



Mercedes-Benz

24 hours of Le Mans 1989

One-two win 30 years ago

24 hours of fascinating motorsport: this is the legendary long distance race at Le Mans. Thirty years ago, Mercedes-Benz achieved a double victory in 1989 with the new Sauber-Mercedes C 9 Silver Arrows – just as they did in 1952 with the 300 SL racing sports car (W 194). A third Mercedes-Benz car finished in 5th place. This result makes the race a highlight of the anniversary year for “125 Years of Mercedes-Benz Motorsports”, which is being celebrated throughout 2019.

Stuttgart/Le Mans. How can one possibly translate the thrilling 24 Hours of Le Mans on 10 and 11 June 1989 into easily grasped data? For example, with ten numbers between 1 and 5,265.115: Sauber-Mercedes C 9 Silver Arrows crossed the finishing line in 1st, 2nd and 5th places. They were among the 19 sports car prototypes that finished the race after 24 hours – while a total of 55 cars originally took part in the race. The Mercedes-Benz winning team completed exactly 389 laps at an average speed of 219.990 km/h – covering a total of 5,265.115 kilometres.

However, the tension inherent in every 24 Hours of Le Mans race is contained in the stories behind these figures. Two Sauber-Mercedes C 9 started from grid positions 1 and 2, bearing starting numbers 62 and 61 respectively. But the car that actually won the race, starting number 63, only started the race from 11th place: on the first leg, Jochen Mass produced an impressive race and fought his way up into 2nd place before handing over to Manuel Reuter.

In Reuter's second lap on the Hunaudières straight at 380 km/h, part of a competitor's exhaust that had broken off penetrated the left side of the car –

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forcing him to stop at the pits for emergency repairs and lose two laps. Then Reuter took up the chase once again. He recalls: "From then on, the car ran like clockwork." Well, almost: Stanley Dickens, the third driver in the winning team, managed to rip a second hole in the bodywork after a slightly risky driving manoeuvre on the Tertre Rouge bend, this time on the right. But this was only cosmetic and, throughout the relentless chase during that day, the night and again the next day, no other team was faster than these three: victory at Le Mans!

Team mates Kenny Acheson, Mauro Baldi and Gianfranco Brancatelli finished second for a one-two triumph – although a gearbox problem meant they only had fifth gear for the last hour and a half. Nevertheless, they succeeded in keeping their competitors at bay. And the third C 9, which had started from pole position, finished 5th with Alain Cudini, Jean-Pierre Jabouille and Jean-Louis Schlesser – but, in the opinion of motorsport experts, would probably have completed the one-two-three if it hadn't been involved in an accident in the third hour of the race.

The most successful car of the 1989 season

The Sauber-Mercedes C 9 was the most successful car: it was developed by the Swiss Sauber racing team and the powertrain came from Mercedes-Benz, just as with its predecessor, the C 8. It first competed in 1987 as one of the Group C racing cars and won the seasons final of the Group C Supercup on the Nürburgring with Jean-Louis Schlesser at the wheel. In the 1988 season and then starting under the name of Sauber-Mercedes, the racing car won eight races. For the 1989 season, the C 9 was equipped with the new 4,973 cc V8 biturbo M 119 HL with four-valve technology, which generated up to **680 kW** (925 hp) for a short time in qualifying. During the actual race, it was about **530 kW** (720 hp).

For the 1989 season, the C 9 had not only been technically enhanced, it was also given a silver paint finish. This was intended as an unmistakable signal that Mercedes-Benz was once again on the track to achieve victories as a factory team. The C 9 was the superior car of the season and the first winning

Silver Arrow since 1955. Jean-Louis Schlesser became driver world champion in 1989 after no less than seven victories in eight races, Jochen Mass was runner-up, and Sauber-Mercedes won the team classification.

Three men, a joint victory

In preparing for the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1989, the then Mercedes-Benz race director Jochen Neerpasch, himself an experienced Le Mans driver, left nothing to chance. A weighty strategy book was packed with instructions for almost all eventualities. The cars were well prepared – as were the drivers: physical fitness was ensured by targeted training and dietary requirements overseen by the legendary Willi Dungl.

At the end of March, a 24-hour test race took place on the Paul Ricard track with two C 9s. One of them failed. Was this a bad omen for Le Mans? Not at all: what is probably the most demanding endurance race in the world is always unpredictable. It is renowned for producing totally unexpected winners – and causing despair at the bottom of the list as favourites come in last or suffer complete car failure.

Achieving victory with respect and passion

Mercedes-Benz had very carefully put together its three teams of drivers. Manuel Reuter was the youngest in the winning team aged only 27. He also drove for the car brand from Stuttgart in the German Touring Car Championship (DTM) in 1989. “The move up to the C 9 was a huge change,” he remembers, “and I had great respect for that car.”

Stanley Dickens, the 38-year-old Swede, also treated the car with healthy reverence, although he had already gained experience in high-performance cars and in endurance races. “The car was incredibly fast and driving it was a pleasure after I had got accustomed to the driving style,” he reminisces. “Maintaining maximum possible speed down the Mulsanne straight and in the small bend at the end was a real challenge. Once I managed 394 km/h. There were no chicanes at Le Mans in 1989.”

