



Triple victory for Mercedes-Benz SS at the Nürburgring 90 years ago

Press Information

“Super Sport” sensation in the scorching July of 1928

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The official race début of the Mercedes-Benz SS (Super Sport) ended with a dramatic triple victory. Rudolf Caracciola and Christian Werner won the third German Grand Prix on 15 July 1928 at the Nürburgring, beating Otto Merz and the team Christian Werner and Willy Walb. The Type SS, a development of the Type S, was successful particularly as a private super sports car at that time.

Stuttgart. It was a race eagerly anticipated by motor sports aficionados and the automotive industry: at the third German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring in 1928, the new Mercedes-Benz SS racing touring car had its premier. Two weeks earlier, Rudolf Caracciola had won the mountain race on the Bühler Höhe as part of the Baden-Baden Automobile Tournament with a Type SS registered as a Type S.

The main opponent of the Stuttgart compressor car was Bugatti. Mercedes-Benz's response to the light French racing car with its high-speed engine was the Type S, which had been so successful in 1927. Even the production version of the sports car achieved **118 kW** (160 hp) from the 7.1 litre six-cylinder engine. With the compressor on, this rose to **147 kW** (200 HP) at 3,300 rpm.

“Super Sport”

Compared with the Type S engine, the Mercedes-Benz engineers increased the bore by two millimetres and improved the charge cycle. The Mercedes-Benz Type SS (the abbreviation stands for “Super Sport”) was initially available only as a sports four-seater. Even in the German Grand Prix, the Stuttgart brand started with four-seater vehicles, with the rear seat closed off by a cover.

The special four-seater (1929) and special Cabriolet and Roadster (1932), among others, were added later on. The Type SS was primarily developed as a strong and luxurious sports car for discerning private customers. Externally it is recognizable by the cooler: this consists of eight blocks and is 42 millimetres higher than the Type S (seven blocks). In 1934, the highly exclusive Type SS special cabriolet version cost 44,000 Reichsmark - ten times as much as the Type 170 (W 15) sedan.

The blue spectre in training

The German Grand Prix for sports cars at the Nürburgring, which opened in 1927, is one of the most important European racing events of the year. A total of 41 sports cars of various brands were in the starting line-up. Mercedes-Benz started with six Type SS vehicles. One mechanic accompanied each driver as the co-pilot.

Driver Rudolf Caracciola knew the Eifel route well. The previous year he had won the opening race of the Nürburgring on his first attempt. In training he now came up against Bugatti, Mercedes-Benz's strongest competitor. Giving a news-style account of his memories, he said: "The car hurtled into the arena ... rocketed up Bergstrasse, which seemed to lead straight up to the sky, raising dust on its way back down into the valley ... taking a number of S-bends at an outrageous speed [...] suddenly a spectre, a shadow, a breakneck blue shadow, appeared next to my car." But Caracciola prevailed: "Slowly, the mighty white Mercedes-Benz pushed ahead."

Blazing battle in the Eifel

On the day of the race, the sun was blazing in the sky - it was extremely hot, as the whole summer had been. "The thermometer climbed to 35 degrees in the shade," said Race Manager Neubauer, describing the conditions. Caracciola has respect for his vehicle: he describes it as "the big, solid Mercedes-Benz SS, the largest and heaviest racing car of the time", and adds: "This German oak of a car was not easy to drive." In historical photographs, a black band of paint can be seen on the white bonnets. In the 1928 German Grand Prix it marked vehicles in the class with a cubic capacity of more than three litres (Group 1).

The race was 509 kilometres long and consisted of 18 laps of 28.27 kilometres around the entire Nürburgring (South and North Loop). Caracciola kept on

increasing his speed and reached 111.6 km/h in the fifth round. “Outright lap record. I was staggered by our twenty-seven-year-old,” Neubauer writes in his memoir.

But Caracciola’s team-mate Willy Walb came off the track in lap two and his Mercedes-Benz crashed down an embankment. The driver was uninjured and made the eight-kilometre journey back to the pit on foot. On lap nine, Mercedes-Benz driver Christian Werner, winner of the Nürburgring opening race in 1927, dropped out of the class for racing cars with more than two litres. He had injured his shoulder. Willy Walb took over Werner’s car, number 4 in the starting line-up, and continued the race.

