

# Alessandro Zanardi – phenom and inspiration.



Alessandro Zanardi is a phenomenon. Just when you believe he has achieved the maximum in a given discipline, he simply seeks another challenge – and promptly masters it with his unique level of enthusiasm. Since losing both legs in an accident on the Eurospeedway Lausitz in 2001, Zanardi has given new hope to many who have met the same fate. “I am out to prove that there are no obstacles for the disabled,” the double ChampCar champion and former Formula One driver says succinctly.

Examples of his irrepressible spirit abound. Very few foresaw a comeback to motorsport after his accident. However, drawing on cast-iron determination and his enormous will to live, the Italian fought his way back. In 2003 he impressed the sport greatly by entering the final event of the European Touring Car Championship at Monza in a specially adapted BMW 320i.

These races in front of his home crowd whetted his appetite for more, and in 2004 Zanardi contested the entire ETCC season, going on to represent BMW Team Italy-Spain – ROAL Motorsport in the World Touring Car Championship from 2005 to 2009. Merely competing, though, was simply not enough for the racer from Bologna. He targeted victories. And so it transpired: On 28th August 2005, Zanardi sensationally became the first disabled person to win a world championship motor race at Oschersleben. He followed this success with another victory in Istanbul a year later. In 2008 he was climbing the steps to the top of the podium again in Brno, having previously claimed the first pole position of his WTCC career. One year later in 2009, Zanardi clinched his fourth race win in the World Touring Car Championship, again in Brno.

The 47-year-old has also taken a Formula One car to the limit: When he returned to the BMW Sauber F1 Team garage at Valencia’s “Circuit de la Comunitat” on 25th November 2006, those fans and media present immediately realised they had witnessed history in the making: Zanardi had become the first amputee to drive an F1 car as he rolled off the first laps in a BMW Sauber F1 Team Formula One car. It was no surprise, either, that Zanardi’s lap times continuously fell as he increasingly badgered his engineers for information.

His immense ambition makes Zanardi a genuine anomaly – and his story transcends beyond the world of motor racing. He has also achieved star status in his second career of para-cycling, and is one of the best and most successful athletes in the world. Zanardi’s greatest achievement so far came at the 2012 Paralympics in London, where he won two gold medals and one silver to emphatically make his mark on the handbike competitions. After

London, Zanardi was again the man to beat: In September 2013, he was crowned para-cycling world champion at the world championships in Canada. And he will try to defend the world title in Greenville (US) next August.

BMW Motorsport recognised these outstanding performances by rewarding Zanardi with a special DTM test. On 8th November 2012, the Italian drove onto the Nürburgring in a modified BMW M3 DTM, featuring a specially designed golden livery. And it didn't take the Italian long to get back into racing driver mode. Zanardi improved and became more familiar with the car with every one of his 32 laps.