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Werner Daemen: "Racing at night at Spa were the most beautiful moments I had on the bike".

- **Werner Daemen, the Team Manager of the BMW Motorrad World Endurance Team, looks back on his time as an active rider racing at Spa-Francorchamps and speaks about the magic of Spa.**
- **The Belgian circuit offers unique challenges for the riders.**
- **Unforgettable: racing in complete darkness and heavy rain.**
- **Daemen's tips for spectators: the best spots to watch the 24-hour race on-site.**

Spa-Francorchamps. The final preparations are underway for the next highlight in the 2022 FIM Endurance World Championship (FIM EWC), the 24H SPA EWC Motos (BEL) from 2nd to 5th June. There are not many people who know Spa-Francorchamps better than Werner Daemen, Team Manager of the BMW Motorrad World Endurance Team. The Belgian raced at this unique circuit in the Ardennes countless times and stepped onto the podium of the 24-hour race. Now, as motorcycle endurance racing returns to Spa and ahead of the 24-hour race, the home round for his team, Daemen speaks about the magic of Spa.

In an interview, he recalls his first Spa experiences that influenced his decision to become a race rider, takes a look back at unforgettable racing moments that also led to a close relationship with Steven Casaer and explains which skills riders need to be strong in darkness. For the many spectators that are expected for the 24-hour race, Daemen also has some insider tips about the best spots to watch the action.

An interview with Werner Daemen.

Werner, you are a real Spa-Francorchamps expert. How often did you race there?

Werner Daemen: "I think it must have been 20 times – and I did the 24-hour race there five times. Spa has always been something special for me. When I was a young guy, before I started racing, I went there and when I watched the 24-hour race, I immediately thought that this is what I want to do in the future – and I want to be on the podium. Also, I won my first Belgian Championship race there; that was in the 250 class. When I started to be an international rider, I rode in French teams and in 2000 we finished the World

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Championship 24-hour race in third place overall. That is a race I will never forget because we had 23 hours of rain – and we stepped onto the podium.”

What makes racing a motorcycle at Spa so special – especially in endurance racing?

Daemen: “I must say that Spa is made for endurance racing! Because it is long, it is hard, it is dark, it offers good grip in the rain. It is a nice track in the rain. And for me Spa is – not because I am a Belgian, I am independent in this one – for me, Spa is one of the nicest tracks I know. And it is a unique track. As a rider, you think you are fast and then you see your lap time and notice that you still need to improve by five seconds. It is very difficult to learn. It is not like other tracks that you know after five laps. If you go to Spa, you need at least two days to be fast. That's what makes it special. But you always have a big smile under your helmet when you ride there because the track is so nice, the environment is nice. And racing at night at Spa were the most beautiful moments I had on the bike.”

You have special memories of racing at Spa at night...

Daemen: “Yes, in the times we rode there, it was black-black. We had zero lights around the track and that makes it very exciting to ride. Sometimes in the middle of the night, when no competitors are with you on this long track, you feel like you are alone in the world. That always was a very, very special moment for me. Racing at Spa in the night, especially when it rained, those were moments of my race career I will never forget. Nobody will ever forget that. All the guys I speak with who were doing this from my age they are always speaking about these hours. Very special.”

Is there a situation or moment that comes to your mind first when you remember your time racing at Spa?

Daemen: “I think of darkness, rain - and Steven Casaer, who is now my crew chief. We were riding in these dark and rainy hours together. He even also mentions it in the books he is writing. He always says: I remember the hours I rode with Werner at night because we stayed together. It is something very special. I rode on a factory bike but it was very difficult to be faster than all the other guys because due to the heavy rain you did not see anything. I think nowadays, they would bring out the red flag in moments like that immediately, but back then, the red flag was not coming out. We had to go on. What limited us on the straights was the fact that you did not see anything with so much rain. There was also ten centimetres of water on the track – it was only about surviving. But they were great times ...”

And then you made a deal with Steve regarding having your own team...

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Daemen: "Yes, we made a deal afterwards. We were very young guys back then, he was maybe 25 and I was 30, and we made a deal that once we will come back to win the Spa race. When we knew that we will really have our own team, we agreed on three things: that we would win a 24-hour race, that we want to be world champions, and if we go to Spa, that we want to win Spa. We have won one race now at Most; now we want to win a 24-hour race, we want to win Spa and we want to be world champion because that is the highest goal, of course. And I think if everything is going well at Spa, we are one of the four teams who can win there. Sure."

Can you help your riders to tackle this challenge with your Spa experience?

Daemen: "I have already for quite some time, because we have been there already a few times and Markus Reiterberger has also set some new lap records. I was the record holder for nine years and now it is Markus. Of course, you speak a lot with the riders about where and when to take the risk and also especially how to ride at night because normally you do everything with your eyes. If you ride at Spa you need more senses, like smelling, eyes, ears. At night you change from looking to more listening and smelling. For example if there is oil on the track, you change not to seeing the oil but you start to smell the oil. You don't go in the turn with your eyes because you will see too late where to go. You have to change your sense, and that is difficult in the beginning to explain to young riders but once they are in the race they understand it very well."

It's the home round for you and the team – and we all hope to see many spectators there. What would be the best spots to watch the race?

Daemen: "The best spot for me is always Radillon, if you go uphill. Radillon is a corner like the Parabolica at Monza. It exists only there and something very special. Personally, I also like Blanchimont. It is a very, very fast left hander just before the Bus Stop. I remember when I was sitting there as a spectator at three o'clock at night alone in the woods to see the guys and it was my dream to do that once again in my life. But Spa is also exciting if you like to walk. You can walk over seven kilometres or maybe four, five hours to visit all the different places. Sometimes you are sitting 50 metres above the track and you can see 50 metres down seeing the riders racing at night. Those moments I still have in my head. I think everywhere on the track is unbelievable for watching racing."

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Media Contact.

Benedikt Torka

Spokesperson BMW Motorrad Motorsport

Phone: +49 (0)151 – 601 32455

E-mail: benedikt.torka@bmwgroup.com

Media Website.

www.press.bmwgroup.com/global

BMW Motorrad Motorsport on the Web.

Website: www.motorsport.bmw-motorrad.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/bmwmotorradmotorsport

Instagram: www.instagram.com/bmwmotorradmotorsport

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