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Motorsport

Audi “works” driver Mattias Ekström in the spotlight

- **The reigning DTM Champion from Sweden**
- **Jet-skis and two dogs are his big love**
- **Partner Tina Thörner is a successful Rally co-driver**

Even if Mattias Ekström, at 27-years of age, still numbers among the youngsters in the DTM, the defending champion knows one thing all too well: “It is more difficult to defend a title than to win one for the first time.” The Swede is finding out every race weekend just how hard that is in arguably the most exciting DTM season ever: Gaps of a thousandth of second in qualifying are followed by equally close races on Sunday. Only a few points separate the title rivals, the lead changes constantly. Ekström’s victory last year was, in contrast, almost like a summer stroll: In Brno, at the penultimate race of the season, Ekström relieved record champion Bernd Schneider of the crown, and presented Audi with the championship during its comeback year as a “works” team in the DTM.

AUDI AG
Kommunikation
85045 Ingolstadt
www.audi.com

Mattias Ekström competes under the sign of the Four Rings since the 2001 season – initially for the Audi “customer” Abt Sportsline team and since last year, as official “works” driver at Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline. Much has changed within his immediate environment since his first laps in the DTM – but not the blond haired driver from the almost idyllic village of Krylbo in the middle of Sweden. His father Bengt and mother Agneta still travel to almost every race, to cook for their son in the mobile home and to give him a piece of home. Porridge is served for breakfast – almost out-of-place for such a cool image. Ekström’s explanation is simple: “It’s just perfect and gives me a huge amount of energy – even if many others find it amusing.”

Without trying, the 1999 Swedish Touring Car Champion, who started his career in karts and made the jump into “big” touring cars directly from a one-make cup, refuses to be pigeonholed in the typical race driver cliché. A sportscar? Partying till dawn? An apartment in the Monegasque tax haven? All this just draws a

mischievous grin from Ekström. His Audi A4 TDI is very economical, time too valuable to waste on boozy parties, and after all, he enjoys the peace and quiet of Krylbo. His cosy home in a yellow and white terraced house is only a stone's throw from the River Dala – jet ski tours, fishing or just whiling away the hours on the river bank, far away from suspension set-up, sector times or technical meetings.

Ekström is rarely alone during his free time at home. For almost eight years he has a partner, Tina Thörner, with whom everything fits together perfectly: Privately the pair trust each other more than most other couples, and as far as the subject of motorsport is concerned Ekström found an understanding partner in the rally co-driver. If they ever find time to talk about it: For almost a year "Moss" the Jack Russell Terrier, named after motorsport legend Stirling Moss, and more recently his small sister, "Lou", demand a lot of attention and keep the Swedish dream couple on the ball at all times.

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Relaxing, resting, dreaming – the new DTM Champion has precious little time for this during the daily routine at the track. Fully concentrated, professional, always on the case and with a solution concept in the right direction – the people who work with him value these character traits, and they admire the casualness, friendliness and cheerfulness with which Ekström makes his way in the choppy waters of the DTM and which he has retained since his very first race in an Audi four years ago. To his team of mechanics and engineers, a mix of fellow Swedes and Germans, he is more of a friend than a driver or colleague. He quickly won the hearts of the predominantly Bavarian team members with his mix of refreshing sincerity and the ability to be able to deliver a performance at the highest level at any second during a race weekend.

Communication Motorsport

Telephone +49 (0)841 89 34200, Telefax +49 (0)841 89 38617

E-Mail motorsport-media@audi.de

Photographs of Mattias Ekström in his hometown and additional information to download at: www.audi-motorsport.info (accreditation required)