

TAKING OPPORTUNITIES



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There are many people in the world who aspire to become a racing driver at some point in the future, but very few are able to make that a reality. For one individual though, after dabbling in motorsport at a grass roots level, he's now embarked on a mission to go racing across Europe as an amateur driver, and is already making huge progress.

Peter Erceg is the individual fulfilling that dream and his love of motorsport began at an early age. His step-dad used to race Lotus Sevens and had one stored in the garage, which Erceg used to admire, but the main attraction came via Formula 1.

"The family thing used to be watching Formula 1," Erceg explained to The Pit Stop. "So we did that, and anytime any motorsport was on in New Zealand we were all watching it.

"Certainly when he [Erceg's step-dad] was racing, the summer series in New Zealand was like the winter series in Europe, so a lot of the drivers would come over from Europe at the time and race on our side of the world. So it was always the sport that we watched, even though I didn't really compete in it until much later on.

"I had always grown up around cars and the racing side of it. So when I did get the opportunity, then I started racing."

Growing up, motorsport was just a dream ambition for Erceg. He loved his sports, playing cricket, hockey and football at school. But motorsport was the one he longed for.

Unfortunately for Erceg though, a career in motorsport never was on the cards. He wasn't able to go karting at a young age, trekking around New Zealand trying to make a name for himself, on the hunt to rise up to the likes of Formula 1. He and his family just didn't have the budget for that.

Instead, racing became a sport that he loved, but watched from the sidelines. That was until he began working.

Once earning money, Erceg decided to start spending some of his cash on racing, and all of a sudden the dream started to become real.

"I started really late because we didn't have any budget to go racing. It wasn't until I was working that I could start affording to go racing myself," Erceg explained.

"There wasn't a super drive that I had to go



racing. But as soon as there was an opportunity to get on a track or anything... I originally joined the Porsche Club in New Zealand and they had track experiences like where you do slalom and you do three corners or something. I remember doing those things.

"In those days you'd have a road car and you'd turn up to a track with a second set of rims and tyres and change the tyres and go racing. So it was pretty low budget on that front. But whenever the opportunity was there I definitely took it. But it wasn't the sole driving thing that I had to do it.

"I guess it morphed into that as I got more and more into it. As I raced more then it became a bigger part of my life. But initially it was just a nice thing to do."

Erceg's first real racing season began in 1998, racing in the New Zealand Porsche Club championship at the age of 28, using a 944. But after a single season getting involved with the club racing, Erceg's racing stopped after he decided to relocate to the UK.

Once in the UK, Erceg's racing hit the pause

button for several years, but in 2005 he got back into the sport, taking part in hillclimb competitions in a Porsche 968.

That rebuilt his bug for racing and it wasn't long before he transitioned into circuit racing, taking his 968 to the Porsche Club Championship in the UK in 2006.

"We did that for a few years and we were pretty good at it," said Erceg. "But we decided to move on to do British GT, which was great.

It was at this point that everything fully evolved for Erceg. Not only had he gone on to race in the biggest sportscar championship in the UK, but now he had his own team, PB Racing. And as you might expect, his first attempt at racing at a high level wasn't exactly straightforward.

"It was a big learning curve for us. It was obviously a big jump up from club to doing a premier championship. We had an Aston Martin GT4 and that probably taught me the most about running the business side of it because we were looking after the sporting side and someone else was looking after the financial side. And the financial side didn't come



through.

"So we ended up doing only three or four rounds in British GT due to a lack of funding and then the next year the same sort of thing happened. We did one round in a Ginetta and that was the end. Then basically I got fed up with the whole motorsport side and took a break, and didn't really race again for about another three or four years."

At that point Erceg had pretty much consigned himself to the fact that his time racing in sportscars was pretty much over. But little did he know, he'd be back on the grid again. And it came about via a driving experience gift from his wife.

"My wife gave me a driving experience at Leipzig and I thought it would just be following around, rev limited, no fun at all. But that's not the way Porsche does it.

"So effectively you follow the leader and as soon as the instructor works out you can drive, you're off.

"BUT WE STILL MANAGED TO WIN THE CLASS IN THE SECOND YEAR."

After about two laps I was right on it again. So that really re-engaged my getting back into racing, which we did.

"We started back in Porsche club for a little while then went to 750 Motor Club, then moved into Britcar as it was then. We had a Porsche 981 GT4 and did a couple of seasons in that. It wasn't the most competitive car, it was quite an old GT4 by that point. But we still managed to win the class in the second year."

Erceg then moved onto the Porsche Cup car for the 2022 Britcar Endurance Championship season, a car that Erceg admits he absolutely loved, and he

finished the year third in class.

A new car beckoned for the following season though, this time Erceg replacing the Porsche with an Audi R8 LMS GT3 Evo II.

"We found this Audi in Germany for less than what a Porsche Cup car was going to be. So we got



a full GT3 car. We got that, and ran one year in the British Endurance Championship. We couldn't win that year because of the way the points were, there weren't enough cars out.

