

# JOEY HAND'S DREAM RIDE

By JOHN JEPPESEN

Every *SPEED SPORT Magazine* reader has had at least one car they'd do absolutely anything to own. Sometimes those dream rides remain just that — dreams.

The dream for Joey Hand began in 2011, the first time he set eyes on a photo of BMW's new German Touring Car (DTM) M3. It was scheduled to hit the track in 2012, marking BMW's return to the DTM after an 11-year hiatus.

Hand's 2011 racing season was the prelude to the dream. His on-track performance "blew the lid off the dump" as David Letterman is fond of saying. He won the Rolex 24 At Daytona with Chip Ganassi Racing and the Mobil 1 12 Hours of Sebring a month later at the wheel of the Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing M3. The winning continued with RLL and ended with the ALMS driver's championship for Hand and Dirk Müller.

"Joey was our go-to guy in the ALMS," said Bobby Rahal. "He drove the last three hours at Sebring for the win. Anybody that has ever raced there knows how hard that is. We hated to lose him to DTM."

Hand approached BMW Motorsport boss Dr. Mario Theissen for the DTM ride during the 2011 season. "Dr. T" was retiring but said: "You never know, Joey, you never know."

Hand reiterated his pitch to Jens Marquardt, the new boss, during the ALMS finale at Road Atlanta. Marquardt thought a test was possible but not until the middle of the 2012 season. Undaunted, Hand replied: "Why not sooner? You need an American in DTM."

Hand's persistence is reminiscent of

Carl Edwards' pursuit of Jack Roush. Failure was not an option for either driver. Hand's bold approach was the tipping point for the BMW brass.

"Two weeks later I got the call," Hand said. "Could I get to Montblanco in Spain and I said 'I'm there.'" After jumping on a flight to Spain that week, he immediately impressed the team and got invited back to test the latest spec car — so it was done and done.

Hand and Patrick Long (Porsche) are the only Americans currently racing for European factory teams. They join such past luminaries as Phil Hill, Carroll Shelby, Masten Gregory and Hurley Haywood.

Hand knew his rookie season would be steeply uphill. His first challenge was an insane travel schedule from his home near Sacramento, Calif. He and wife Natalie decided against moving to Europe for their children's sake. Thus, Hand has amassed enough frequent flyer miles to go anywhere in the world. But when he's not racing, his longest trip is taking the kids to soccer practice.

"I knew it was going to be new in DTM, but the biggest thing you get reminded of is not only did I have to learn all new race tracks, but I was going to Europe for the first time in my life. I went to new countries, new food, new street signs to read, different languages, everything was new," Hand explained. "And then I had to go racing against guys that have been racing DTM for 12 years."

Then there's the car itself. On the surface, the DTM M3 looks an awful lot like the American Le Mans Series M3 Hand raced for RLL. The similar-

ity, however, is merely skin deep. Think of DTM M3 as the difference between an Indy car and its Formula One cousin. For instance, there's a full carbon-fiber monocoque where the stock ALMS M3 unibody and roll cage once resided. It's essentially an F-1 car with doors.

Then there's the race craft. "Everything is different," Hand said about the adjustments to his racing routine. "When you spend a lot of time like I did in American Le Mans you start to get really comfortable with everything and you forget how it is to be new. I knew the American Le Mans rules, you know, by heart. I know what's coming...all the stuff that would be confusing to anybody in their first year."

And forget about catching your breath during a pit stop.

"Pit stops in DTM are very different," Hand said. "The stops are so quick, usually two seconds. A three-second stop is a slow one. It's F-1 style, 15 guys over the wall. You're looking for every little tenth of a second. In DTM there's so much intensity put into these little things, the pit lane, the pit stops and what your crew does can for sure win or lose a race. And then there's the race itself. It's an hour-and-a-half qualifying session. It's sprint as hard as you can, maximum attack. I'm fine with that, but I had to get used to it."

Then he had to learn a new steering wheel replete with a dizzying array of buttons and switches to adjust engine mapping, fuel management, suspension, traction control and more.



"I've been driving so long (in the ALMS M3) the buttons are the same," Hand said. "The pit speed limiter, all the buttons are in the same place. I didn't have to look at them. It became second nature. It's all different in the DTM M3 and it's those fractions of a second lost that can make a big difference on the track."

"When you add it all up, it was a big first year," Hand said. All the tracks are now stored memory, all the shortcuts in and out of the race facilities noted, all the good places to eat stored in the GPS and all the best flights across the pond sent to the team logistics manager.

"All that can be confusing in the first year I got sorted out," Hand said. "So now I can be thinking about the strategy, how much fuel we've got. It allows you to just drive the race car to its maximum potential."

This year, Hand races for Team RBM. Compared to his rookie season "...the second year has been much more enjoyable." The Californian's performance has noticeably improved in qualifying and he has steadily moved up the finishing order as the season progressed, ranking 10th in the standings at the end of August.

He has earned the respect and trust of his team members.

"They've been really good for me," Hand said. "It's a great group of guys. I felt at home right away. Anybody that knows me says the more comfortable I am, the better I am, not only from the race car but the people around me. And that makes for a better Joey Hand, the race car driver."

Team principal Bart Mampaey is pleased with his American driver.

"I would say it is going pretty well. He is a very talented driver with experience in many different categories," Mampaey said. "He is a very enjoyable person and can describe how the car behaves very well. He has 26 points and has scored points in four of the last six races. We have had some spectacular races where he has come from the back to score in the points and carve his way forward. We like working with him, that's for sure."

Hand "debriefs" himself after every weekend during those long flights home. "It's not a bad thing to look at things from a different perspective.

"DTM has opened my eyes."

And if you were to ask him how is it going? He would most likely say he's just living the dream. ■



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