



Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters (DTM)

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

DTM • Rotax Max Challenge • Cuba Race Market

ALSO KNOWN as The German Touring Car Masters, the Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters (DTM) is a nine-weekend series that holds a total of 18 races with one each on Saturday and one on Sunday. Most drop the green flag in Germany, but events also take place throughout Europe. This year, Russia (Wolokolamsk), The Netherlands (Zandvoort) and Hungary (Hungaroring) saw action before DTM's motorized "Octoberfest" season finale.

"We always have a race on Saturday (40 minutes plus one lap) and one on Sunday (60 minutes plus one lap, which includes one pit stop) with each race having a separate earlier qualifying session," explained Lorenz Liechti, DTM Media Relations in Stuttgart, Germany. "The change to this format in 2015 is one of the success factors, and the response from fans, spectators, teams and drivers is very positive: more racing, more action on the track, better fight in the championship!"

Changing economies throughout the world can provide new business opportunities in motorsports, and this month's column highlights Germany's premier road racing series, a karting event that draws hundreds of competitors worldwide, and a potentially thriving performance segment in newly sanction-free Cuba.

One series highlight is the 2.3-kilometer Norisring race, or 'Franconian Monaco' that includes a 360-degree hairpin turn—the only German street circuit where spectators can see nearly the entire track from the huge grandstand called Steintribüne. Some events see at least 100,000 spectators.

In addition to the expected participation from German manufacturers Audi, BMW, and Mercedes-Benz, each has developed a special car for the series: Audi RS5 DTM, BMW M4 DTM, and Mercedes-AMG C 63 DTM. For the 2016 season, 24 drivers from 10 teams participated in the series.

Past manufacturer participation has included Alfa Romeo, Ford, Opel, Rover, Chevrolet and Volvo.

Not forgetting the lessons learned 20 years ago, when high participation costs axed the former DTM series and International Touring Car Championship, today's DTM keeps a tight grip on rules changes, and is equally mindful of younger motorsports enthusiasts.

"We want to reach the younger audience mainly through a strong appearance on all social media channels," said Liechti. "You will find us at Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, as well as www.dtm.com. But, of course, we

By Louise Ann Noeth

also promote the series through all other 'classic' channels. The main objective of DTM is being close to the fans, offering them more than just racing on the track, and staying one of the top touring car series in the world."

As you might imagine, trying to convince the proud German automakers to keep their checkbooks and development engineers in line can be as entertaining as the racing itself.

Still, all the manufacturers involved agreed to a "hands-off" approach for the series' technical regulations. From 2012 through the 2016 season, those guidelines have—to a large extent—remained in force. "The regulations and cars have basically been frozen," noted Liechti. "In 2017 we will have new regulations and new cars, but not engines. The introduction of turbos has been postponed to 2019. For the next two years we will stick to the V8 with some modifications, but generally still the same engine."

Technically, cars in DTM use only 90-degree V8 engines that max out at four liters. The air-inlet system has a pair of air restrictors no larger than 28 millimeters in diameter. And only one reserve engine per manufacturer is allowed each season.

Rotax MAX Challenge

Rotax MAX Challenge Grand Finals (RMCGF) is an invitational karting championship that unfolds in a different country each year, with participation from almost 300 racers covering some 60 countries.

To get there, racers must first compete

in a national Rotax MAX Challenge (RMC). The championships take place all over the world, attracting upwards of 15,000 racers in more than 70 countries. Each country sends a team of drivers to compete against other teams operating under CIK-FIA (Commission Internationale de Karting-Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) compliance.

The 2015 champs hailed from four different countries, and for the second time in four years, Team USA went home with the Nations Cup—karting's highest honor as a team earned by posting the best podium finishes overall.

The season's winners of each class of all national RMCs and of the international RMC participate free of charge. The series is owned and organized worldwide by BRP and its distributors.

More than 80 certified dealers and service centers assist in the distribution of Rotax kart products throughout the United States. Rotax engines are found in snowmobiles, watercraft, all-terrain and side-by-side vehicles and roadsters, motorcycles and light aircraft.

Because the same chassis, tires, fuel, and controlled and sealed Rotax engines are used in each of the four RMCGF classes, each participant has an equal chance of winning off the starting line—the only factor that truly matters is driving ability.

These talented drivers, some as young as 13 years old, compete head-to-head, an ideal first step into a motorsports career.

