

# Super Maro



None of the three Erebus Mercedes E63 AMGs is yet to set the world on fire in V8 Supercars, but recent outings have shown steady improvement. What's also been gradually getting better at Erebus is the driver of the SP Tools. Transplanted from the other side of the planet, Maro Engel is clearly on a steep learning curve but the former DTM driver is adamant he's not here just to make up the numbers: when the time comes that Lee Holdsworth and Tim Slade are up there challenging for race wins, Engel plans to make it a trio of three-pointed stars at the front.  
By Tom Howard

**G**rowing up on the streets of the motorsport mecca that is Monte Carlo, it is not too surprising that Maro Engel found his way into motor racing. And while V8 Supercars' latest Euro import hasn't grabbed many headlines so far in 2013, he has endured a unique journey to Australia and has no intentions of leaving without glory.

Born in the BMW heartland of Munich, it's slightly ironic that Engel's career has been largely dominated by racing for Mercedes. But few would have predicted just how he would end up racing for the new Erebus Motorsport Mercedes AMG squad in V8 Supercars this year.

But Engel's formative years were spent in the glamorous surroundings of Monaco. It was here, in kindergarten, where the dream of becoming a racing driver was born. One of the other kids at kindergarten was a boy named Nico, and very soon young Maro Engel and Nico Rosberg would become best friends.

"We spent a lot of time outside of kindergarten together and then our families got on very well and we went on holiday together," Engel says. "One such time Keke (Keke being Nico's father, the 1982 F1 World Champion) was buying Nico a go-kart for his sixth birthday, two months prior

Dan Kilian





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to my birthday, and my dad followed suit and bought me a go-kart. While the parents were enjoying their holiday at the pool, me and Nico were down at the kart track putting some laps in and enjoying ourselves.

“Possibly if I hadn’t known Nico at an early age I may never have ended up in motorsport. But my mum tells me that even when I was a small baby whenever I was in a car I was peaceful. When they took me out of the car, I would start crying. I would like to think that I would have found my way to motorsport somehow.”

Fast forward to today and the pair remain close friends with Maro embarking on his first full season in V8 Supercars and Nico hauling himself into F1 title contention with wins at Monaco and Silverstone. Maro even travelled back ‘home’ to Monaco to see his friend claim one of motorsport’s iconic events in May.

While Keke Rosberg’s purchase of Nico’s go-kart sparked Engel’s interest in motor racing, his journey to V8 Supercars began like most drivers, with several years competing in karting. After finishing fourth in the European Junior Karting Championship in 2000, he made his single-seater debut in Formula BMW. Two seasons later he made the move into Formula 3, first in the German F3 Cup, before stepping up to the highly regarded F1 star production line that is the British F3 Championship, in 2006.

Racing wheel-to-wheel for Carlin with the likes of Bruno Senna, Romain Grosjean, Sergio Perez, Mike Conway and Australian John Martin provided a challenge and more importantly developed his racecraft to new levels. The new skills were displayed in 2007 as he finished runner up to Marko Asmer, recording three race victories along the way. Engel recalls the time as a pivotal moment in his career.

“My two years in British F3 were very important. It was there that I learnt the most as a driver. It was good to be working with Carlin and it was the right choice for me and certainly one that taught me pretty much what it means to be a professional racing driver. I’d never

**Young stars:** Or Junge Sterne, to use the German translation on the side of Maro Engel’s DTM Mercedes in 2008, below. Engel was part of Mercedes’ junior programme in the DTM, and before that did several seasons in Formula 3. Here is Engel on the podium with Nico Rosberg, top left, and heading Rosberg and Christian Kliemann in 2003.



been to UK circuits as I had done most of my racing in Germany, so the situation was similar to now in V8 Supercars as I had to learn all of the circuits. It was a good challenge and one I really enjoyed.”