Caracciola gives up

Next to succumb was Rudolf Caracciola: in the twelfth lap he had to drop out – with blisters on the soles of his feet from overheated pedals and suspected sunstroke. He describes the ordeal vividly: “Tropical sunshine, blinded, fried by the heat, thirsty, weak – plus the tremendous weight of the car, which had to be forced through 180-degree turns on each lap.” Werner continued driving the Type SS, number 6 in the starting line-up, despite an injured shoulder. Then Caracciola took over again for two laps, before Werner finally drove the car over the finish line to win with an average speed of 103.9 km/h.

In second place was Otto Merz (average speed 103.3 km/h). He was in the lead in the last lap and only just lost the position to his team mate Werner because of a defective tyre. Merz, in the Mercedes-Benz SS, number 5 in the starting line-up, was the only one to endure the scorching hot five-hour race in the Eifel.

Third place went to Willy Walb in Christian Werner’s car with starting number 4 (average speed 100.5 km/h). As a result, Werner was mentioned twice on the leader board of the German Grand Prix in 1928. The success of the “white elephants” that day was completed by Georg Kimpel and Adolf Rosenberger in fifth place.

In total, 31 of 41 vehicles in the starting line-up dropped out. And what about Bugatti, the major competition of the day? “More than quarter of an hour passed before Mr Chiron’s car came into view,” said Alfred Neubauer,

remembering the distance between the Bugatti, which placed sixth, and Christian Werner's winning car.

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The official premier of the Mercedes-Benz SS was a sensational success for the "Super Sport". The SSK (Super Sport Short), which was a further development with a shorter frame, took an even greater share of the racing victories of the Stuttgart brand at the end of the 1920s and the start of the 1930s. It made its début on 29 July 1928 in the ninth Gabelbach mountain race near Bad Ilmenau in Thuringia. The winner, with a new track record, was Rudolf Caracciola.

Contacts:

Frank Mühling, +49 176 3095 1412, frank.muehling@daimler.com

Ralph Wagenknecht, +49 160 865 8077, ralph.wagenknecht@daimler.com

Miriam Weiss, +49 160 862 8913, miriam.weiss@daimler.com

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Captions:

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Daimler-Benz AG advertisement featuring the triple victory at the German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring on 15 July 1928 with the Mercedes-Benz SS racing touring car. Published in "ADAC Motorwelt" No. 30, 1928.

6756

German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: Christian Werner in the Mercedes-Benz SS racing touring car (number 6 in the starting line-up) was crowned champion at the finish line. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.

7142

International Motor Show 1928 in Berlin. Presentation of the winning car in the German Grand Prix 1928. Mercedes-Benz SS racing touring car, number 6 in the starting line-up, drivers Rudolf Caracciola and Christian Werner. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.

7227

German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: Tyre change on the Mercedes-Benz SS racing touring car, number 5 in the starting line-up, by Otto Merz. The black band across the bonnet (marking Group 1 vehicles with a cubic capacity of more than three litres) and the tarpaulin covering the rear seats are clearly visible. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.

R960

German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: Mercedes-Benz driver Rudolf Caracciola in the pits. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.

R971

German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: Mercedes-Benz SS

at the start in the first and second row. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.

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R1021

German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: Mercedes-Benz racing team with management. Above (starting 5th from the left): Christian Werner, Rudolf Caracciola, Otto Merz and race manager Alfred Neubauer. Below (from the left): Ferdinand Porsche, Willy Walb, Ernst Carstens, Georg Kimpel and Carl Schippert. Mercedes-Benz achieves a triple victory with the Type SS racing touring car.

R1023

German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: Otto Merz (second place in the overall ranking) wins the Ernes Merck Memorial Prize for the fastest German sports car. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.

R1025

German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: The drivers of the winning car, Mercedes-Benz SS racing touring car, number 6 in the starting line-up: Rudolf Caracciola (right) and Christian Werner. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.

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German Grand Prix 1928 at the Nürburgring, 15 July 1928: Winner's trophy. Altogether, Mercedes-Benz occupied the top three places with the Type SS racing touring car.