

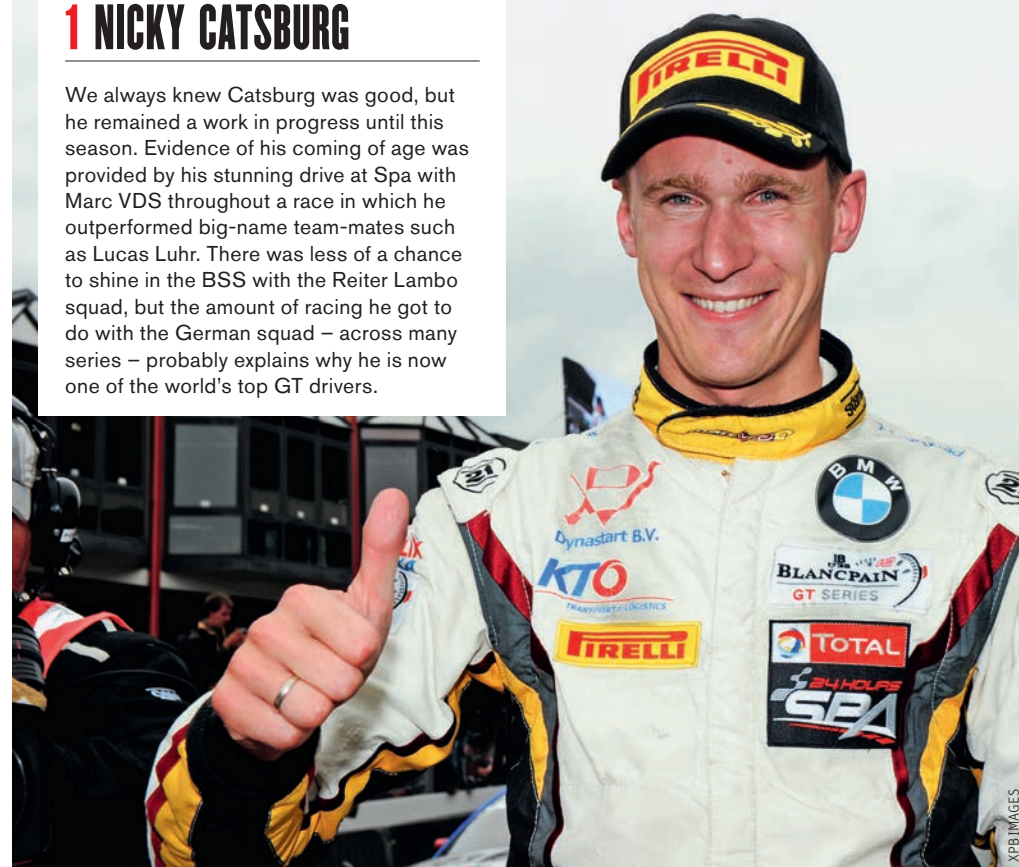
AUTOSPORT'S TOP 10 DRIVERS

BASED ON BOTH THE ENDURANCE AND SPRINT CAMPAIGNS



1 NICKY CATSBURG

We always knew Catsburg was good, but he remained a work in progress until this season. Evidence of his coming of age was provided by his stunning drive at Spa with Marc VDS throughout a race in which he outperformed big-name team-mates such as Lucas Luhr. There was less of a chance to shine in the BSS with the Reiter Lambo squad, but the amount of racing he got to do with the German squad – across many series – probably explains why he is now one of the world's top GT drivers.



2 STEVEN KANE

There's not much to say about the Northern Irishman's 2015 season, except that he performed exactly as we expected him to. He was blindingly fast as the quickest of the M-Sport Bentley drivers and posted some of those impressive charges – most notably at the Nurburgring finale – that have become his trademark. There was a mistake as he strived to take the lead at Paul Ricard. That spin shouldn't be held against him, though. Getting past the Nissan was always going to be a long shot on that track and the gyration ultimately had no bearing on the outcome of the championship.

