

CLASSIC DRIVER

Mercedes W125 - story of its discovery in the 1960s



Editors note: Colin Crabbe is a very well known English collector and dealer in the rarest classic cars. At a time in the 1960s, when these cars were not as valuable as they are today, Colin became a specialist in finding the most exotic cars in the most unusual places all over the world.

This is the story of finding a pre-war Mercedes Grand Prix W125.

Let's take up the story when Colin is in Ethiopia travelling back to Europe in 1968 from an extended visit to South Africa. He has already discovered an Alfa 8C, an original Maserati 6C Monoposto and a 1954 ex Marzotto brothers Ferrari Mondiale.

"From Addis Ababa I flew to Cairo but was too skint to afford a trip to the Pyramids - I still have not been. It was there I received a telegram offering me a pre-war Mercedes. This was the W125. The car was basically complete and had been languishing on the East German/Polish border since 1945 where it had probably been hidden by the Russians. We paid what must have been a record price of \$30,000 in cash at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin. The owners had even given it a new coat of silver paint. I suppose the W125 is the ultimate historic racing car. It was similar in layout to my 250F - with a straight eight supercharged engine developing in excess of 500 bhp, with a De Dion rear suspension and four speed transaxle.

"It was enormous (which suited me!) and I was lucky to obtain some trade help from Firestone for the 23" tyres and in rebuilding the crankshaft. It probably helped that I was getting into Formula 1 in 1969. We demonstrated the car at the Daily Express Trophy on a half bald set of Indy tyres and I wore a red leather driving helmet! Incredibly exciting as not only was it the first time I had driven the monster but a W125 had not been seen running since before the War. It proved easy and fun to drive, was very quick and the spectators most appreciative. What more could you want?

"We competed in various races during 1970 and 1971, the high points winning the Seaman Trophy in both years - fun to know that Dick Seaman had driven the car originally. By 1973 I had rather lost interest in the historic single seater scene as the Mercedes was also competitive in the post-war series including my beloved Maserati 250Fs and the like. That combined with thoughts of what a 'blow-up' would cost made me take the decision to sell my beloved Mercedes to Neil Corner."

The car is now beyond price and these pre-war Mercedes are now only demonstrated at the very finest historic racing events such as Goodwood by ex Grand Prix Drivers (John Surtees for example). Anyone who has heard the sound of a pre-war Mercedes will never forget it.

We are grateful to the publishers of 'Cars for the Connoisseur' Magazine for allowing us to use part of this interview; a full version appearing in the April 2002 edition. For further information and details of a free sample issue call +44 (0) 1258 473215, visit www.carsfortheconnoisseur.com or email [Charles Harbord](mailto:Charles.Harbord@carsfortheconnoisseur.com) direct.

In a future article, again by kind permission of Charles Harbord and 'Cars for the Connoisseur', Colin Crabbe will tell the story of his foray into modern Formula 1, as a team owner, and his second season's racing, this time with the Swedish driver Ronnie Peterson.

Photograph by permission of Colin Crabbe showing Colin winning the Seaman Trophy at Oulton Park in 1971 in the W125.

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