



# Le Mans '96

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**BMW in Le Mans or The Long Wait Until 1995**

Whoever wishes to delve into the annals of the 24-hour race of Le Mans, will have to search for a long time until he comes across a BMW success. For, traditional though this classic event may be in the international motor sport calendar, it has long been unimportant to the Bayerische Motorenwerke - until the collaboration with McLaren Cars led to the great triumph of 1995.

The first entry of a BMW, type 328, dates back to the year 1939, when Le Mans was already in its 14th year and marques like Bentley or Alfa Romeo had already scored several final wins. Two years later, two Germans achieved the first succès d'estime for their domestic marque. Prince Paul von Schaumburg-Lippe and Fritz Wencher, on a BMW 328 Touring, finished fifth with only twelve laps behind the final winners Wimille/Veyron (Bugatti), thereby scoring the victory in the 1501 to 2000 cc class.

For a long time, this was to remain the only BMW success in Le Mans. On the one hand, there were no BMW cars that held out prospect for victory and, on the other hand, combinations of the different chassis and engine manufacturers were not as frequent as they are today.

When touring cars of what was referred to as Group 2 at the time were admitted in 1972, strong BMW and Ford teams which had put up a terrific fight, returned to the Sarthe. In 1973, the Viennese Dieter Quester who had been loyal to BMW for more than 30 years and the Dutch Toine Hezemans on a BMW 3.0 CSL Coupé, finished 11th in the overall standings and triumphed over Ford in the touring car event. During the following years, French teams affirmed their supremacy in the class without, however, moving as far ahead in the overall standings as the multiple European champions Quester/Hezemans in 1973.

It was not until 1975 that a turbo-powered BMW CSL from the American IMSA series again caught the public's attention with an eighth place in the training runs. In the race itself, the US/French trio Redman/Gregg/Brillat failed, though, as did some private CSL teams who were no match for the gruelling marathon. The CSL of Harald Grohs from Essen, who has been loyal to BMW to this day and at the time counted among the up and coming German talents, of the American Sam Posey and the Belgian Hugues de Fierlat crossed the finish line in the 10th place before a quarter of a million spectators. Moreover, finishing 24th, a Belgian team with a CSL scored the Group 2 victory.

The following year, even two BMWs made it among the first ten. The reigning touring car European champions, Pierre Dieudonné and Jean Xhenceval from Belgium, piloted a BMW 3.0 CSL and finished eighth in the overall standings thereby scoring the class victory. Runner-up was the BMW 320 decorated by Roy Lichtenstein and piloted by the French Hervé Poulain and Marcel Mignot. It was due to their restrained driving style that the colourful car crossed the finish line in spite of an imminent engine damage and was then added to the BMW ArtCar collection.

That same year, the Swiss Sauber team with a do-it-yourself sports car powered by the BMW 2-litre engine appeared on the scene for the first time. With the BMW junior Marc Surer as a team leader, the little Sauber C5-BMW finished 13th in 1978, before a transmission damage and defective engine threw him back to 18th place in the overall standings, which was still sufficient for a second place in the class standings.

1979 marked the beginning of the BMW M1 era, the first production sports car from Munich which celebrated one motor sport triumph after another around the world. For the premiere, BMW introduced the M1, which had been allocated to Group 4 (special GT), as a piece of art on wheels by Andy Warhol. The unforgettable BMW junior Manfred Winkelhock put up a great show and, together with his distinctly slower team mates Poulain and Mignot, finished sixth behind five Turbo-Porsches and a Rondeau-Ford in spite of a few technical ailments and became runner-up in this class. To date, this has been the best scoring for a BMW ArtCar in Le Mans.

Although top-notch drivers, like Stuck, Quester and Pironi, were at the wheel and at times were even in the lead in spite of heavy rain falls, all M1 teams failed the year after. It was similar in 1981, when



out of six M1 piloted by top-flight drivers, only the Allot/Darniche/Cecotto team crossed the finish line in the 16th place. Some comfort was drawn from the class victory of a French Lola-BMW in the 2-litre sports car event. In 1982, with an M1 finishing 18th, the result was just as sobering.