"But the second year we won the British championship in that. It was amazing really. It was great to go to the RAC club and get presented as a British champion with myself and Marcus [Clutton - Erceg's team-mate]. That was a brilliant day, I really enjoyed that."

Running on the highs of winning that year's title, Erceg was ready to return and defend his title for the following year, but the championship folded, meaning he had to find somewhere else to go racing.

That new home ended up becoming GT Cup, a series he's raced in for two years now. It's a championship where he's consistently racing at the

very front of the field, regularly picking up podiums and victories.

And when reflecting on how far he's come, after what started out as just a weekend hobby in his road car, Erceg is naturally proud of where he's got to.

"I remember at the time when I was doing some track day stuff, an uncle in the family had a factory BMW M3 race car that he'd got. And you thought 'wow, it would be great to ever drive one of those things' and now we're running round in a factory GT3. But you never thought you'd ever get there.

"And even six years ago we were still doing fundamentally road cars. So to get into a factory car was amazing.

"I think we've just always taken our opportunities when they've come along. Whether that's from a

financial point of view or buying the right car at the right time. It's funny, it's just been organic.

"It wasn't like we started with the Cayman and we had to really get to a GT3. It actually started off going 'you're never going to get to a GT3, so you're happy with a GT4'. Then you go from a GT4 to a Cup car and go 'this is great, maybe we can go one step forward to GT3'. So it's been quite organic as we've grown.

"But yeah, driving those cars is amazing. They're an amazing bit of kit and you look how strong the GT3 championship is globally, even though at the moment we're not competing in GT World Challenge, the cars that we are racing are. So you can really link that affiliation of what we're doing to what they're doing.

"It's pretty amazing when you think about where

we've come in a short frame of time, and on a real shoestring budget. That's the other side of it. We haven't been blessed with heaps of finances, so we've really had to work at it to get there. But what we've achieved is pretty amazing really."

Right now, Erceg is enjoying the format that GT Cup provides. Race weekends are split between qualifying, sprint races and then a pitstop race. For a while Erceg preferred the longer races and the challenge that endurance races bring, but as time has gone on, he's started to really get more enjoyment out of the sprint events.

"Qualifying has always been my weaker point," explained Erceg. "And sprint races I thought were as well. But actually, since I've been in the GT Cup, when you look at the results, that's not been the case.





"I enjoy the endurance races because it brings in different factors. You've got the team which becomes involved, you've got tyre changes or fuel stops. There's a driver change. It's all just a bit more team involved. The sprint I never used to really like because I wasn't as competitive as I was in the endurance. But that's kind of changed.

"So now, I think they're both different, but I think now I enjoy them both. And if we're doing a two hour endurance, it's a one hour sprint for my stint. Gone are the days where you have to nurse the car. The Audi will do a 24-hour sprint from a mechanical point of view.

"You are on it the whole time. So I think where I like the endurance side is that the work I do in the gym and the simulator helps me perform in that whole period of time without a drop-off. And I think that's where we perform better than some of the other drivers.

"But the sprint side of it, when you look at it, and

look at the results, I probably enjoy it just as much. I just enjoy the endurance a bit better."

As you may have noticed earlier, Erceg stated that he's not racing in the GT World Challenge yet. And the yet is because there are aspirations to expand his racing programme into Europe over the next 12 months. And the first championship being targeted is GT Open.

"If you look at where GT World Challenge is now, especially with the endurance side of it, you look at the competition and the fields are so great, it's an exciting time to be part of GT3. And our goal is to try and get there.

"It's quite interesting because if you look back about five years ago everyone was saying they wanted to get to Le Mans. Le Mans was the place to be. But actually if you look at it now from a GT3 point of view, for me, if I miss Le Mans it's a shame but not the end of the world. But I really want to do the 24 Hours of Spa, or some of the big GT World



Challenge races.

"So if that's our goal then you're not going to rock up having just done the UK rounds in GT Cup and go into GT World Challenge. So we need a stepping stone there. And if you look at the fields of GT Open, and also the teams that are running in there, for me it feels like a feeder series into GT World Challenge.

"So you're getting that level of competition, you're running on the European tracks, very similar to the ones, if not the same ones there are in GT World Challenge. So it's an ideal stepping stone for us to run a couple of rounds next year, see how that feels, see if we're competitive enough. And if we're going in the right direction, then the goal would be to run a full championship in GT Open the year after and set us up for GT World Challenge if that's where we could finally end up.

"That's obviously an aspirational goal, but they would be the steps we'd want to do, see how it goes

and go from there."

If Erceg and PB Racing can take that step forward in the next year or two then Erceg will have achieved his ultimate dream. And it showcases how it is possible to turn those dreams into reality.

It isn't easy and it may take some time, as Erceg's own journey has proved, but that doesn't mean it is impossible.

With hard work, determination and taking opportunities when they appear are the key elements in what's enabled Erceg and PB Racing to rise to the front end of GT3 racing. And given Erceg's track record since he decided to begin his racing career, it would be no surprise to see him go on to fulfil those last few motorsport dreams. 🏁