Mercedes-Benz Museum GmbH, Mercedesstrasse 100, 70372 Stuttgart, Germany
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Forty-three-year-old Jochen Mass was the experienced veteran of this race and completely at home in the C 9. To his advantage, he had taken part in Le Mans eight times before, which meant he had excellent knowledge of the race and the track, but had not claimed a victory up to that point. Mass shared his experience with the other two drivers during training: "At Le Mans, we braked very gently into the bends and drove through them smoothly so as not to put too much strain on the car. When you drive close to 5,300 kilometres almost without stopping, that is a key success factor."

Triumphant double victory and the third car in 5th place

Everything came out fine in the end. Jochen Mass drove the final leg "with an eye on the official clock only at the start and finish, but at this stage you feel the minute hand isn't moving at all", quoted "auto motor und sport" motoring magazine in its race report in issue 13/1989. Mass remained a tactician right to the end, as it continued: "I drove the last laps slower and wasted time to cross the finishing line immediately after 4 p.m. so as not to have to do another lap."

The three-man team won the race with 389 laps. The three drivers thoroughly enjoyed the champagne shower. "That victory was a real highlight for me," says Jochen Mass today. For Dickens, this was the greatest victory of his career, and Reuter's trophy still has a place of honour today - and right next to it is the exhaust part projectile that the mechanics presented to him after the race: as a reminder that the 24 Hours of Le Mans 30 years ago could well have ended differently.

Second place was taken by the second C 9 after 384 laps. This Silver Arrows double victory in 1989 is reminiscent of the triumph by Mercedes-Benz in the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1952, which Hermann Lang and Fritz Riess won ahead of their team-mates Theo Helfrich and Helmut Niedermayr in Mercedes-Benz 300 SL racing sports cars (W 194). But there was one major difference, there was another C 9 car among the top ten: despite an accident, the third C 9 finished in 5th place after 378 laps. The celebration after the award ceremony was too large for the originally scheduled room - and was spontaneously relocated to the large hospitality tent.

More wins in 1990 and 1991

In 1990, the Sauber-Mercedes C 11 became the successor to the C 9. This sports car was the first Sauber car to feature a carbon fibre chassis, which gave the vehicle outstanding strength. In 1990, Mercedes-Benz again won both the drivers' title (Schlesser and Baldi) and the World Championship constructors' title. Altogether the new Silver Arrows clocked up 16 victories in a total of 18 races in 1989 and 1990. For the 1991 season, no turbocharged engines were permitted in Group C any more, and Mercedes-Benz developed a new 3.5 litre V12 engine M 291 (**478 kW**/650 hp) for the C 291. This was to be the last Mercedes-Benz Group C car. With it, in October 1991 the team Michael Schumacher / Karl Wendlinger surprisingly won the season's final race of the sports car world championship in Autopolis, Japan.

The winning car in the Mercedes-Benz Museum:

Room "Legend 7: Silver Arrows - Races and Records"

Sauber-Mercedes C 9 (M 119 HL engine)

Number 63 (team: Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter)

Used: 1989 to 1990

Cylinders: V8

Displacement: 4973 cc

Power: **530 kW** (720 hp) in the race, up to **680 kW** (925 hp) during qualifying

Maximum speed: about 400 km/h

Kommentiert [R(1)]: Lassen wir alle Einträge versal beginnen?
Sieht schöner aus.

Kommentiert [RA2]: Technical specifications analogous to PI
"25 years of victory at Le Mans", 2014

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Captions:

89F585

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. The photo shows the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototypes with start numbers 62 (Alain Cudini, Jean-Pierre Jabouille, Jean-Louis Schlesser) and 63 (Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

89F634

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. Triumph of the winners: Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter (l. to r.). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

89F587

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. Nocturnal pit stop of the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototype with start number 61 (Kenny Acheson, Mauro Baldi, Gianfranco Brancatelli). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

89F590

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. Dusk pit stop of the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototype with start number 61 (Kenny Acheson, Mauro Baldi, Gianfranco Brancatelli). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

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89F604

89F614

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. The picture shows the later winner Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototype with start number 63 (Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

89F600

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. The scene at the start was dominated by the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototypes with start numbers 61 (Kenny Acheson, Mauro Baldi, Gianfranco Brancatelli) and 62 (Alain Cudini, Jean-Pierre Jabouille, Jean-Louis Schlesser). The later winning car with starting number 63 (Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter) worked its way up from 11th on the grid.

89F605

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. Award ceremony: Jochen Mass, Peter Sauber, Manuel Reuter and Stanley Dickens (l. to r.). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

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24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. The photo shows the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototypes with start numbers 63 (Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter), 61 (Kenny Acheson, Mauro Baldi, Gianfranco Brancatelli) and 62 (Alain Cudini, Jean-Pierre Jabouille, Jean-Louis Schlesser). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory (63, 61), and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

89F630

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. Nocturnal pit stop of the car that later won, the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototype with start number 63 (Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place.

89F631

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. Pit stop of the car that later won, the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototype with start number 63 (Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter). The Sauber-Mercedes clinched a one-two victory, and, in addition, the car with start number 62 finished in 5th place. At rear, centre: Jochen Mass.

89F627

24 Hours of Le Mans, 10/11 June 1989. Cockpit of the Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototype.

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The Le Mans 1989 winning car: Sauber-Mercedes C 9 sports car prototype with start number 63 in the high-bank curve in the Mercedes-Benz Museum, room "Legend 7: Silver Arrows – Races and Records" exhibition area. The drivers were Stanley Dickens, Jochen Mass and Manuel Reuter.