Nevertheless, a few teams, following the introduction of Group C, decided to equip their sports cars with the 6-cylinder in-line engine from the M1. One of them was Peter Sauber who apparently had the right antenna, as he did a few years later with Mercedes-Benz. With three Latin Americans, Garcia, Naon and Montoya at the wheel, the Sauber C7 BMW, among the dominating Porsche armada, in 1983 finished 9th as the best car powered by a naturally aspirated engine, thereby winning two world championship points at the same time. The French Sotty and Curnot with their 14th place on the German URD-BMW underlined the reliability of the BMW engine over long-distance-courses.

In 1984 and 1985, the M1 was back. During these two years, the BMW of the German Helmut Gall scored the Group B victory, first with the French de Thoisy/Yvon/Degoreau finishing 13th in the overall standings, then with Dören/Birrane/Libert (D/GB/B) finishing 15th. A succès d'estime was achieved by the German constructor Ernst Ungar in 1986 whose URD C83 BMW was piloted to eleventh place and to second place in the C2 sports cars class by Danish privateer team Winther/Jensen/Mercer. The proven M1 engine in 1987 powered two ALD sports cars of the French constructor Louis Descartes with French drivers finishing 11th and 14th. After a modest 22nd place of the ALD BMW in 1988, the days of the M1 powerpack were over, though. Descartes in 1989 was no longer able to qualify all three ALD BMWs so that the three letters disappeared from the list of entrants during the years of 1990 to 1992. It was only after the end of Group C, that very old Sauber C6 BMW emerged in 1993 and another ALD BMW in 1994; while they were able to qualify because of the small number of entrance, they did not stand a chance in the race and were eliminated.

Thanks to the change in rules and the greater integration of the revived GT vehicles, BMW as an engine supplier for the superior McLaren F1 GTR last year celebrated a triumphant return to Le Mans. A first, third, fourth and fifth place in the overall standings put McLaren-BMW on the list of the great winners, like Porsche, Jaguar, Ferrari, Ford and Alfa Romeo.



## **The Myth of Le Mans**

The Grand Prix of Monaco, Indy 500 and the 24 hours of Le Mans - three car races to be mentioned in one breath, three events of unique tradition and flair in the world of motor racing. There is hardly a reputable car manufacturer that has not tried to gain worldwide fame in motor racing by entering its GT, sports or touring cars in Le Mans. For it is in Le Mans where victories are won by marques as opposed to the „formula“ races in Monaco or Indianapolis.

While the first Grand Prix in the French provincial town of Le Mans in the Sarthe Department took place as early as 1906, it was the «Les 24 heures du Mans» that have established the worldwide fame of this city. The idea of having a car race twice around the clock was implemented by the two Frenchmen Charles Faroux and Georges Durand in 1923. While similar competitions had already existed in the United States, their significance was merely regional.

This was different in Le Mans. On 26 May 1923, at 4 p.m. - with a few exceptions, this was to remain the traditional starting time to the present day - the flag was dropped for the first 24-hour race. This happened in a hail storm and it soon became so dark that large army spotlights illuminated the bends and gas lamps had to be set up everywhere. At the time, the route started from the east of Le Mans, taking the drivers to the village of Pontlieue over a distance of 17.262 kilometres (10.726 miles). Only three out of 33 teams dropped out and the first final winners were Lagache/Léonard on a Chenard & Walker after covering 2209 kilometres at an average speed of 92.064 kph.

Even then, the organisers realized that the spectators should be offered a little more than just pure motor sport. Thus, something of a fun fair village with movie theatres, snack bars and bands developed on the periphery of the race track. To this day, Le Mans is unthinkable without this unique fun fair atmosphere.

In 1925, the so-called Le Mans starting procedure was practised for the first time, with the vehicles positioned on one side of the track and the drivers on the opposite side. When the starting signal was given, the drivers dashed to their cars, jumped into the cockpit and off they went. But only after they had closed the folded-down tops of their cars ...

This typical starting procedure was used until 1969. In 1970, the drivers waited for the starting signal while sitting in their cars and the so-called flying Indy start has been in use since 1971.

The dominating marques of the first races were Bentley and Lorraine-Dietrich. Then, Alfa Romeo and Lagonda topped the list of winners, and also Bugatti and, in one case, Delahaye made it to the top shortly before the Second World War. With 13 final wins from 1970 to 1994, Porsche is the most successful manufacturer racing



in Le Mans, followed by Ferrari (9 victories from 1949 to 1965), Jaguar (7 from 1951 to 1990) and Bentley (5 from 1924 to 1930). Last year, McLaren with the BMW-powered F1 GTR headed the winners' list.

