

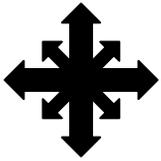
**Fifth Place Finish for THILENIUS GROUP in Challenging 2021 ADAC Total 24 Hour**



Hey! Following up a successful debut with **Walkenhorst Motorsport** in May, I returned to the Nurburgring June 3-6 for the **2021 Nurburgring ADAC Total 24 Hour Rennen** with co-drivers Charlie Postins, Cameron Evans and Lance Boicelli. I had one of the most difficult race weekends of my career, but despite the challenges, we brought our **BMW M4 GT4** home fifth in the SP10 class.

When I arrived in Germany, the weather was nothing short of spectacular. I took advantage of the weather and ventured into Belgium for a track day at the Circuit Spa-Francorchamps before the activities commenced at the Nurburgring. Unfortunately, all the forecasts projected rain, and lots of it, for the duration. We watched the clouds roll in during our wonderful **Walkenhorst Motorsport** team dinner on Wednesday evening.

A brief shower dampened the track moments before the first qualifying session. I ventured out for some shakedown laps and found a surprising amount of grip from my **Yokohama** slicks on the drying grand prix circuit, but the correct tire choice for the Nordschleife was not clear. After consulting with my race engineer, Enzo Scholz, we decide to stay with slicks. I pushed hard up to Aremberg and then effectively aborted any attempt at a quick lap when I found the track completely soaked. Cameron took over for his first laps in the **BMW M4 GT4** next and later on a drying track, Charlie laid



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down a lap placing us fourth in class. Ultimately, Charlie's lap in this session would prove to be our quickest, gridding us fifth in class and 67<sup>th</sup> overall.

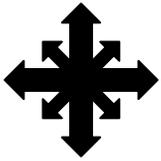


The weather stayed dry for night qualifying. Lance and Cameron logged qualifying laps before I jumped back in the car and lapped the grand prix circuit for ten laps to prepare two full sets of brake rotors, pads and calipers for the race. By the time I headed out on the Nordschleife, it was dark! Traffic from Hohe Acht to Pflanzgarten spoiled what would turn out to be my only fully dry lap of the weekend.

On Friday, with only one more qualifying session left before the start, I did not feel prepared for the race. I started the session intent on working through my test plan only to find the track wet at Aremberg once again. Caught out with the stability control completely turned off I had a big oversteer moment exiting Fuchsröhre and then had massive understeer when I attempted to turn into the slow lefthander in Adenauer Forst. I straightened the wheel, bounced over the curbing into the runoff and felt stupid for pushing too hard under those conditions. Unbeknownst to me, the experience I gained throughout qualifying would prove invaluable in the race, but at the time, it simply added to my frustration. My co-drivers logged additional laps after the track dried.

Leading up to the start of the race, my co-drivers focused on reviewing data while I spent most of my time looking at the weather forecasts. Race day dawned unexpectedly warm and sunny but weather radar showed intermittent rain in the area. As the start approached, the crew swapped the **Yokohama** slicks for rain tires. Enzo advised with rain forecast for the next 24 hours we could not afford to destroy any sets of rain tires and cautioned me to be especially careful with the ultra soft compound rain tires on the dry sections of the track.

The start-finish straight was bone dry when I rolled away from the starting grid in my **Walkenhorst Motorsport BMW M4 GT4**. Rather than focusing on the impending start, an alarm for a stability control failure captured my attention. The idea of racing on the Nurburgring in the rain without stability control was none too appealing, so after consulting with Enzo, I stopped and did a complete system shutdown, the automotive equivalent of CTRL-ALT-DELETE. Initially, the reset appeared to fix the problem, but the alarm returned when I started rolling. I caught up with the back of the first start group and then repeated the reset process, the second time with more success.



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With the stability control crisis averted, the next challenge was sorting through the starting procedure. In the NLS series, the rules state when passed on the pace lap by the last car in your start group, you cannot re-take your original starting position and must take the start from the back. I was fairly sure the rules in the 24 hour were different because I remembered cars re-taking their start position in previous races. So, after yet another consultation with Enzo to confirm my understanding of the rules was correct, I worked my way through the pack and recovered my original starting position.

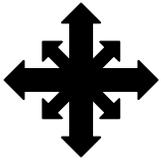
Putting all that drama behind me, I finally had a chance to focus on the start. The track conditions on the pace lap varied from completely dry to wet, but there was no standing water. The right tire for the conditions would have been a cut-slick tire with a dry weather compound and hand cut grooves to channel the water away from the contact patch. Unfortunately, we did not have cut-slicks available. The weather radar showed more rain on the way, so rather than pitting for slicks I took the green flag on my **Yokohama** rain tires.

Driving a mostly dry track on rain tires was a completely new experience. The tires worked great in the rain, but on the dry parts of the track, the **M4 GT4** handled strangely. When cornering, there was a significant delay between the response of the front and rear suspensions that felt remarkably similar to a slide from the rear. I took a conservative approach to protect my tires; losing two positions and falling to seventh in class behind the #72 Toyota and #71 Aston Martin that we had out qualified.



