



Media Information  
BMW Junior Team  
8<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Jochen Neerpasch on the BMW Junior Team: “Learn together to improve together”.**

- **In an interview, Jochen Neerpasch compares the prerequisites of the current BMW Junior Team with those of the legendary first BMW Junior Team in 1977.**
- **The first Managing Director of BMW Motorsport GmbH and founder of the BMW Junior Team explains his philosophy of promoting youth.**
- **Neerpasch: “I wanted to place the emphasis on the combination of man and machine”.**

**Munich. With the prospect of the Nürburgring Endurance Series (NLS) kicking off its season at the end of June, preparations for the first race outing of the BMW Junior Team are picking up speed again. Current situation permitting, the Juniors will get their first race laps on the Nordschleife under their belt on 27<sup>th</sup> June. One keen observer will be Jochen Neerpasch. The first Managing Director of BMW Motorsport GmbH and the BMW Junior Team is supporting the current crop of Juniors – Dan Harper (GBR), Max Hesse (GER) and Neil Verhagen (USA) – as a mentor. In an interview, he compares their current situation with the prerequisites of the legendary first BMW Junior Team back in 1977.**

**Video clips on Jochen Neerpasch and the BMW Junior Team:**

Jochen Neerpasch on the beginnings of BMW youth development:

[https://b.mw/junior\\_team\\_YT](https://b.mw/junior_team_YT)

Jochen Neerpasch on the founding of BMW Motorsport GmbH:

[https://b.mw/History\\_of\\_M](https://b.mw/History_of_M).

The BMW Junior Team on working with Jochen Neerpasch:

[https://b.mw/Jochen\\_Neerpasch](https://b.mw/Jochen_Neerpasch).

**Mr Neerpasch, you have shaped the history of BMW Motorsport for many years since 1972. You have now breathed new life into the idea of the BMW Junior Team. How did that come about?**

Jochen Neerpasch: “BMW Motorsport came to me and asked me to help them develop a new prioritisation for youth development. I then suggested going back to



supporting a BMW Junior Team. After all, BMW had succeeded in bringing through some very successful, talented youngsters in recent decades – but always individually.”

### **Why does team spirit play such a key role for you?**

Neerpasch: “As a team, you see more, experience more, chat to each other, and help one another. That was clear for all to see with the first BMW Junior Team in 1977, and it plays an even bigger role now, as the Juniors will share a car in the endurance races on the Nürburgring-Nordschleife. They must learn together, to improve together. That way, they will develop far faster than if each were to work alone.”

### **Why did you decide on Dan Harper, Max Hesse and Neil Verhagen?**

Neerpasch: “We looked for drivers who have improved continuously in their respective classes. They had to have been in the top third in each category they raced in. Furthermore, it was important to us to assemble a team of international drivers with different cultural backgrounds and characters. They should complement each other and learn from one another.”

### **For comparison, how was the original BMW Junior Team selected in 1977?**

Neerpasch: “It was basically the same system. Eddie Cheever, Marc Surer and Manfred Winkelhock were among the most promising young drivers in various categories at that time – and they too were an international team with different characters. In their case, you could see how well they worked as a team and how much faster they developed as a result. Based on this experience, we took a very similar approach when putting together today’s BMW Junior Team.”

### **Back then, Cheever, Surer and Winkelhock were renowned for their aggressive driving style. However, you did not try to stop them. Why not?**

Neerpasch: “Because that was the philosophy. They should drive freely. Back then, we even let them take on our experienced drivers in the German Motor Racing Championship – first to learn from them, then to challenge them. Our approach was not to win the title with the BMW Junior Team, but to develop the talented youngsters. That is how we will handle matters with the current BMW Junior Team too.”



### **Are you still in touch with Eddie Cheever and Marc Surer?**

Neerpasch: “Yes, absolutely. More than just in touch: I am sure that we will meet more regularly again as soon as possible. They are both intrigued to meet their successors, and to watch them at the racetrack.”

### **How did you come up with the idea of supporting young racing drivers in particular?**

Neerpasch: “When I used to enter races myself in the 1960s, motorsport was not regarded as a sport. As such, a racing driver was not seen as an athlete, but a driver. The car did all the work. Accordingly, the drivers at the time were not as well prepared physically for the exertions. I focussed on this point as head of racing, after my active career. I wanted to place the emphasis on the combination of man and machine, and to support the racing drivers in their preparation. Back then, I was already convinced that the best car is worth nothing, if the driver is unable to exploit its full potential. BMW was the first manufacturer to professionally prepare drivers for races.”

### **How has motor racing changed in recent decades, from a driver’s perspective?**

Neerpasch: “The demands placed on a racing driver today are completely different to my time. Back then, driving a racing car was more of an adventure, because there were next to no technical aids. The driver was all by himself in the car, and was only able to give the engineer any feedback on the way the car was handling once he returned to the garage. Nowadays, some of the technology is more advanced than the driver and even tells him how to react in certain situations. This means that other skills are required of today’s racing drivers. The sensors he has to use, in order to get the best out of himself and his car, are something completely different. You obviously need special training methods to train this – such as the wholistic mental and fitness training concept at Formula Medicine, for example.”

### **At the time of the first BMW Junior Team, you were head of BMW Motorsport GmbH. What do you remember from that time?**

Neerpasch: “As early as the end of the 1960, Ford approached me and asked me to join their management as head of racing. As I was at the peak of my career as a racing driver at that time, that was one of the toughest decisions I have ever made. However, I decided to take them up on their offer, and never regretted doing so. I single-handedly built up a specific racing department there, and when we started to beat the



BMW coupes of that time with our Ford Capri, the BMW sales director asked me to come to Munich at the start of 1972. I signed my contract a few months later. BMW wanted to reorganise its motorsport commitment. Based on my experience at Ford, I requested a flexible organisation from the outset. There had to be a separate motorsport department, which built the racing cars and then, based on these cars, developed high-performance and sporty cars for the streets, with which it would be possible to make money. We got cracking in May 1972 and first developed the BMW 3.0 CSL, which went on to become the most successful touring car over the following years. Generally speaking, BMW Motorsport GmbH developed very quickly. That was the best time of my career.”

### **How do you look back now on the project you started back then?**

Neerpasch: “I am very proud to see what has become of BMW M GmbH. They build fantastic cars, which are perfect for both the racetrack and the road.”

### **One of the icons of BMW M GmbH, and probably your biggest project, was the BMW M1, wasn't it?**

Neerpasch: “The BMW M1 was definitely the highlight of my time at BMW. The project was not only big, but also tough. The idea was not to transform a road car into a racing car, as had been the way up to then, but to develop a racing car and then derive a road version from it. As it was not possible to build the BMW M1 in the BMW plant, we at BMW Motorsport GmbH took full responsibility for development, production and sales. That was a very ambitious project. Unfortunately, we had many issues with production, which is why we were unable to get the BMW M1 homologated for motorsport. Together with Max Mosley and Bernie Ecclestone, we came up with the idea of launching the M1 Procar series on the support programme for Formula 1. The head-to-head battles between Formula 1 stars and established sports and touring car drivers, in identical cars, were iconic. The top five Formula 1 drivers always went head to head. Those races in the BMW M1 were fantastic and real crowd-pullers.”

### **Do you still drive a BMW M1 now and again these days?**

Neerpasch: “I do. The BMW M1 is still fantastic to drive. I used to have one myself, but sold it at some point. It's a shame actually, as it would probably be worth a fortune today.”



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