In 1929, the organising Automobile Club de l'Ouest (A.C.O.) reduced the length of the route to 16.3 km which, for the first time, included a special connecting stretch as the actual race track. From 1932, the «Circuit de la Sarthe» reduced to 13.492 km started resembling today's route. The average speeds before the renewed change in route in 1956 were already close to 200 kph.

The Number 5 Route used from 1967 to 1971 was far and away the fastest version. It was during that period of time that Marko/van Lennep set up the distance record, when they covered 5335.313 kilometres in a Porsche 917 at an average speed of 222.3 kph. Lammers/Dumfries/Wallace missed this record with their Group C Jaguar in 1988 by just 2.5 kilometres.

Until that time, however, the route was changed several times. Since 1990, there have been as many as 10 variants of the «Circuit des 24 Heures»; its distance is exactly 13.6 km. The heart of the route is the notorious Hunaudières, a straight of about 5 kilometres leading from the outskirts of Le Mans towards Mulsanne. This highway has acquired notoriety, as it permits speeds of up to 400 kph. In 1990, it was divided into three sections by two chicanes and „defused“.

There have always been dramatic events in the history of the most famous long-distance race of the world. For example in 1933, when Tazio Novolari beat his Alfa team mate Luigi Chinetti by 400 metres. In 1950, when winner Louis Rosier left the wheel of the Lago-Talbot to his son Jean-Louis for only two hours. Today, a driver is allowed to stay at the wheel for a maximum of 4 hours at a stretch and 14 hours in total. The victorious Ferrari piloted by Gonzales/Trintignant crossed the finish line with a lead of only 90 seconds. Finish was even tighter in 1966 when in the two Ford teams with Amon/McLaren and Miles/Hulme were only 20 metres apart and, in 1969, when Ickx/Oliver in a Ford distanced the Porsche piloted by Larrousse/Herrmann by 120 metres at the finish line.

In 1972, Graham Hill of Great Britain, father of the current world championship leader Damon Hill, was the only race driver up until that time who also won the 24 hours of Le Mans after Indy 500 and the Formula 1 world championship. Of the 102 drivers who have so far headed the winners' lists of the 63 events, only nine are of German origin, with Hans-Joachim Stuck scoring two straight victories and Klaus Ludwig finishing first three times.

So far the most successful Le Mans driver of all time is the six-time overall winner, the Belgian ex-BMW factory driver Jacky Ickx. The last milestone was set by McLaren and BMW in 1995, when the new



combination triumphed at the first go - 30 years after the victory of Bruce McLaren on a Ford MK II; his greatest ambition then was to repeat this victory on a vehicle of his own construction...

This list of remarkable events could be continued indefinitely. One of the special events was the entry of the first „racing“ piece of art for Le Mans, the BMW 3.0 CSL Coupé designed by Alexander Calder in 1975, which was followed by three additional BMW ArtCars of Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol by the end of the 1970s. BMW, in collaboration with the French auctioneer and race driver Hervé Poulain, had thus added to the 24 hours of Le Mans a new feature that was unique in the world of motor sport and gave the fascination of this race a new quality.

After the limitation to Group C sports cars in 1992 had proved counter-productive for the participants, Le Mans returned to the roots of its racing rules and reopened the field for GT vehicles. It is due to the revival of the GT category, in which BMW is participating with its customers, that Le Mans has preserved its character and this year faces a real rush of teams and spectators.

**BMW and Art in Le Mans**

With all the sponsor logos, modern race cars frequently are very difficult to identify, as they resemble advertising pillars dashing by. There is also a reverse approach - making a race car look even more unique than it already is by giving it a special paint. This is exactly the approach taken by BMW even more than 20 years ago with its BMW ArtCars.

The idea was born in 1975 when the French auctioneer and race driver Hervé Poulain entered the Le Mans race for the first time. Living up to his reputation, Maître Poulain was looking for a link between art and motor sport. He then had the idea of having an artist re-style his 480HP BMW 3.0 CSL. Not finding an open-minded partner at BMW, he commissioned his friend Alexander Calder to design the piece of art on wheels.

The artistic design of a real race car gave the American the opportunity to deal with a realistic medium and at the same time re-enter the field of working with shape and colour in motion in a playful manner. In doing so, the artist was not guided by the streamlined styling of the race car body but created his own styling lines. Like with his sculptures and mobiles, which many count among the most innovative American sculptures of the 20th century, Calder used intensive colours and elegantly moulded surfaces which he lavishly distributed among fenders, bonnet and roof of the BMW CSL race coupé.

