24H SERIES 50 RACES

Ralf Bohn

To-date, Ralf Bohn has completed every single one of his 50 CREVENTIC events with series staple Herberth Motorsport, and has enjoyed an impressive amount of success with the Bavarian team. Not only did this amiable German win the Overall GT Drivers' crown as well as the prestigious Hankook 24H DUBAI in 2017, he was victorious on his 24H SERIES debut in 2015 too!

Not that Ralf tends to measure success by the top step alone. As he looks back across his first 50 CREVENTIC events, Ralf Bohn explains why fulfilling his own expectations is just as important as podium finishes, why a motor racing career with Porsche has always been the dream, and why keeping 'a clear mind' is vital to a successful endurance race weekend.

Images | *Petr Frýba | Eric Teeken | Nico Mombaerts*

Ralf, this won't come as much of a surprise to our long-time 24H SERIES fans, but you've done each of your 50 CREVENTIC races so far with Herberth Motorsport…

RB "Yes, my whole career in the 24H SERIES has been with Herberth Motorsport! Just at the very beginning, I did a few races – the Gulf 12 Hours, for example *[with MRS GT-Racing in 2013 and 2014]* – to find a team. And once I'd found the *[Renauer]* brothers, I thought, 'that's the right setup for me.' "

Before that, you competed in the Porsche Carrera Cup Germany. Was that your first introduction to racing?

RB "Yes it was. Well, sort of! In 2013, I started with some track days in a *[Porsche 911]* Cup car. I got my license that November and then in December, I did my first 12-hour race. And then after that, in 2014 and 2015, I did Carrera Cup Germany."

So, you went from no motor racing experience at all straight into Porsche sprint racing, and then endurance racing soon after that. You don't make life easy for yourself, do you?!

RB *[Laughs]* "Well, it's always been Porsche! From my early days with matchbox cars, it was always Porsche. So, for me, it was clear, when I got into racing – I was always interested in racing, but I never had the time to do so – it would be with Porsche. Then, when Daniel *[Allemann, long-time friend and Herberth Motorsport teammate]* started racing, he invited me to some track days in 2013. I said, 'you're totally crazy thinking I can drive such a car in the same year I got my licence!' But then I started also being crazy!

"Time was the biggest factor in those days. I started with track days a few times a year, and then, because Porsche *[produced]* the Cup car with a paddle shift gearbox, I thought, 'let's try to do Carrera Cup as an amateur.' Why not? I had success,* I had a lot of fun, and I had a good team with the Renauer guys, so we continued *[into 2015]*. I thought, 'okay, I'll do another year of Carrera Cup.' As Daniel had already started in the 24H SERIES, we split that year" – *Daniel and Ralf were 'Team GT3 Kasko' teammates in 2014* – "but in the end, I did some CREVENTIC races in parallel with the Carrera Cup."

**In his only his third Porsche Carrera Cup Germany race, Ralf took B-class victory. By the end of the year, Ralf had picked up 10 more class podiums, and finished 2nd in the standings to 2014 Hankook 24H DUBAI winner, Rolf Ineichen.*

You ended up entering three 24H SERIES races in 2015 with Daniel, the Renauer brothers, and Herberth Motorsport…

RB "I started in Mugello, and started directly with a win. Nobody expected that! I had no expectations either. Starting a 12-hour race, my target was just to get through, do a good job, and have fun. So, we drove one after the other – everyone did three hours – and in the end, we got the victory!

"That was a new experience, and at the time, the target was, once in a lifetime, to do a 24-hour race. I haven't counted the 24-hour races I've done since then!"*

**We checked, Ralf. In the 24H SERIES alone, you've competed in 26, 24-hour races so far at Dubai, Barcelona, Brno, Paul Ricard, Portimão, the Circuit of the Americas, and Sebring.*

We've already spoken with Alfred Renauer and Daniel Allemann about Mugello in 2015, so instead, we'd like to talk about the end of that first year. You finished 6th in Brno after a solid run, so how seriously were you considering a switch to endurance racing?

RB "Endurance racing gave me a good comparison with the sprint races, and for us, as amateurs, it's always important to have as much drive time as possible. And we've really found that with CREVENTIC. We get a lot of testing days, a lot of experience in the races, and it's a competition you need to work hard at, physically and mentally. At the end of 2015, *[Daniel and I]* just knew, 'okay, this is good for us and we have a good team.' Not long after that, we made the decision to do the full season in 2016.