3 ALEX BUNCOMBE

He proved again that he should be considered to be among the elite of the world's GT drivers, even if he doesn't yet have the profile to match his talents. The Briton was strong everywhere, didn't make any mistakes and played a key role in turning a line-up that was completed by two much less experienced drivers into a title-challenging combination. The solid rearguard actions against Kane at Ricard and the Nurburgring ultimately gave Nissan the title, even if he did lose out to the Bentley in Germany.



4 LAURENS VANTHOOR

The WRT Audi driver probably drove better than ever in 2015, yet he can't retain the top spot in this ranking courtesy of the mistakes at Brands Hatch, Spa and, if you agree with the stewards, Misano. Brands perhaps best summed up his season: he crashed in opening free practice, put it on pole with barely a lap's running under his belt and was imperious over the two races. Whatever your view of the Misano shunt, it meant Vanthoor undeservedly ended the season without a title.

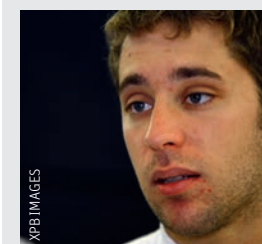


5 KEVIN ESTRE

Estre is always a joy to watch at the wheel of a racing car and nowhere more was that so than in the rain at Spa when he stormed into the lead. It was one of those drives that underlined the talents of the man. There were other impressive performances, most notably at the wheel of the Attempto McLaren in the BSS race at Brands. The irony of his season is that he had less to do – as the last driver in the car – when the VonRyan team claimed its pair of enduro victories.

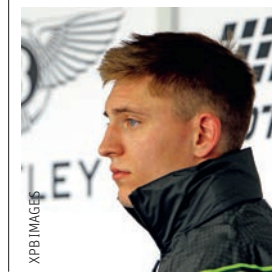
7 MAXIMILIAN BUHK

Is Buhk the superstar that we suspected he might be back in 2013? If he is, the 2015 season didn't provide the necessary evidence. Rather it reinforced the view that the 22-year-old is an enigma, a driver who is super-quick and intuitive on his day, yet too inconsistent and prone to mistakes. Buhk did his impressing in the BSS within the home environment of the German HTP squad rather than with M-Sport in the BES, but then he isn't the first driver to fail to shine in the second works Bentley.



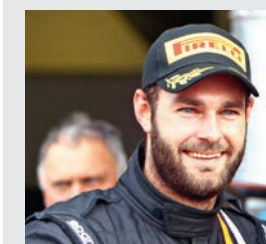
6 ROBIN FRIJNS

Had Frijns not been paired with Vanthoor, we'd likely be eulogising about him as the next big thing in sportscar racing. The Dutchman had an impressive first season of GT racing. It began badly with a car-destroying shunt at the Nogaro BSS round, but that didn't knock his confidence. He bounced back and was a worthy foil for Vanthoor in the BSS, looked the part in the enduros and didn't make another mistake all year. His reward, one that shouldn't be overlooked, was the BGTS title.



9 CRAIG DOLBY

The underused Briton made an impressive transition to GT racing after landing a job as development driver for JRM, NISMO's partner on the GT-R GT3 programme. He proved his credentials with the German MRS squad, even though results didn't get much better than a qualifying-race third at Brands and a smattering of top sixes. A switch to the AIM-run Always Evolving Motorsport squad proved what might have been. He and his regular team-mate, Sean Walkinshaw, may have notched up a victory at Misano with a bit more luck.



8 SHANE VAN GISBERGEN

Kiwi van Gisbergen was able to transfer his V8 Supercars pace to the northern hemisphere on tracks he didn't know and against drivers with much more GT3 experience. He shone at Spa, while VonRyan's Silverstone victory was all about him. He showed phenomenal pace at the same time as stretching out a tank of fuel after taking over the McLaren early during a full-course yellow. No one could quite believe the times he was able to set.



10 WOLFGANG REIP

The former Nissan GT Academy winner – in only his third proper season of racing, remember – stepped up to the plate as the Japanese manufacturer entered a car in the Pro Cup class for the first time. The Belgian proved able to hold his own with any of the established stars of the series and was particularly impressive at Silverstone and Ricard. He gets the nod for the final place on this list over team-mate Chiyo because of where he came from.