Alexander Calder personally experienced the 24-hour race in 1975; one year later, he died in New York. The première of his BMW ArtCar was not crowned with success on the motor sport side, due to a defective propeller shaft and exclusion from the scoring, but the result of his work met with so much interest that BMW decided to continue the experiment.

In 1976, it was New York artist Frank Stella who took it upon himself to style a 750HP BMW CSL Turbo. In his first concept, the American was inspired by the technical flair of the 340 kph BMW Group 5 coupé, and he created a grid of black-and-white squares which in its precision and uniformity resembled an oversized graph paper. «My design», said the artist, «is like a blueprint applied to the body.» Although the BMW Turbo CSL racing coupé was the fastest Group 5 car at the starting line, it never achieved any motor sport success in Le Mans.

Therefore, a short time afterwards, the coupé was again entered in the manufacturers' world championship in Dijon, France. There, the racing piece of art of Le Mans was piloted by Stella's friend, Ronnie Peterson. When the popular Swede died of injuries sustained in a collision at the starting line two years later at the GP of Italy in



Monza, Stella in memory of his friend created the series called «The Polar Co-Ordinates for Ronnie Peterson».

Following Calder and Stella, it was the turn of two renowned pop artists: Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. Lichtenstein has vivid memories of how the styling concept for a BMW 320i Group 5 was created: «The painted lines were supposed to represent the road showing the car where to go. The layout also shows the scenery in which the car travelled. Even the sky and sunshine can be seen.... It might be called a list of all the things that a car experiences - except that the car reflects all these things before it has ever travelled on a road.»

This BMW ArtCar was distinctly influenced by Lichtenstein's comic art with oversized grid points and long drawn-out colour surfaces which suggest speed in the comic strip.

For the first time, the entry of a BMW ArtCar also received motor sport honours at Le Mans in 1977. Hervé Poulain and Marcel Mignot piloting the BMW 320i took an impressive 8th place and finished first in Group 5 up to 2000 cc.

Even more successful was the fourth and so far last BMW ArtCar, the design of which was entrusted to Andy Warhol, at the Le Mans race in 1979. The American who also converts objects of every-day life, such as soup cans and Coca Cola bottles into pieces of art, approached the matter without any pre-conceived ideas. As opposed to his predecessors, Warhol got by without a fifth-scale mockup and painted right on the original race car, a BMW M1 in one go. Andy Warhol's personal style was thus expressed even more intensively. «I tried to portray speed. When a car really goes fast, all lines and colours tend to be blurred. I love this car. It has come out better than the piece of art» enthused the American.

His spontaneity and extraordinary gift were to be rewarded. With the German BMW junior Manfred Winkelhock as well as Frenchmen Poulain and Mignot at the wheel, the Warhol BMW M1 was entered as a special GT in the Group 4 version and, after 24 hours, finished 6th overall and second in its class.

What had started in motor sport, soon grew beyond it. Other artists primarily focused on production BMWs or BMW race-tuned touring cars which were no longer entered in Le Mans. The BMW ArtCars, however, not only find admirers on race tracks. Numerous museums and art galleries made these pieces of art on wheels available to the public worldwide. Thus, the „racing“ pieces of art of Calder and Stella were to be admired that same year in the Paris Louvre and later on in almost all famous museums of the world. Today, as many as nine countries from all five continents are represented with their leading artists in the unique BMW ArtCar collection.

Of course, there were also „normal“ racing entries in Le Mans. For instance back in 1939, when Prince Max von Schaumburg-Lippe and his „co-pilot“ Fritz Wencher finished second in the overall standings with their BMW 328 Touring and won the 1501-2000 cc class. In 1972, when touring cars were again permitted to race in Le Mans for a few years, BMW CSL racing coupés finished high up in the overall standings - and not only as pieces of art. In the 1980s, it was above all the BMW M1 as GT race cars that showed convincing achievements in the overall standings among the first ten as well as with various class victories.

With all factory-supported BMW race entries, an ambitious design of the race cars is typical of BMW's appearance on the race track. This is also the case in Le Mans 1996 when the distinctive BMW motor sport design unmistakably identifies the two factory-supported McLaren F1 GTR at the starting line.