It wasn’t long before Mercedes, which had been keeping an eye on Engel’s development, came calling. Although initially keen to continue down the openwheeler path towards Formula 1, the problem was finding the budget needed for a seat in GP2. At the same time there was an offer on the table from Mercedes to join its DTM squad – so Maro opted for the three pointed star. Competing in year-old machinery with Mücke Motorsport provided arguably the toughest challenge of his career to that point. After four years, he left with 12th being his best overall championship finish.

“For me DTM was the right decision; it was too good an option to turn down. Mercedes had signed me up at the end of 2006 as a junior driver and the chance of a professional paid drive in DTM was definitely the option, especially when you compared it to the enormous budget needed to race in GP2 – and I didn’t have a rich family background to pay that.

“The championship in the four years I raced in was very much divided between the new cars and the old spec machinery. Unfortunately I never quite got the chance to race in current spec machinery. With the old cars, the challenge was to try and get yourself into the top eight and beat some of the new spec cars. I did manage to do that on some occasions but unfortunately the Audi old spec cars had an edge over the old Mercedes cars, so it made it quite difficult. Competition was very fierce but it was good to see I could keep up with people like Ralf Schumacher, David Coulthard, Jamie Green and Gary Paffett.”

The relationship with Mercedes continued post DTM, with Engel remaining as an AMG Customer Supports driver. It was in this role that saw him ultimately land a coveted V8 Supercar seat. A call up to drive for Erebus’ Australian GT Championship squad brought immediate success as he guided the team’s Mercedes SLS to victory at last September’s meeting at Phillip Island, after a thrilling on track battle with Craig Lowndes.

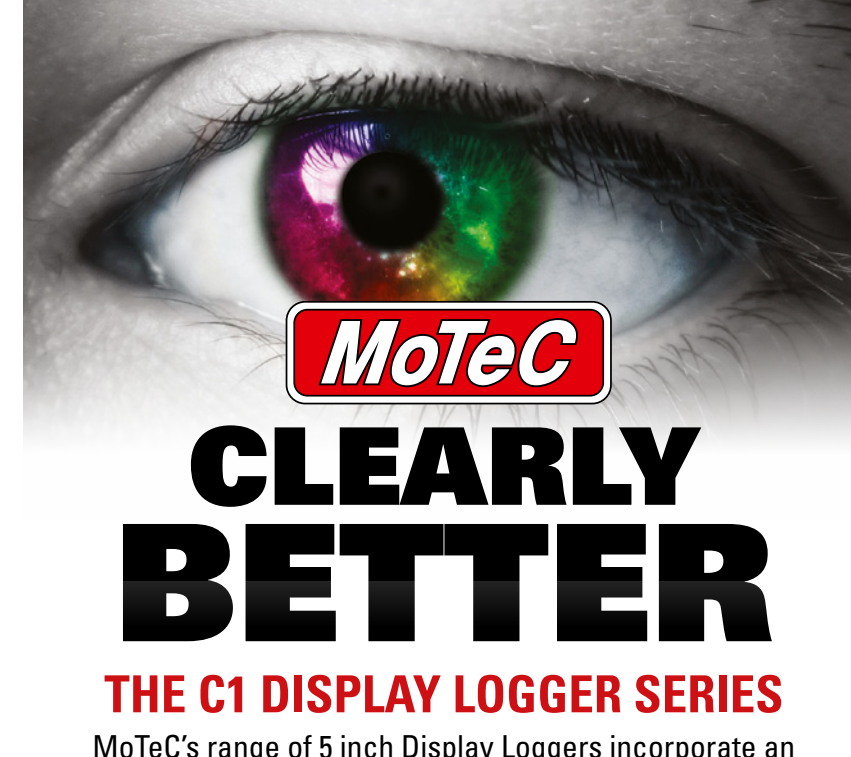
With the team unveiling plans to move into V8 Supercars for 2013 with a trio of brand new Mercedes E63 AMGs, a seat became available. Maro was quick to pick up the call, put pen to paper, pack up his life and embark on the big move to Australia.

Moving to the other side of the world and leaving friends and family behind is not easy, but the self confessed sports fan, who lists vacuuming among his sporting hobbies, has settled in well on the Gold Coast. He has even been able to find a small part of Germany down under and continue his love of soccer, playing for his local Broadbeach team.

