



Dynamic duo: Jochen Schümann (left) and Axel Strotbek discover that they have plenty in common.

“Business is like sport”

Axel Strotbek, Member of the Board for Finance and Organization of AUDI AG, and world-class sailor Jochen Schümann on success, experience and ambitious goals.

INTERVIEW Tatjana Pokorny PHOTOGRAPHY Enno Kapitza

Mr. Strotbek, would you consider switching jobs with Jochen Schümann for one week? What would appeal to you about his duties?

AXEL STROTBEEK: What I would find most appealing about this proposition is the fresh air and freedom out on the open sea. But I would also relish the challenge of sharing responsi-

bility as part of a team. I think that’s what both our jobs have in common. Whether it’s sailing or being on the board of a large company like the Audi Group – success only comes if every team member puts in hard work. But apart from the mental challenge, I’d also relish the physical test. Sport has always been an important part of my life; it clears your head and is a vital source of energy.

“Sustainable success can only be achieved with an elite team.”

Axel Strotbek, Member of the Board of Finance and Organization of AUDI AG

Let's turn it around: Mr. Schümann, would you consider switching places and working in the financial world of Mr. Strotbek?

JOCHEN SCHÜMANN: Actually I really enjoy my job. I've turned a hobby into a job, and made a success out of it. I have no reason to switch.

What are your biggest challenges?

STROTBEK: The greatest challenge for me is to continue the Audi success story. 2007 was our twelfth record year in a row for unit sales. This involved an incredible push to improve financial performance, particularly in the past few years. Now it's all about sustaining this success. The automotive industry is facing huge challenges. On the one hand, we are seeing increasing competition in traditional markets such as North America and Europe, which have already reached a certain level of saturation. On the other hand, we need to successfully manage growth in countries like China and Russia.

SCHÜMANN: For both of us, it's about sustainability. Anyone can get to the top with a bit of luck. But the only real form of success is the sustainable kind.

STROTBEK: Business is a lot like sport: Sustainable success can only be achieved with an elite team. That's why we at Audi pay a great deal of attention to development programs, fostering and furthering the careers of high performers, so that we have the right people on board to face our challenges in the future.

And how do you cope with these high expectations?

SCHÜMANN: It's only outsiders who paint this pressure as being so great. I would say myself that I have responsibility, but no pressure.

STROTBEK: It's always been important for me to grow with the demands made on me. To reach your mental and physical limits and use these experiences to grow – that's what makes you stronger.

SCHÜMANN: I play a lot of sport in my spare time. When I sit on a bike for hours and really wear myself out, it's regenerat-

ing at the same time. I let my thoughts wander and come to terms with things that might have been preying on my mind.

Where do you get the motivation for your enormous efforts?

STROTBEK: The car industry moves people in two ways. We drive cars, and we love cars. In my current job, the opportunity to play an active part in shaping the future – that's a fantastic motivation. I also relate very strongly to technology.

SCHÜMANN: You try to achieve perfection. I've learned that even winners can do lots of things better. Public recognition is also an important motivating factor.

Can you explain to a non-expert why design and technology are so crucial in professional sailing?

SCHÜMANN: We often design our boats ourselves – the hull, the rudder, even the masts and sails. The way you handle technology has an influence on sporting success. We dream about “Vorsprung durch Technik” – leadership through technology. With a faster yacht or a faster car, you're already off to a good start. If you then adopt a good strategy and tactics, anybody wanting to beat you is going to have a pretty hard time.

Mr. Schümann, you adopted the slogan “International Campaign. German brain.” Mr. Strotbek, might that also apply to Audi?

STROTBEK: Audi stands for “Vorsprung durch Technik” made in Germany. That is a decisive factor for our international success.

You both have a very cosmopolitan background...

STROTBEK: Living abroad gives you a huge amount in terms of life experience. You have to take risks with a few things: Continuity, friendship and local interests. But those things are balanced out by unique experiences, meeting new people and exploring their cultures.

SCHÜMANN: I can totally endorse that. You don't forget your own roots, but you stop being rooted. It's thrilling to travel, have new experiences and encounter diverse characters. ●