**BMW and McLaren**

«Twenty-five years ago, Bruce McLaren's favourite project, the McLaren M6GT, was to be entered in endurance races. He was unsuccessful at the time, and today, the F1 GTR is in a sense the continuation and consummation of Bruce McLaren's project. From the very first race, the F1 GTR proved extraordinarily successful. To us, Le Mans 1995 was a historic event. I therefore would like to express my appreciation to our customers who convinced us to create the conditions required to enter their vehicles in endurance races. I also wish to thank the staff of McLaren Cars, the company of BMW and all those who have contributed towards making our project a success.»

This is an extract from the foreword of McLaren boss Ron Dennis in his book «F1 McLaren GTR» published by the Group C Motorsportverlag in Duisburg. If Mr. Dennis, who has a reputation for accepting nothing but the optimum, is paying this kind of tribute, something very special must have been accomplished.

The aforementioned customers include Dr. Thomas Bscher, a private banker from Cologne who was convinced by the British in 1994 to transform their road-going sports car to a racing machine for the new BPR Global Endurance GT Series. In the event of a positive decision, he would immediately and gladly be the first customer. Following Bscher's initiation of the project, constructor Gordon Murray, with the McLaren team and BMW as engine partner, developed a racing vehicle which catapulted the McLaren BMW combination to the top of GT motor sport almost immediately. At Le Mans 1995, the McLaren customers won ten of the twelve races in the BPR Series and - as a thank-you for his initiative - the first World Cup and European Cup winner was Dr. Thomas Bscher, together with his partner, professional race driver John Nielsen from Denmark.

The real highlight, however, was to be the 24-hour race of Le Mans last year; its rules permit different racing categories and it is therefore not part of the BPR Series. It was only in the seventh race of the series that seven McLaren customer teams participated in this classic marathon. Led by the Kokusai-Kaihatso team with J.J. Lehto (Finland), Yannick Dalmas (France) and Masanori Sekiya (Japan), five McLaren BMWs finished first, third, fourth, fifth and thirteenth in the overall standings. Only two dropped out because of accidents, including John Nielsen, Thomas Bscher and Jochen Mass, who had been in the lead for a long time. On top of that, the BMW-powered McLaren F1 GTRs took the first five places in the GT standings. All that against a competition consisting of such renowned marques as Porsche, Ferrari, Jaguar, Honda, Nissan and Toyota.



The ingenious constructor, Gordon Murray, who helped Brabham BMW win the Formula 1 world championship as early as 1983 made a dream come true with the McLaren F1: designing a road-going sports car combining Formula 1 technology with fitness for everyday road usage. Therefore, in making the chassis, body and the most advanced wheel suspension systems, extensive use was made of plastic and composite materials, such as carbon fibre and Kevlar or light-alloy materials. It is therefore not surprising that the production model weighs little more than 1,000 kilograms, thereby providing optimum conditions for motor sport entries.

At 370 kph maximum speed, the McLaren F1 is considered to be the fastest road-going sports car of the world. However, it took some major modifications to convert it into the F1 GTR for the race track. Thus, instead of the production standard 90-litre fuel tanks, a 100-litre safety tank had to be installed. The aluminium housing of the all-synchromesh six-speed gearbox remained unchanged, but the interior had to be modified and matched to the enormous stresses to which it would be exposed in a racing environment. The four Brembo disk brakes were designed with larger diameters, appropriate brake callipers and pads to guarantee optimum deceleration in any situation.

Air-conditioning, hi-fi system and silencers in the exhaust system were removed; instead, the F1 GTR was fitted with a roll cage and a complex fire extinguishing system.

To meet the special requirements of Le Mans, the entire wheel suspension system was re-designed and the gearbox beefed up.

The heart of the McLaren F1 GTR is the V12 engine which was developed by a team headed by Paul Rosche at BMW Motorsport in Munich. This powerpack, type designation S70/2 (1995) or S70/3 (1996), is unparalleled in GT motor sport. For BMW, the decisive element was not only power output but also a comparatively low weight and compactness of the power unit as well as its reliability and ease of maintenance. BMW succeeded in everything; in 1995, there were teams entering several 4-hour races with the same engine, with just an overhaul before Le Mans. At the 24-hour race itself, the BMW personnel in the pits appeared almost idle in the absence of any engine problems.

