

The Styrian Green Carpet at the Austrian Grand Prix is a great event, especially for the fans. And you can see how momentous it is at times just by looking at the riders' faces. The idea is that on race day, the MotoGP stars don't just trickle into the paddock through the back door, but walk down a green – the state colour of Styria – carpet past the fans, as movie stars walk down the red carpet at the Oscars or Palme d'Or ceremony in Cannes. Rarely do the worlds of the sportsmen and the fans come together as closely as they do here. Due to their speed on the track, racers perceive fans as either a colourful mass in the stands or as a parade of people they drive through in a team car or the backdrop at any number of circuits around the world. Few fans have access to the paddock. It's the exception, not the rule. At occasions like the Styrian Green Carpet, by contrast, the fans can put a face – and voice – to the riders' names. And unlike classic autograph sessions, there is no set time for each rider to appear. There's a big cheer every time a familiar face appears, walks down the green carpet, stopping over and over again to sign autographs, pose for selfies, accept home-made gifts or have their photo taken with a fan club, family or bunch of regular attendees. Fans and competitors interact. Barriers come down. The person behind the helmet comes to the fore and enjoys these people's passion and joy. He provides joy himself and earns their enthusiasm. It's moments like these that demonstrate the incredible power of MotoGP, the passion, the admiration, but also why the riders give it their all every Sunday. As good as the action may have been in those spectator-free pandemic years, every rider would be happy to admit that without the fans at the track, without their enthusiasm and the colourful, eager, singing crowds, there was something vital lacking.

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An
autograph,
another one,
and one
more too.
Marc signing
his way
along the
Styrian
Green
Carpet at the
Austrian
Grand Prix.

