

Wolfgang Graf Berghe von Trips – Hill Climb Champion with Porsche

Shortly before claiming the Formula One World Championship title, Wolfgang Graf Berghe von Trips had a fatal accident in Monza. He had previously been a member of the Porsche works team for many years, winning the 1958 European Hill Climb Championship.

Wolfgang Graf Berghe von Trips was very clear about the reason why he raced cars: 'I can't live without taking risks. Car races remind me of medieval tournaments and thus of knights and my ancestors. That's something I need.' He first rode BMW motorcycles on some orientation drives before taking part in two rallies in a Porsche 356 Coupé. Having been scouted by Porsche racing manager Huschke von Hanstein, von Trips became co-driver to the experienced Walter Hempel at the 1954 Mille Miglia. The duo switched to a Porsche 356 and won the class ahead of Richard von Frankenberg, the hotly tipped favourite. Von Trips had caused his first upset. The next would follow towards the end of 1954. Using the pseudonym Axel Linther, he won the German Championship in the class for series sport and GT cars up to 1600 cc driving an upgraded Porsche.

As a Porsche works driver, von Trips won the 12 Hours of Sebring with Hans Herrmann in 1956, earning a class victory and sixth place in the the overall standings. At the end of the season, Porsche drivers Herrmann, von Trips and von Frankenberg shared the top three places at the German Championship for racing cars in the class up to 1500 cc. He finished in second position at the 1957 Millie Miglia with Ferrari. When the competition was still young, von Trips won the European Hill Climb Championship in 1958 by a convincing margin, driving a Porsche 718 Spyder.

Within a few years, Wolfgang Graf Berghe von Trips had become one of Germany's most famous racing drivers. He was a young man with an open laugh and good manners – a popular figure for German motor sport on the whole. 1961 should have been his year. Driving for Ferrari, he won the Targa Florio as well as the Formula One Grand Prix in Holland and England. He arrived in Monza for the Italian Grand Prix with a leading position in the world championship. On the second lap, however, von Trips collided with Jim Clark's Lotus. The Ferrari sped into the stands and 15 spectators lost their lives. Von Trips was thrown out of his car and died at the edge of the track. German journalists gave the vice world champion the posthumous title of Sportsman of the Year in 1961.