Even in the road-going sports car, the 6064 cc 48-valve, V12 engine stands out for its enormous power and impressive torque. The hardware carried over from the production car includes engine block, cylinder head and crankshaft. Modifications were required for the cooling system, the entire fuel supply system and a larger oil pump was fitted. Thanks to the cooperation of TAG Electronics, a company of the McLaren Group, the complete electronic system was optimized to Formula 1 standard and the power output was further enhanced. The result was clearly noticeable: Although the



BPR rules cut the air supply by means of two 35.5 mm air restrictors, the maximum torque reaches an unbelievable 725 Nm (536 lb-ft) at 4,500 rpm and the engine delivers 615HP at 6,750 rpm.

Based on this potential, seven McLaren BMW teams will be entered in Le Mans also in 1996. For the first time, the team will include two F1 GTRs piloted by two MBT factory drivers and featuring the blue-lilac-red flag design of BMW Motorsport, harmonically integrating the FINA logo, the oil producer as the sponsoring partner. The two BMW-supported McLaren F1 GTRs are entered by the Italian Bigazzi team which has for many years been successful with BMW touring cars, especially also in endurance races.

Meanwhile, the collaboration with McLaren has been extended from the GT project to the BMW touring car programme. By late 1995, BMW M GmbH, the successor of BMW Motorsport GmbH, had been responsible for the motor sport activities of the Munich-based company. As the company activities beyond the field of motor sport had grown intensively over the past several years, it stood to reason, as part of a more streamlined corporate structure, to again create an independent organization that would exclusively handle motor sport activities for BMW.

Thus, in December 1995, the new BMW Motorsport Ltd. was founded; it is headquartered in England, but is also active in Germany. A team headed by McLaren constructor Gordon Murray has since then been in charge of the development of BMW race-tuned touring cars for the national championships in England, Germany and Italy, headquartered in England. The engine development is under the responsibility of Paul Rosche in Munich. Paul Rosche is also the managing director of BMW Motorsport Ltd.

## **The Two BMW Bigazzi Teams in Le Mans**

A team is always as good as the weakest link of a chain. This wisdom is not only true for endurance races such as Le Mans, but generally applies to all types of sport where man and machine have to interact. What's the use of the best chassis (McLaren) or the best engine (BMW) if they don't harmonize? What happens if mechanics or drivers fail?

The event is just as international as the drivers of the two teams: Nelson Piquet (Brazil), Johnny Cecotto (Venezuela) and Danny Sullivan (U.S.A.) form the American team, Marc Duez (Belgium), Steve Soper (Great Britain) and Jacques Laffite (France) make up the European team. Cecotto, Duez, Laffite and Soper have raced in Bigazzi teams for BMW several times before. Each one of these pilots can also look back on a most remarkable career - and maybe a further climax of their career with a new success in Le Mans.

Nelson Piquet is undoubtedly the „primus inter pares“. The 43-year old Brazilian, together with BMW, wrote one of the most significant chapters of Formula 1 history. Piquet, having become world champion on a Brabham Ford for the first time in 1981, embarked on a new adventure with Brabham and the BMW turbo engine from mid-1982. In that year, the British-German-Brazilian combination, winning the GP of Canada, celebrated a triumph even in the first GP year. With three GP victories and five additional runner-up places, Nelson Piquet, only one year later, in 1983, presented BMW with the first Formula 1 world championship title.

Three further GP victories for the Brabham BMW team were added during the two following years; as the turbo era came to a close, however, Nelson Piquet changed to Williams and there won his third and last world championship title in 1987. During the era of turbo engines, BMW power plants, some of them delivering more than 1200 HP - depending on boost pressure - were considered to be the most powerful race engines of all time. Together with Hans-Joachim Stuck, Piquet also celebrated a historic win on a long-distance course at the 1,000 km race on the Nürburgring in 1981: Piquet/Stuck, with the Group 5 BMW M1 built by today's Formula 1 constructor Peter Sauber, beat all sports cars on the „Nordschleife“ and won the overall victory in this manufacturers' world championship race.

After the end of his Formula 1 career in 1991, with 23 victories in 204 GP competitions, Piquet failed in his attempt to also gain a firm foothold in Indianapolis. The likeable Brazilian had an accident while doing a training lap and suffered serious leg injuries. Since then, he has always participated in touring car races with BMW, such as on the Nürburgring-Nordschleife or in his home country Brazil. In Le Mans, however, Nelson Piquet has never been at the starting line - BMW has now made it possible.



