

Rolf Michl: “An exciting challenge”

- **Head of Audi Motorsport in dual role also Managing Director**
- **Ambitious goals with motivated team for Dakar Rally**
- **Desert rallying demands first-class coordination**

Neuburg a. d. Donau, December 7, 2022 – Since September 1, Rolf Michl has been responsible for motorsport at Audi and is Managing Director of Audi Sport GmbH. The 44-year-old manager talks about the Dakar Rally, the complementation of the right and left hemispheres of the brain, the emotions that motorsport arouses in him, and his expectations and goals for the desert rally.

Mr. Michl, you were Project Manager in the Audi Sport TT Cup in 2015, then Director Sales & Marketing at Audi Sport GmbH. You returned to motorsport as Managing Director of Audi Sport GmbH. Did you miss the racing world in the meantime?

Before that, I also enjoyed my management function in global sales and marketing and was able to achieve three sales records in a row with the team there. But returning to the racetrack and the rally tracks has a very special fascination. Being operationally at the track, experiencing the spirit in motorsport, whether on the circuit or in the sand, is and remains unique. I have definitely missed that.

How would you rate the projects you found at Audi Sport GmbH?

The Dakar Rally and customer racing form an exciting project landscape. There are some exquisite, major events in motorsport worldwide and the Dakar is definitely one of them. I was very fascinated to see how Audi competes with an electric drive in such a difficult discipline and is successful right from the start. But the human aspect, the spirit and the passion, are also clearly noticeable. Carlos Sainz, who I already admired in the World Rally Championship and with whom we're now working, Stéphane Peterhansel who has remained relaxed and modest even after 14 Dakar victories, a guarantor of success like Mattias Ekström, with whom I've had a good relationship for years – simply great drivers! And with Lucas Cruz, Edouard Boulanger and Emil Bergkvist we've got co-drivers who are just as strong in character and first-class. The same applies to Audi Sport customer racing: the people in our team live for their profession. Our customer racing driver squad is characterized by experienced names but also by ambitious young drivers. In addition, our customers are often successful and demanding entrepreneurs in their own right. Through the customer racing programs, we make Audi tangible and visible in other areas, on a global scale. For me, it was a nice challenge to quickly get on the ball operationally in all these areas and also to manage it strategically.

How do you manage the balancing act between Managing Director and Head of Motorport?

Sometimes that's actually not all that easy. In the management of Audi Sport GmbH, where I run a company of 1,500 people together with Dr. Sebastian Grams, the financial responsibility lies

with me. When the motorsport boss then talks to the finance boss in me, it's usually an intense discussion ... Let's put it this way: The right side of the brain, the emotional side, belongs more to motorsport. But the rationality of the other half of the brain, i.e. the financial expertise, is also needed. It is extremely exciting to manage motorsport in an entrepreneurial way with clearly measurable key performance indicators. Nevertheless, I think I have the experience to understand the positions of all the protagonists – from drivers and teams to investors such as our partners or the teams in customer racing. So it's less about 'we do need that otherwise we won't win,' but about what the overall result is for Audi. The marketing, the story we tell there, is given a very large area by Audi. So I see the tension between the two positions in the initial question as more sporting and productive than negative.

In your new role, you were at the Morocco Rally in October. How did you experience the rigors of desert rallying?

I was impressed by the incredible team spirit under the most adverse conditions. Even in the sandstorm that lasted for hours, everyone helped everyone else, and no one was too shy to lend a hand. Both the employees of Q Motorsport and our own team are extremely ambitious, focused and yet always in partnership. Everyone recognizes their responsibility and takes it seriously. Given the legalities of this sport, we are glad to have such an experienced partner as Sven Quandt on the team. As team boss of Q Motorsport, he brings decades of rally knowledge to the table, making him an important point of reference and source of experience. When it comes to race strategy, he knows how we can make the most of the strengths of our technical concept and our drivers. Everyone in the team is a thoroughbred motorsport enthusiast, as are the experienced car chiefs. They have a connection with the drivers, which is important to me because it's not just about the technology. I particularly appreciate the commitment of our mechanics in this new project – together with their colleagues from Q Motorsport, they have to keep a highly complex vehicle at the best operational level under the toughest conditions, which is really challenging, especially in the event of damage. For this reason, regular personal exchanges with the workshop teams are particularly important to me.

The Dakar Rally is absolutely significant for Audi. What goals do you set the team for 2023?

We're competing there for the second time and have clear goals: I hope to clinch a podium. We've improved the car, we've got the best drivers and a highly motivated, competent team. The important thing for me is that if everything works, I think a podium is possible. We have to be optimally prepared, highly concentrated at every moment and team cohesion will be the decisive key to success. But I'm also realistic enough to realize that, especially in this sport, there are a number of unpredictable factors: Damage, accidents, freak weather or navigation are what make this competition so exciting and challenging at the same time. We have no control over these general conditions. But I'm in good spirits because we weren't just thorough in preparing the three RS Q e-tron cars. We have also made considerable progress with processes and procedures.

How did you personally prepare for your first Dakar Rally?

That affects several areas at once. As far as my management function is concerned, off-road rallying is extreme, of course. On the circuit, there's a lot of precise technical data and lots of instruments to look after the car. In the desert, on the other hand, your tablet gives you the first

clues about what's going on out there after 40 to 50 minutes. And you hope your satellite phone doesn't ring. For me, the focus is on how I can contribute as a manager. As for the trip itself, I basically like to exercise, which is an important catalyst to clear my head in my complex subject world. Sport also helps to be fit for the Dakar, of course. Likewise, I would consider myself to be well organized and structured, otherwise the complexity in everyday life is impossible to manage. In fact, I already have a clear suitcase and luggage order for the rally! I have always been good at sleeping, and I am flexible when it comes to food. I recently learned that, if in doubt, you can get through an entire rally day with a few jars of apple and millet porridge from the baby food shelf ...

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