“It doesn’t quite feel as big a move as it was, which is a good thing. But when you look at it, it is the other end of the world and a completely different racing industry with a lot of new circuits to learn.

“Australia is a beautiful country, without doubt. It’s a very different lifestyle over here compared to Europe both off track and on track. It is a much more laid back lifestyle away from the circuit. It takes a bit of time to get your head around it but it is very enjoyable. It makes you question what all the hurry and fuss is about in Europe.

“What I really love here is there is a very big sports culture. Wherever you go people are playing, watching or following something, which is excellent. Funnily enough, there is also a Bavarian beer cafe just down the road from my house, which is quite ironic – and no, I didn’t choose



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my building because of that! It was a pleasant surprise to see that, and it gives me the chance to go and have a schnitzel and even a German beer. It's a part of home I have here."

While he has nicely settled into Australian life, his on-track results so far in his debut V8 Supercar season have not reflected the German's true potential. However, Erebus' faith in Engel is starting to pay off following an impressive drive to his first top 10 finish, with a ninth at Hidden Valley in June.

While Engel has proved his pedigree in arguably the toughest and most competitive arenas in motorsport, tackling and conquering V8 Supercars is by no means a walk in the park, especially with a brand new car.

"Going into the season I set myself some goals. My first was to be close, where possible, to my team-mates, as these guys have clocked up multiple podiums and are considered very highly. In that respect, I have certainly achieved what I wanted and have out qualified and finished ahead of them in some races. Unfortunately we are not as competitive as a whole as we want to be at the moment, and our focus is to make sure all three of us are much higher up the grid.

"I think I need a year to be able to show what I am made of. The project needs time to develop and the same goes for me."

Erebus Motorsport team manager David Stuart echoes Maro's views and has been impressed by how the former DTM man has adapted to V8 Supercars. Stuart also firmly believes that in Engel he has a driver more than capable of shining in the category, and says that some of the criticism he has attracted this year has been unfair.

"I think Maro has done a pretty good job so far," Stuart said. "He comes from a completely different background and is the new boy. Some of the situations he has found himself in, he doesn't need to be involved in, but it is not easy when you are down the back. Racing

**Tough start:** It hasn't been an easy V8 Supercar debut for Maro Engel, left, above, but nor has 2013 been a picnic for Erebus Mercedes team-mates Lee Holdsworth and Tim Slade. Engel's introduction to Erebus and Australia came via a guest drive in the team's SLS at Phillip Island last year, centre.

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in the top 10 is a lot easier than racing in the bottom 10. I think Maro showed his class in Darwin with a top 10 finish. He has got all the talent and he can make a big impact in the championship and, to be honest, I think he has made a pretty good debut."

Erebus has made solid progress with the development of the three Mercedes E63 AMGs and the enduro season could provide Engel and the team an opportunity to shine. The 27-year-old is already earmarking his Bathurst debut as an event he is desperate to perform in, and partnered with the experienced Steven Johnson, a strong result is a possibility.

"Naturally I am hugely excited about racing in the Bathurst 1000. I went to the 12 hour this year and I saw my German friends Bernd Schneider and Thomas Jaeger race for Erebus and I was itching to get in the car there. With Steven Johnson confirmed as my co-driver, I am very excited to go there and work with him.

"It is a motor race where 28 cars will start and anyone could be in with a shout of winning. I'm very hopeful and not disregarding anything. Getting the car up there is the priority and we won't rest until we do."

As for the future, Maro understands he is on a steep learning curve in V8 Supercars and has no intention of stopping until he reaches the top.

"At this stage the commitment from the team and myself is very big. Obviously I need to learn the championship and the circuits and the intention is certainly long term. I've signed a multi-year agreement to be here and at this stage it is my intention to be here. Mercedes is my brand and it is great to carry that on. They have been very good to me and given me the opportunity to be a professional racing driver.

"I'm hoping in five years time with Erebus we will win multiple races and maybe a championship and Bathurst."

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