

# USTCC Champion Gary Sheehan Races in TCR Series in Germany

As a reward for his performance in the United States Touring Car Championship last season, Gary Sheehan won a chance to test in one of the top touring car series in the world, the TCR International Series. TCR competes worldwide with some support races at Formula 1 events, and factory teams from Volkswagen, SEAT, Alfa Romeo, Subaru, Honda and Opel. Sheehan performed well in testing, representing NASA, USTCC and the United States. He must have done something right because a day later he was asked to drive for one of

the biggest teams in TCR, Team Engstler Liqui Moly, which races three Volkswagen GTIs. Below is Sheehan's account of the weekend he called a dream come true. — Ali Arsham

I have just returned from my first TCR International Series race in Oschersleben, Germany, and I was blown away by the amazing experience I had! The United States Touring Car Championship that I race with in the U.S. had originally scheduled a test day in the JBR Motorsports Seat Leon Cup TCR Germany car as a reward for the 2015 racing season. After

my test day in the JBR Seat, it quickly expanded into a full race weekend in the Team Engstler Liqui Moly Golf GTI TCR in the TCR International Series race! Talk about a dream come true!

The test in the JBR Seat went well. Despite a fuel-delivery issue that limited my testing time to only 15 laps, in a car I'd never driven, and on a track I'd never driven, I was able to set a lap time that would have been good for seventh on the grid in the TCR Germany race that weekend. The following day I learned I would be driving one of the Team Engstler Liqui



TCR International cars, shown here in Germany, will appear in Mexico City as a support series to the Formula 1 event there and then are slated to appear at Homestead-Miami Speedway later this year.

Moly Golf GTIs for the rest of the weekend. The emotional transition from thinking my time in the TCR cars was over for the weekend to learning that it was only just beginning is hard to describe. It felt like waking up as a 10-year-old boy on Christmas morning!

Unfortunately, the move to the Engstler Golf GTI and the switch to the Michelin tire did not go quite as well for me. With limited track time and my lack of experience working with these cars, I wasn't able to adjust the setup to the point where I could gain confidence in the Golf, and it showed in my performance on track. Every time I tried to push the car it would bite back with snap oversteer. I struggled with this through all of race

one until it caught me out in Bauer-Kurve and ended my race one lap too soon, preventing a 10th-place finish. Race two was an exercise in restraint — tough for any racing driver — just to bring the car home in one piece. Some testing time to play with settings and settle the back of the car down would certainly get things back on track.

The TCR cars and the competition are phenomenal. There is something to be said for factory-prepared touring cars, and the level of preparation offered for the price point of these cars is hard to beat. They are fast, strong, and fun to drive! Despite the tough competition on track, I found the paddock was a friendly place, where many of the drivers and crew welcomed me as a newcomer. TCR International Series points leader Pepe Oriola even shared some pointers with me.

Finally, the fans really made an impression on me. During the grid walk, their excitement

for racing was clear to see and they enjoyed getting to see the cars up close, and chatting with the drivers. The highlight for me was meeting a German fan who asked me to autograph three photographs of different Subarus I have raced in the U.S. Crazy!

This type of racing would be well received here in the States. The cars are fast and look the part, and the competition is fierce. I am looking forward to the inaugural season of TCR Las Americas kicking off in October this year, bringing this type of racing much closer to home. The season starts with the Formula One Mexican Grand Prix in Mexico City, and is scheduled for the following month for the first TCR race in the U.S. at Homestead-Miami Speedway. I think once our drivers and fans see these cars up close and in action, it won't be long before the TCR Series takes hold in the US. I can't wait! — Gary Sheehan **SN**

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