

Hans Herrmann – the Le Mans winner

After 20 years competing in Le Mans, Hans Herrmann claimed the first overall victory for Porsche. Together with Richard Attwood, the man from Swabia won the 24-hour race in a Porsche 917.

After two decades in racing, Hans Herrmann was regarded as a driver to whom successes came naturally and who could survive hair-raising accidents with nothing more than mild injuries. Blessed with charm and talent, he enjoyed a stellar career. His first race was in 1952, when he drove his own Porsche 356 in the Hessian Winter Night Drive. His first widely noted success came a short time later in 1954, when he was co-driver to Herbert Linge in the Porsche 550 A at the Mille Miglia. They won the class and took sixth place in the overall standings. The Swabian duo trained diligently and concentrated well – and they were skilled drivers. Reflecting on this Mille Miglia, Herbert Linge says, 'His feeling for the car and his automatic security when pushing the limits were incredible!' Also in 1954, Herrmann took part in Formula One with the Mercedes W 196, completing the fastest lap in Reims. An accident in Monte Carlo and the withdrawal of Mercedes prevented a glittering career in Grand Prix racing.

Herrmann drove for Borgward and later for Abarth. However, he celebrated his greatest victories with Porsche. For instance, he claimed overall victory with Olivier Gendebien in the 12 Hours of Sebring in 1960 and duplicated this result in the same Porsche 718 RS 60 with Jo Bonnier as a partner at the Targa Florio. Hans Herrmann is regarded as an outstanding development driver for successful models such as the 907, 908 and 917. 'If Hans prepared a car, we know it will be fine,' said Jo Siffert, the fastest driver in the works team. Mechanics could recognise wear patterns on the synchroniser rings of the transmission when Herrmann had driven a car. They were always the cleanest. Senior race engineer Peter Falk described Herrmann follows: 'Reliable, fast, constant and precise.'

He was narrowly beaten in the closest of all Le Mans races in 1969, when he drove a Porsche 908 and Jacky Ickx was in the cockpit of a Ford GT40. Before the Le Mans race in 1970, his wife Magdalena asked, 'Hans, when will you stop?' His answer: 'When I win.' And Hans Herrmann was true to his word. He won the race with his partner Richard Attwood and then asked for his works contract to be terminated after this victory. Once his career in racing was over, he established the company Hans Herrmann Autotechnik and became a successful businessman.