

Note 51



Daimler-Benz and Ferrari

Two firms have been very much to the fore in Grand Prix racing, one – Daimler-Benz – in the first half of the 20th Century; and the other – Ferrari – in the 2nd half.

Daimler and Daimler-Benz

(racing as Mercedes and Mercedes-Benz: 1908 to 1955)

Mercedes, and from 1926 Mercedes-Benz, took part in Grand Prix motor-racing directly from 1908 (after participating in pre-Grand Prix events) but by no means continuously. When their absence was not enforced by war and post-war situations they chose their entries carefully for returns in advertising (sometimes *national* advertising as in the 1934 – 1939 period) and in technical advances. Their approach from the earliest Grand Prix days could be expressed by 2 principles:-

- (1): their technical approach has been “Conservative Pioneering;
- (2): expense has been no objection.

A “pioneer” has been defined by a cynical American as “A man alone on the prairie, face down, with an arrow in his back!”. However, in engineering “Conservative Pioneering” may be defined as:-

Retaining technical features which have succeeded previously while seeking constantly for novelties which promise improvements which, if they pass rigorous pre-service testing for performance gains with reliability, can take their place.

Obviously, this is a very costly procedure and here the 2nd principle came into play at Mercedes-Benz up to the end of 1955. This also applied to their racing operations as well as to car design, see Sub-Note A.

Post 1955: cars

Having retired from direct Grand Prix participation with their own cars in 1955 and after considering in 1991 and rejecting a proposal to return in that way (via Sauber), Daimler-Benz from 1992 part-financed specialist chassis constructors using their own names instead:-

Firstly, Sauber (1993 – 1994 seasons);

Subsequently, McLaren (1995 onwards past the end of this review. From January 2000 Daimler (then Daimler-Chrysler until May 2007) owned 40% of the McLaren parent group. The latter bought their stock back by 2011).

Post 1955: engines

In November 1993 Daimler bought 25% Of the racing engine manufacturer Ilmor and from then the Grand Prix units bore the name Mercedes-Benz. (Post this review Daimler increased their share of the company to 55% in 2002 and to full ownership and re-naming in 2005). The GP engines were supplied to Sauber in 1994 and then to McLaren.

Abandonment of the 2nd principle

To cope with the cost of modern Grand Prix competition even Daimler-Benz had in the more recent years of this review accepted large-scale non-automotive sponsorship as part of racing with McLaren.

[Post this review

In November 2009 Daimler bought most of the ownership of the successful Brawn team. It now enters the cars as Mercedes AMG, made in the UK and with engines supplied by their fully-owned but UK-based company.]

CoY

Mercedes or Mercedes-Benz were CoY in this review in 3 periods separated by long gaps:- 1908, 1914, then 1935, 1937, 1938, 1939, then 1954 and 1955.

After another long gap the Ilmor engine, badged as Mercedes-Benz, powered the McLaren CoY in 1998 and 1999 (Drivers’ only).

Ferrari

Ferrari have raced in Grands Prix continuously since 1948, a record unapproachable by any other firm. While Enzo Ferrari was alive this devotion was because of his own passion for motor-racing. Many sports car races were also contested. His road cars were produced only to help finance the racing cars, which was the converse of every other company making ordinary cars and competing in races with specialist departments.

The variety of engines built for GPs in the period of this review comprised:-

2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 cylinders;

In Line, Vee and Flat configurations;

Naturally-Aspirated, Mechanically-Supercharged and Turbo-Charged;

a range which no-one else can rival.

CoY

In this review Ferrari were CoY in:-

1949, 1952, 1953, 1956 (using basically Lancia cars), 1958 (Drivers' only), 1961, 1964, 1975, 1976 (Constructors'), 1977, 1979, 1982 (Constructors'), 1983 (Constructors') and then not until 1999 (Constructors') and once again, after a 21 year gap, both Championships in 2000.

[Post the review they have held both titles each year from 2001 to 2004 inclusive and again in 2007.]

Sub-Note A

Daimler:-"Expense no objection" in running racing operations

Apart from practising "Conservative Pioneering" with all its extra expense in their racing car design and manufacture Daimler (and Daimler-Benz after them) applied their principle of "Expense no objection" in the organisation and management of their racing teams. Examples are given below:-

- 1908 French GP – the cars were tried on the Dieppe circuit 4 months before the race in which they finished 1st and 4th;
- 1914 French GP – for this race trials were run at Lyons 3 months before the event for which they entered 5 cars, brought 6 + a spare chassis (1076), and finished 1st, 2nd and 3rd;
- 1924 Targa Florio – practised 3 months before winning the race;
- 1937 – 1939 GPs – entered 4 to 5 cars and had an equal number at the works being overhauled for the next race with engines 2 x the number of chassis. A supercharged lorry was available to rush a spare car to a race if needed;
- 1939 1.5L Tripoli GP – unwilling to let the Italians steal a march on them by converting this race from GP Formula to Voiturette Formula with only 8 months notice, Daimler rushed through 2 cars to suit and took 1st and 2nd places;
- 1939 1.5L Nuffield Trophy – this was a case where Daimler *would* have spent the money to compete but refused an earnest request by their English driver Dick Seaman to send him with a single W165 to compete in this 1.5L race because they could not prepare *both* existing cars post-Tripoli in the time available. Their "Conservative" principle would not risk the failure of a singleton entry (775) (as had happened at Le Mans in 1930 with the SSK when the firm was short of money);
- 1954 – 1955 GPs – built 20 cars, had up to 6 at a race and built another "racing lorry" to back-up the team. In 1955 built 2 cars with a wheelbase 6 cm (2.7%) shorter than that year's medium-length specially for the Monaco GP. Took 5 car types to Monza in 1955 to settle the best for the Italian GP 3 weeks later on the combined road + banked track but still needed the "racing lorry" to bring another hastily-built type from Stuttgart during the meeting. Won and came 2nd;
- 1955 Mille Miglia – Practised 3 months beforehand, entered 4 300SLRs and took 1st and 2nd places;
- 1955 Le Mans – having "Conservatively" kept drum brakes for the 300SLR, despite Jaguar's proof in winning the 1953 race that disc brakes were superior, they demonstrated their "Pioneering" by fitting supplemental air brakes.