"For me, Herberth Motorsport, and Alfred and Robert Renauer are not just a very good start into a racing driver's life, but also a unique, ideal combination of professional motorsport at the highest level, easy-going and relaxed friends. They have high standards on and off-track, and they are able to bring the best out of each of us. Together with Daniel, we have become true 'racing brothers' over the years. I am particularly grateful for this."

In 2016, you won three races outright at Zandvoort, Paul Ricard and Barcelona, one after the other. At the time, no other GT team had done that. Was it tempting to think, 'wow, I've really nailed this whole endurance racing thing!'…?

RB "No! *[Laughs]* We've never thought it was easy! A lot of things need to come together to win in endurance racing. The team has to be good, the car has to be good, the circumstances, the weather… you can't make any mistakes, get a puncture, have a technical issue. Nothing.

"Fortunately the Renauers prepare the car, at all times, very well, and since we started, *[Daniel and I]* have tried to get closer and closer to the perfect level. I think we are pretty well-balanced these days. In the beginning, there was a much bigger gap to overcome. So, it was never easy, and we never expected to win one, two, three, four, five races a year. We're very proud of that. But every year is always a new start.

"And, just to be clear, the Renauers have always been faster than us!" *[Laughs]* "We are never close enough to catch them, and that was never the target for me personally! To catch them or get as close as possible. I just try to learn as much as I can at every race."

Again, we've spoken with Daniel and Alfred about Herberth's successes in Dubai, Mugello and Barcelona. But Paul Ricard is another circuit that Herberth has done really well at over the years, winning in 2016, 2017 and 2021. Was this a circuit that just suited you all?

RB *[Pause]* "Honestly, Paul Ricard doesn't really *[stick out]* to me. What I do remember is that, like Mugello, either we win, or we go home early. As to why we usually went well at Paul Ricard, I can't really explain."

In 2017, you won the Hankook 24H DUBAI…

RB "To have Brendon *[Hartley, three-time FIA World Endurance Champion]* in the team with us was a fabulous experience. He was very… natural. You could sit with him, talk with him, and he was just a human being! In the beginning he was a little bit slower, but he's a top driver, and very, very fast, and in a very short time, he was much faster than us! So we felt, 'okay, it could be a good weekend for us.' The race started with 100 cars, and anything could happen. It was a very special moment to win in Dubai."

That year, Herberth Motorsport also won the Overall GT Teams' 'Continents' title, and has been a title contender almost every season since then. Is it fair to say that Herberth has become the benchmark in GT3 in the 24H SERIES…?

RB "Well, let's say… if you have a lot of success early on, and 2017, for sure, was a very successful year, you should not expect that success to continue without working for it. This is just my opinion, but I think, for an amateur, success comes from being relaxed. We come here at the end of the 'business' week, and then want to be fast on-track, so the most important thing is to *[clear your mind]*. I think the Renauers are very good at that.

"They have a lot of work to do at the track, and then they step into the car: in one moment, they're changing the brakes; in another, they're posting the fastest lap! I think, all four of us, keep our minds clear. And this is, let's say, the method for success. To keep that constant, lap-by-lap, hour-by-hour, day-by-day.'

You took two more overall wins in 2018 at Imola and Barcelona, then, from 2019 onwards, Herberth Motorsport started entering two cars at CREVENTIC events. As a driver, does having a sister entry and additional teammates make it easier or harder to get results?

RB "It was a new experience to have sister cars in the garage with us. Before, we were more or less alone, with the brothers, and now, having three cars means the team is much bigger. There's much more work to do, and there's a lot more 'action' in the garage. But there has never been, let's say, a kind of 'elbow' competition between the cars. We are all treated equally inside the team, and in many ways, it's a good thing to have sister cars because there's more information to be exchanged: 'how do you do this corner?'; 'how do you do that corner?' Even though they are competitors, we try to help each other – Daniel has some input, or Jürgen *[Häring]*, or myself, 'try like this, try like that.' For us, it's not that easy to simply say" – *Ralf clicks his fingers* – " 'okay, we should do things this way.' We have to practice and we have to find out if a certain setup works for us. Remember, we are still amateurs! So being able to help each other does make a difference."

In 2019, you took two class wins and finished 2nd overall four times. That was the first year Herberth Motorsport didn't take an overall victory though. Looking back, was that a frustrating season, or can you still take positives from it?