While Indianapolis was the nadir of his career, Indy to his Le Mans partner Danny Sullivan represents the climax. The 46-year old American from Louisville/Kentucky started his race driving career in Europe. By way of Formula 2 and a short excursion into the legendary CanAm series, he even made it all the way up to Formula 1 in 1983. At the GP in Monaco, piloting a Tyrrell-Ford, he finished fifth - his best result. From 1984, Daniel John Sullivan III, his full name, primarily focused on the Indy car series. In the Penske team, Sullivan won the 500-mile race of Indianapolis in 1985 and the championship in 1988. Sullivan can take credit for a total of 17 IndyCar victories. In the 1980s, the sunnyboy also tried his luck as a screen actor, which amongst others won him a role in the action series «Miami Vice».

Sullivan's first experience in Le Mans dates back to the year 1988, when he finished 16th with the Jaguar factory team. In 1994, he teamed up with Hans-Joachim Stuck and the Belgian Thierry Boutsen in one of the two Porsche factory teams. Finishing third in the overall standings and second in the GT1 class, he made it to the top of the victory rostrum the second time around. You might say then that Danny knows how to get a car across the Le Mans finish line safe and sound.

By contrast, Johnny Cecotto's experience in Le Mans is comparatively poor. But he, too, knows very well how to step on the throttle, especially with BMW models. The greatest successes scored by the 40-year old Venezuelan were not on four but on two wheels. In 1975 and 1976, Cecotto was motor cycle world champion in the 350 cc class and his third world championship title followed in 1978 with his victory in the 750 cc class. Like John Surtees, Mike Hailwood or Giacomo Agostini before him, Johnny later changed to motor sport. He entered his first major car race on a BMW M1 at Le Mans in 1981 but didn't finish the race. As the runner-up in the Formula 2 European championship of 1982, the South American living in Italy one year later took the great leap forward into Formula 1 events. With the defeated Theodore-Ford, he won his only world championship point at the GP USA West in Long Beach. In 1984, he joined the Toleman team, the precursor of Benetton as team partner of Ayrton Senna, but ended his Formula 1 career after a serious accident and from then on piloted touring cars only.

Following victories in the European championship and world championship, Cecotto in 1989 won the Italian touring car championship on a BMW M3, with which he subsequently raced in four seasons scoring a total of 10 victories in the German touring car championship, he was vice champion in 1990, before conquering a German championship, the ADAC GT Cup, in 1993 on a BMW M3 GTR. One year later, the BMW factory driver, who always



displayed a great fighting spirit, also presented the Munich-based company with the first touring car cup for 2-litre cars - a success repeated by Joachim Winkelhock in 1995. In the British touring car championship, however, Cecotto was not able to continue this series of victories in last year's race. Back in Italy, with a new BMW 320i, he today counts among the candidates for the Superturismo championship title.

At age 52, Jacques Laffite is the oldest and therefore the most experienced pilot from the Le Mans Sextet of the Bigazzi team. Following a somewhat slow start of his career in the late 1960s, Laffite in 1973 won the French Formula 3 championship, thereby making a name for himself in the full-throttle community. In 1974, the mercurial Frenchman entered Formula 2 and fought the first Grand Prix races for the ISO team for Frank Williams, who was then rather laughed at. In 1975, Laffite won the Formula 2 European championship title and, as runner-up in a Williams at the Nürburgring, won his first GP victory and made a significant contribution towards winning the manufacturers' world championship title of Alfa Romeo - a level of versatility shown by only a very small number of professional race drivers.

In 1977, Jacques Laffite celebrated his first GP victory; in 1979, he even fought for the world championship crown all the way to the last Grand Prix in Las Vegas, but in the end finished only fourth, as in 1980 and 1981. After 13 years and 176 Formula 1 races (6 wins), Laffite changed to touring car and GT races. At that time, he came to know the Bigazzi team with which he first participated in the Italian touring car championship and then the DTM (German touring car championship) for BMW. The climax came in 1990 with a DTM victory on the Nürburgring-Nordschleife. Although Laffite entered for the Le Mans race several times in factory teams such as Ligier-Maserati and Renault, a mere 8th place was his best result in eight entries. Of course, Jacques Laffite hopes to considerably improve on that with his BMW-powered McLaren.

