



FIA EUROPEAN DRAG RACING CHAMPIONSHIP 2011

Round Number: **FIA 4**

Event: **NitrOlympX**

Location: **Hockenheim, Germany**

Date: **12 – 14 August 2011**

PREVIEW: FIA PRO MODIFIED

To no one's surprise, Michael Gullqvist and his ex-R2B2 Camaro have been the dominant force this season in FIA Pro Mod. Yet, despite leading both the championship points and performance statistics, they have still to win a race.

That changed, to a degree, the last weekend of July, when Gullqvist won Tierp's NDRS Nationals (2nd Edition) after a bravura high-performance battle with the resurgent Johan Lindberg. It may only have been a national-level race but it will rank as a milestone in European Pro Mod history. Between them, Gullqvist and Lindberg polished off nine 5-second passes, managing in one weekend to double the number of 5's ever seen in Europe. And it was Lindberg who claimed the performance honours, albeit narrowly. The reigning European champion qualified low with the event's quickest elapsed time, 5.922sec, which would have been a backed-up European record if the race had had FIA status, and hit a final-round terminal speed, 392.44kph/243.85mph, which matched exactly the Tierp track record set by Mikael Lindahl at the FIA race six weeks earlier. Only Gullqvist has ever driven faster. Moreover, the final round produced the quickest, fastest side-by-side'er we have seen, Gullqvist winning it at 5.926/391.87 to Lindberg's 5.942/392.44.

If the form book points to a Gullqvist-Lindberg carve-up at Hockenheim, what are the odds that neither will reach the final? Well, this is drag racing, so most things are possible. Lest we forget, it is Bruno Bader and Mats Eriksson who are the FIA winners so far this year. Gullqvist's consistency – low qualifier at Santa Pod's rained-off Main Event and runner-up at Tierp and Alastaro – sets him 43 points and a handy couple of elimination rounds ahead of Bader going into Hockenheim, and roughly a couple more rounds in front of Eriksson and Lindberg. Realistically, if not mathematically, the two Swedes might be outside the championship picture, but a slip-up for Gullqvist in the early going could see Bader leading the field to Santa Pod for the European Finals. It's five years since anyone has won more than one FIA Pro Mod race in a season. Could Bader now be the one to break that pattern? Or Eriksson...?

Among the other proven heavy hitters, Adam Flamholz has stuttered after his 5-second, race-winning breakthrough at 2010's Euro Finals. So too has Andy

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Robinson, whose Studebaker still searches for the final flourish to crown its retirement year. Never count out the Johanssons, Roger and Urban, but Hockenheim specialist Mikael Lindahl, whose two FIA victories came at the German track, looks set to miss the race this year.

Watch out for Marc Meihuizen. Hockenheim owes him one after the miserable time it gave him in 2009 – first, his brand new Firebird was damaged in a freak, concertina-style accident behind the start line, then the motor blew big-time once the car was back on track. The Firebird is starting to show the form to match its handsome appearance, dipping several times into the 6.0's. Meihuizen qualified fourth at Tierp's and Alastaro's FIA races and again at Tierp's July NDRS event, and reached the Alastaro semi-final.

Apart from Bruno Bader, Marco Maurischat and Norbert Kuno are the strongest contenders among the homegrown and other nearby entrants – indeed, Kuno won here in 2007, before the event acquired FIA status, and qualified low in 2008. Jürgen Schomann makes a rare appearance and Peter Ritscher an even rarer one. Switzerland's Rolf Ammann is best-known at Santa Pod for clouting walls and demolishing Christmas trees, but at Hockenheim he finished runner-up in 2008.

So: predictable winner or inspired outsider to claim NitrOlympX Pro Mod victory? Of all the tracks on the FIA calendar, Hockenheim looks likeliest to embrace the latter.

Text: Robin Jackson