RB "I can only disappoint myself if I don't fulfil my own expectations. If we are out, doing good laptimes, and we finish 2nd, 2nd is still a good result! If you have four 2nd places in a row… I mean, back then, it was the *[Scuderia Praha]* Ferrari that was faster, and in the end, there was no chance. Only at Spa, if you remember! But, no, I'm not disappointed to finish 2nd. No way. Every result is a good result for an amateur if he fulfils his own expectations, and I feel I managed to do that in 2019. Plus, every year, at every track, I'm getting a little faster. That, to me, is a success."

You mentioned the near-miss at that year's Hankook 12H SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, but you also came very close to winning in Barcelona: after 24 hours, Herberth Motorsport was just 10 seconds behind Barwell Motorsport at the line…

RB "I think that just proves consistency and a good team is very, very important in endurance racing. Also concentration, when you're driving through the night, for example. Some teams, in the middle of the night, can lose concentration, go off, get a puncture, have a small accident, etc. If you lose consistency in a team, you won't win, or you won't be on the podium."

In 2021, you became GT3-Am Drivers' champion with four wins from six races…

RB "That year was a good year, because in 2021, we started competing in other series. That meant we couldn't do every CREVENTIC event…"

Like Hockenheim…?

RB "Actually, Hockenheim was a special issue. At the turn in at the Motodrom *[turn 11]*, you can hit the ground with the Porsche. You do that enough, and eventually you can get an engine problem. So, we felt it was best not to race at Hockenheim.

"These days, some races *[conflict]* with other series, so the team has to decide whether they're doing this or doing that. But that does mean you have to make every race count, and I think we proved that with the championship in 2021."

The 2021 season ended with CREVENTIC's first race at Sebring. Given the Raceway's illustrious heritage, how big a deal was it competing at the Hankook 12H SEBRING?

RB "Daniel and I loved Sebring! We'd never raced there before, so we got some data from Porsche, watched YouTube onboard videos and mostly we practiced at home on our simulators. That's how we prepared. The rest you need to find out for yourself. Sebring is really bumpy!

"But I enjoyed Sebring, for sure, and the track history is very rich. It was an awesome experience!

"I also liked *[the Circuit of the Americas]*. It's a long trip to get to the other side of the world, but both events were a lot of fun. Plus, at COTA, I think we won one and finished 2nd, and at Sebring we finished 2nd too. So America's been good to us!"*

**Good memory! Ralf, Daniel, Alfred and Robert won the Hankook 24H COTA USA in 2017 to seal the Overall GT 'Continents' Teams' and Drivers' titles, then finished 2nd overall at the same event in 2018 and 2019.*

We won't talk too much about the 2022 season, but 2023 started with 2nd place finish in Dubai. Do performances like that help a team and driver 'reset' after a tough year, or is 2022 always in the back of your mind?

RB "I don't struggle with things behind me! Yes, 2022 wasn't the best season for us, but we don't worry about that. We just focus on the event we're at and look ahead to the next one. I live forwards, not backwards. To the next competition."

So, that's 50 races with CREVENTIC in the bag. What is it about the 24H SERIES you've enjoyed so far, and can we expect to celebrate your 100th race with us in the future?!

RB *[Laughs]* "What makes the series interesting to me is the amount of driving time. Plus the effort, physical and mental, that's required. This is competition I really enjoy. How long will I do this? As long as I have the time and the money, and the physical strength to do so!" ■

Notable results

2015
- First series start -12H MUGELLO
- First 24H SERIES win -12H MUGELLO (A6-Pro)

2016
- 3 wins (Zandvoort / Paul Ricard / Barcelona)

2017
- Overall GT Drivers' champions – Continents
- 4 wins (Dubai / Red Bull Ring / Paul Ricard / COTA)

2018
- 2 overall wins (Imola / Barcelona), and 1 overall podium (COTA)
- 1 class win (Portimão) – in SPX with Manthey Racing

2019
- 5 overall podiums (Mugello / Spa / Brno / Barcelona / COTA)
- 2 class wins (Spa / Brno) – in A6-Am

2020
- GT3-Pro Drivers' champion – Europe
- 1 overall win (Mugello) and 2 overall podiums (Portimão / Monza)

2021
- GT3-AM Drivers' champion
- 4 overall wins (Mugello / Paul Ricard / Barcelona / Hungary)
- 1 overall podium (Sebring)