The fact that even touring car professionals can live quite comfortably and be successful is proven by Laffite's Le Mans team colleagues, Steve Soper and Marc Duez. Soper has exclusively been in touring car races for almost 25 years. In his first years, the 42-year old Briton won four manufacturers' championship cups, but in spite of numerous victories - above all with BMW - the professional race driver was never able to win championship titles of international renown. The breakthrough came in 1995, when he won the Japanese touring car championship in the Schnitzer BMW 320i against a strong domestic competition of Toyota, Nissan and Honda. Although Steve never raced in Le Mans except at the pre-qualification runs on 28 April, his enormous touring car experience justifies his commitment.



Marc Duez is the absolute allrounder. As Walter Röhrl did before him, the 39-year old Belgian is changing back and forth between rally cars and touring cars depending on supply and demand. Thus, Duez has won the renowned Belgian rally championship three times and has frequently raced in the rally world championship - also on a BMW M3 - where he has never made the big breakthrough, though. His vast experience, however, has helped Duez to score a few overall victories in endurance races. Thus, the Belgian even became world champion of the Group C2 sports cars in 1986 and, in 1987, piloting a Mazda in Le Mans, he finished 8th in the overall standings and runner-up in the GTP class. In 1992, the Belgian who is married to Swiss rally driver, scored the overall victory at the international 24-hour races together with his team colleagues Soper and Cecotto, piloting a BMW M3 on the Nürburgring.

**The BMW Bigazzi Team**

It is really somewhat unusual. Here we have team manager and chief technician, Aldo Bigazzi, giving his name to his crew, but the boss, inside and outside, is Gabriele Raffanelli. An easy-going Italian who appreciates the pleasures of life as much as the successes scored by his team which he founded in 1987. And these successes are really something he can take pride in.

Ever since the Bigazzi team from Tuscan San Gimignano was first founded, it is inseparably tied to the Bayerische Motorenwerke. The highlight in the first year was a third place in the touring car world championship in Spain and runner-up in the overall standings at the 24-hour race of Spa-Francorchamps with the newly homologated BMW M3. After the European touring car championship in 1988, Bigazzi returned to his home country the following season in order to pull BMW Italia's chestnuts out of the fire in the Italian championship. This was accomplished almost flawlessly: The six-time GP winner Jacques Laffite became vice champion in the A1 main class, while the Italian Marco Brand won the class A2 championship with a somewhat less modified BMW M3.

At the time, the German touring car championship was the key event for BMW. Bigazzi was therefore called to Germany in 1990 where Jacques Laffite, Joachim Winkelhock and Steve Soper teamed up to score four victories and second place in the team standings. Armin Hahne and Steve Soper presented Bigazzi with another four wins in 1991 on their BMW M3 Sport Evo, apart from five runner-up places and one third place.

In the last DTM year of BMW in 1992, Soper scored another two wins. The climax, however, was the final victory of Martin/Soper/Danner and third place of Joosen/Hahne/Béguin at the 24-hour race of Spa-Francorchamps, the counterpart of Le Mans in touring car motor sport.

After withdrawing from the DTM, Bigazzi, as one of the official BMW M teams, returned to the Italian championship which had been newly opened for Class 2 touring cars. On the BMW 318i, the Venezuelan Johnny Cecotto scored two victories at the first go, while his German team mate Alexander Burgstaller secured further victories. BMW was defenceless against the overwhelming might of Alfa, though. This did not change in 1994 either, when Cecotto and Burgstaller only finished as respectable also-rans. Instead, the two Bigazzi BMW teams again put up an impressive showing at the 24-hour of Spa-Francorchamps, which was won by Burgstaller/Ravaglia/Tassin ahead of Winkelhock/Ferté/Duez on the Bigazzi BMW 318i.

Following occasional entries in the German touring car cup of 1994, Bigazzi finally returned to Germany last year as one of three BMW



factory teams. At the Nürburgring, piloting the Bigazzi BMW 320i, Burgstaller scored his first success in the super touring car cup, but again, the highlight was a 24-hour victory. This time, however, it was at the time-honoured Nürburgring-Nordschleife, where Burgstaller/Ravaglia/Duez piloted the BMW 320i to first place in the overall standings in spite of adverse weather conditions and the notoriously punishing route.

The GT category, on the one hand, and Le Mans, on the other, were new territory to Bigazzi. However, the victories scored at the touring car marathon in Spa-Francorchamps and the Nürburgring speak for the experience of the Italians in endurance races. After all, they have their trump card at the rear of the two McLaren F1 GTR, the BMW V12 engine.

Maybe, their ten-year loyalty to Munich will be rewarded in a special way in Le Mans.