"Racing teams in the US and



Rotax MAX Challenge



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Cuba Race Market

worldwide pay attention to the National and Grand Final, looking at it as a feeder series,” said Alexandra Reisinger at BRP-Rotax Marketing & Communications, noting the series has great driving development opportunities.

“The RMC shows the talent of the driver, as all of them use the same equipment and have therefore the equal opportunities,” she added.

It’s where Jenson Button and Kimi Räikkönen got started, and where then 43-year-old 11-time F1 winner Rubens Barrichello finished fourth in class last year. With two teenagers on the grid, he simply could not stay planted in the grandstands.

Like the Olympics, where spots are earned, not bought, the Grand Finals are evenly divided with 72 entries from each class: Rotax 125 Junior MAX with 20.4 hp for 13–16 years old; Rotax 125 MAX with 28.5 hp for 15 years and older; Rotax 125 MAX DD2 with 32.6 hp and two-speed gearbox for those 15 years and older; and Rotax 125 MAX DD2 Masters with 32.6 hp and two-speed gearbox for those 32 years and older.

BRP’s 17th edition of the RMCGF is scheduled to take place at the Circuito Internazionale di Napoli in Sarno, Italy, from October 16–22, 2016. In addition to blistering driving competition, teams partake in a tire changing contest, where the challenge is to mount and dismount kart tires on rims with bare hands and without using any tools or lubricants.

Cuba Race Market

For those who haven’t yet seen it,

“Havana Motor Club” is a documentary film examining the emerging motorsports community on the socialist island of Cuba devoid of modern hot rods—and it might be the best 99 rental pennies and 84 viewing minutes you spend this year.

An insightful, intimate perspective was culled out of 300-plus hours of footage capturing a vibrant, emerging drag racing culture that to this day slogs on with dogged determination.

The prize? To hold the first official drag race on the island nation in a half century despite years of government postponements.

Bent-Jorgen “BJ” Perlmutter, of Perlmutter Productions in New York City, New York, directed the film that provides VIP access, because their world became his world while making the film. It’s personal. It’s raw. It’s real.

“I’ve made films on several different continents, but I’ve never had so much difficulty as I did in Cuba,” said the man who learned that most things happen on their own schedule there.

Reforms have boosted opportunity, but for a half-dozen drag racers and their beloved American muscle cars, the film introduces the viewer to the children of the Revolution.

One can’t help but marvel at the gritty resolve of Rey, Piti, Jote, Tito, Saul and Milton. Guys who are a Cuban version of builder, driver and prolific self-taught engineer Frank Lockhart.

One racer had the help of a Cuban American patron in Miami to bring in parts for his Chevy-powered Porsche

944. His main competitor is a renowned mechanic who uses ingenuity rather than resources to create a racing machine out of his father’s 1955 Chevy Bel Air.

Another racer ponders whether he will participate in the race or sell his motor—one that he recovered on the ocean floor from a ship used to smuggle Cubans off the island in order to flee Cuba on a raft headed to Florida.

Another engine made from GMC, Ford and Chevrolet components will stun engine builders everywhere.

Anchoring the ground-up movement, local car club “Amigos Del Motor” pro-vides race driving lessons, as well as practice spaces shepherding a motor racing revolution focused on giving the street marauders safe on-track driving skills. “To cure us from our aggressive nature on the streets,” as one Cuban drag racer admitted languidly.

Indeed, the FIA has been working locally with the Cuban Automobile Federation headquartered in Havana, careful to avoid any hint of promoting an “elitist sport.”

As the US makes moves to normalize relations with its Caribbean neighbor, the extreme difficulty connected to import-ing performance parts should experience some relief. Cuban racers long for any part that will improve their vintage muscle machines.

“I’m afraid that since we captured the historic race in 2013 and screened the film in Cuba, not much has moved forward with racing on the island,” explained Perlmutter. “There are still many club events on the weekends where informal races happen, but still nothing official. Our racers continue to fight to legitimize their sport, and in the meantime, keep racing by any means necessary.”

Intrigued? Perlmutter has some very practical tips for anyone thinking about doing business in Cuba: “You can exchange dollars to pesos in Cuba, but you lose 10 percent. Bring Euros or Canadian dollars to avoid the penalty. A non-US bank account lets you with-draw money from dozens of ATMs all over Cuba for a nominal fee.”