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Ekström impresses in Race of Champions

With an impressive show of his skills Mattias Ekström and his Audi A4 DTM went into the Christmas break: in front of 62,300 spectators at the nearly sold out Stade de France in Paris (France) the DTM Champion and his DTM-winning car were among the leading cast performing for a cheering audience at the legendary "Race of Champions" to which the Audi driver had been invited for the first time.

Formula 1 star Michael Schumacher, World Rally Champion Sébastien Loeb or fellow DTM driver Jean Alesi – the calibre of the list of opponents would have been difficult to top. And even though victory in the competition staged according to the knockout system ultimately went to the Finn Heikki Kovalainen, Mattias Ekström achieved an exploit in Paris that carries almost more weight for him personally than overall victory: the professed hobby rally driver defeated rally legend Colin McRae right in the first round on the asphalt track specially created for the event.

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"It was really a great honour for me to even be able to compete with Colin," says Mattias Ekström. "And to beat him on top of that makes me feel very happy and a bit proud as well." The prerequisites for the DTM Champion, who had clinched a dominating title victory by winning four races in the season just ended, could hardly have been more difficult, though. "It was the first time ever for me to be driving a World Rally Car – and with gravel tyres on asphalt at that, in a stadium in front of so many spectators and competing against the world's best racers," Ekström reports.

Though Ekström later – following a thrilling duel with double World Rally Champion Marcus Grönholm – had to acknowledge defeat, having finished less than half a second behind, together with his Swedish compatriot Kenny Bräck, he then competed against six other nations in the Nations Cup staged as part of the event, as well. On balance, the result is positive across the board: "It's incredible what the organisers have managed to put on in a football stadium. That was simply a fantastic show that I'll remember for a long time."

The spectators in the grandstands will likely feel the same way, after all, Ekström not only left a lasting impression while fighting against his opponents. Following the quick demo laps in his Audi A4 DTM, the Champion added a few burnouts, engulfing virtually the entire Stade de France in the fog of the rubber burnt by his racing tyres. "Well, if I'm given the chance to show other racers as well as the fans my Championship-winning car, I do want to demonstrate everything the car is capable of doing," Ekström apologised with a smile.

Find photos and further information on the internet:
www.audi-motorsport.info (Accreditation required)

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