With a majority of the track dry, I lobbied for a switch to slicks. Enzo agreed and I headed for the box at the end of the first lap. A quick tire change and a splash of fuel from my **Walkenhorst Motorsport** crew got me back on track. On **Yokohama** slicks, I matched the pace of the front running #76 Porsche and, by lapping over a minute a lap faster, made short work of the Aston Martin and Toyota to re-take fifth in class. After three laps on slicks, Enzo told me to pit for rain tires. Sensing from Enzo's tone he knew something I did not, I headed back to the pit lane for rain tires and more fuel.

The timing of my second stop was perfect. The forecasted heavy rain had arrived. When the rain came down in earnest, the spray from traffic reduced the visibility to zero and standing water caused significant hydroplaning at high speeds. If the conditions were not challenge enough, I began to lose control over the wipers. I do not know if it was an issue with the button on the steering wheel or a poor connection in the wiring,



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but intermittently I could not control the wiper speed or even turn the wipers on or off. Fearful of inadvertently turning off the wipers permanently, I left the wipers running even when I did not need them. However, I still managed to get caught without wipers when I needed them a couple times, not a comfortable situation! Fortunately, pushing and holding the button would engage the wipers for a single sweep.

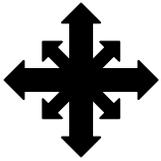
After more than two and a half hours in the **Walkenhorst Motorsport BMW M4 GT4**, Enzo radioed to tell me I was on my last lap. The rain had stopped by this point and a dry line was developing meaning I had to search out wet patches to keep my Yokohama rain tires cool. It would be a huge understatement to say I was mentally and physically ready to get out of the car, so when Enzo came back on the radio and asked me to do two more laps, it took me a while to reply. At no point in the race had I been able to relax. My arms and shoulders ached. Two laps would have gotten me right to the 3-hour maximum drive limit, but on a drying track, preserving my rain tires would have been nearly impossible. I negotiated Enzo down to one additional lap and then headed to the pit lane to serve a pit lane speeding penalty I had incurred earlier in the race. Based on my recommendation, they installed slicks and Charlie took over driving duties.

While I hydrated, ate and tried to get some sleep, Charlie turned in a great stint. Driving on any wet track with a dry line is a nerve-wracking experience because the margin for error is slim, but doubly so on the Nurburgring. Charlie consolidated our fifth position while the #76 Porsche and #70 BMW fought for the lead and the #34 Mercedes recovered from a technical issue early in the race.

Cameron took over from Charlie as the sun began to set over the Eifel and following Cameron's stint, it was Lance's turn behind the wheel. The rain had moved on, but warm surface temperatures, cool air temperatures and high humidity were the ideal ingredients for fog. I suited up, headed to our pit box to be available if Lance had an issue and began to prepare mentally for a nighttime double stint. I need not have bothered. Within two laps, at 9:30 PM, heavy fog forced race control to halt the race.



An hour later, race control fully capitulated and communicated their next update would be at 6:00 AM for a possible 7:00 AM re-start. Rather than spend the night at the track, we headed back to our accommodations for better sleeping arrangements. We returned to the track refreshed only to find the track still fogged over. There was little race control could do beyond supplying hourly updates saying the next update would be an hour later. It was



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9:30 AM before the cars rolled out of the garage to be gridded up for a single file re-start and a full 15 hours from the red flag before the race resumed.

On the re-start, the #70 BMW led the SP10 class followed closely by the #76 Porsche, the eventual winner the #34 Mercedes and the #78 Porsche. Lance logged our fastest race lap, 9:15.206, on his second lap after the re-start. However by this time, the #74 **Walkenhorst BMW M4 GT4** was a lap down to the leading SP10 cars and multiple laps ahead of the #72 Toyota and #71 Aston Martin.

I took over from Lance encouraged by the improved track conditions. Fog still hung in places, in particular the higher elevations of Hohe Acht and sheltered areas like Bergwerk and Fuchsröhre. From the pit box, I had watched many of the leading GT3 cars crash, so I knew the conditions were still hazardous. It was hard to read the track surface in the foggy areas. Sometimes the grip would be good and other times the fog would dampen the track. I pushed hard where I knew the track was dry and ran my personal best lap of the race before handing off the car to Charlie to bring to the finish.

Fifth place was not the result we were hoping for in the **2021 Nurburgring ADAC Total 24 Hour Rennen**. We lacked pace relative to the front running SP10 cars and the long red flag meant there was less chance for our competitor to have mechanical issues. On the other hand, I am immensely proud of how I handled the challenge of the first stint under the most difficult conditions I have ever faced on a racetrack. Big thanks go out to Charlie, Cameron and Lance who drove great and to our **Walkenhorst Motorsport** crew and especially our race engineer, Enzo Scholz, for the support. The **2022 Nurburgring ADAC Total 24 Hour Rennen** will be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary running of this incredible race, so it is time to start planning something special for next year!



## About THILENIUS GROUP

THILENIUS GROUP, LLC based in California provides vehicle dynamics engineering, motorsports and sports marketing services. With over 30 years experience engineering vehicle dynamics at the OEM level, road racing motorsports and sports marketing, THILENIUS GROUP can help you reach your goals. Information about THILENIUS GROUP services is available at [www.thileniusgroup.com](http://www.thileniusgroup.com). Latest updates available on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ThileniusGroup](https://www.facebook.com/ThileniusGroup) and Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ThileniusGroup>.