

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Five questions to: Hans Herrmann, Le Mans winner

### Lead

Hans Herrmann, together with Richard Attwood, gave Porsche its first overall victory at Le Mans. Classic Driver's Mathias Paulokat spoke to the legendary German driver about his motorsport history and fabulous triumph in 1970.

"We all had trouble keeping a car of almost 600HP on the track"

### **Mr Herrmann, at 85 years old you can look back on an incredible career in motorsport. How did you start racing?**

I was infected with a love of cars from childhood. At school, most boys longed to be engineers, to work with ships or planes, but all I wanted was to be a racing driver. Carracciola and Rosemeyer were my great idols; but how would I ever get there? As I was born in 1928, I initially feared that I'd be drafted into the Army but I managed to pass my driving test in 1946 and so I started my own small trucking company. My first car was a Wartburg with a 0.8-litre engine: imagine that today! But I loved driving and the small business flourished. By 1952 I was able to buy my first racing car: a Porsche 356.

### **So did you choose Porsche, or did Porsche choose you?**

Both are true. I entered some endurance races that year with my own car, and Porsche started to notice my success. Then a factory works driver dropped out and I was hired to race at Le Mans in 1953. From today's perspective, it sounds incredible, but that's what happened: the second works Porsche at Le Mans was driven by Gloeckler / Herrmann. I was so lucky.

### **And Mercedes quickly recognised your talent, too - but you returned to Porsche. How was it for you at Le Mans in 1969?**



It was motor racing at the limit. Not because the cars were unreliable, but because the race was so fast and the 908's aerodynamics not properly sorted. We all had trouble keeping a car of almost 600HP on the track. At the end of the race, Jacky Ickx's GT40 and I had a razor-sharp duel. For an hour and a half we passed each other, several times a lap, my front brakes suffering from the rigours of the race and no longer fully functional. That was tricky, but then I'm sure Jacky had his own problems to contend with. We both persevered and stayed on track till the end, when he won by 1.5 seconds. After 24 hours of full-on driving on the absolute limit.

### **And a year later, how did it feel to take the starting line in a 917?**

At first, it was a wonderful feeling. The short-tail Porsche 917 was very well prepared and had previously proved reliable. However, my confidence quickly faded. Why? Well, the weather was a disaster. Constantly changing, with sudden rain and a wet track, then sun. Then two hours of rain. At least all the teams had to face the same weather. The Porsche team was constantly changing the tyres and, in the end, the conditions favoured Richard Attwood and me. We succeeded, winning the race in car number 23. My goodness, Porsche's first outright victory!



### **And you finished your motorsport career on this high. Looking back, Mr Herrmann, what was the best racing car you ever drove?**

Yes, after almost two decades of achievements, but also some serious accidents, I didn't want to tempt fate. What could top an outright victory at Le Mans? I started at Le Mans, and here I wanted to end my career - with this victory. As for the question about the best car, I can only answer it by saying that it's really very simple: the best car is always the one that wins.

Photos: Frank Ratering, Porsche

### Gallery



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