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The Martini Porsche 935 and the World Speed Record for Cyclists

Lead

Don't try this behind the No. 9 bus. In 1979, racing cyclist Jean Claude Rude wanted to be the fastest cyclist on Earth. Clearly, while his legs might have been up to the mark, there was a little matter of wind resistance at the anticipated 120mph+ speeds...

Step forward, then, the factory Martini Porsche team which offered the Frenchman the use of a specially adapted, 800bhp 935 and the facilities at Volkswagen's Ehra-Lessien test track. Rude's intention was to beat fellow Frenchman José Meiffret who had clocked 204.7km/h (127.2mph) in 1962, when riding in the slipstream of a Mercedes-Benz 300SL on a closed section of Autobahn.

With Grand Prix and sports car driver Henri Pescarolo at the wheel of the mighty 935, Rude set off behind the windtunnel-tested rear enclosure of the Porsche. Note the roller at the rear to safeguard Rude touching the back of the car at speed. Also, the model's legendary ability to spit gouts of flame on overrun was neutralised as the exhausts were re-routed to the side of the car. The idea was not only to receive the benefits of streamlining, but also to obtain a 'tow' from the massively fast racing car.



From a slow rolling start, Pescarolo gradually piled on the power until the combination was travelling at 100mph... when Rude's rear tyre exploded. By smart riding – and no little good fortune – he managed to bring the bike to a safe standstill. Having ordered more durable tyres from Michelin, the attempt was repeated, sadly without success. And sadder still, the plucky Rude was killed on a later date when investigating the effect of cycling at speed alongside an express train. He was sucked into its path.

The current cycling World Record stands at 278.8km/h (167mph) set by Dutchman Fred Rompelberg in 1995.

Photo: Porsche Archive

Gallery

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