheel of the 919 Hybrid Evo on the Green Hell of the Nordschleife. "That was a great moment for me personally, as well as for Porsche as a whole," grins the 38-year-old. "I gave everything I had on that lap. The car's aerodynamics meant I was able to drive parts of the Nordschleife at top speed. The 919 Hybrid Evo really is the ultimate motorsport machine."

When Porsche's LMP1 programme came to an end, Bernhard divided his time between his commitments as a Porsche works driver and his own racing team. Since 2018, he's been competing in the ADAC GT Masters in his own 911 GT3 R. "I owe so much to the people at Porsche. I've celebrated many successes in lots of different categories. It's an honour and something special to drive for such a magnificent brand."

