

Mercedes W196

Cartrix 0910 Mercedes W196
- Juan-Manuel Fangio, Belgian Grand Prix 1955.

Cartrix 0911 Mercedes W196
- Stirling Moss, Monaco Grand Prix 1955.

Cartrix 0912 Mercedes W196
- Karl Kling, British Grand Prix 1955.

By Holger "Slaasshh" Thor

Either way you put it, Mercedes-Benz W196 will always be on a top five over the most advanced race cars of all times. With advanced meaning a car which introduced revolutionary new techniques and at the same time dominated almost every race it participated in. Mercedes W196 was just such a race car. And maybe even a bit more. This car alone became the symbol of the second Silver Arrow era. The first era being the latter half of the thirties, when Mercedes W125 and W163 together with Auto Union Type C and D dominated the European race circuits in the same manner.

Mercedes W196 made its debut on July 4th, 1954, at the third round of the Formula One world championship at the Grand Prix at Reims, France. The cars were driven by Juan-Manuel Fangio, Argentina, who had won the first two races of the season in a Maserati 250F, and the Germans Karl Kling and Hans Hermann. With their streamliner body these new Silberpfeile smashed the competition from Ferrari and Maserati. The Italians nearly panicked, and when the Ferrari team sent Mike Hawthorn out once more to equalize the times set by the Mercedes, he blew up the transmission on his F 553.

Juan-Manuel Fangio won the race with ease, Karl Kling took second place, and although Hans Hermann had to retire from 3rd place on lap 17 with engine troubles, he managed to set fastest lap of the race. The Silver Arrows were back. And what a come back!



Juan-Manuel Fangio in his Mercedes W196 with race number 10 on his way to a superb win on Spa, Belgium, on June 5th 1955. After the debut at Reims in 1954, this would be the second 1-2 victory for Mercedes, this time with team mate Stirling Moss coming second. It was in this period the world of motor sport talked about the "8-wheeled Mercedes".

After Reims the streamliner body was seldom used, letting the open wheeled Mercedes W196 looking more like its competition. Together with team chef Alfred Neubauer, Juan-Manuel Fangio continued to dominate the season, and together they won again on the Nürburgring, Germany, in Bern, Switzerland, and on Monza, Italy, making Fangio champion of the world for the second time after 1951.

1955 would prove to be even more successful. Juan-Manuel Fangio won the opening round in Argentina, on Spa, Belgium, on Zandvoort, Holland, and again on Monza, Italy. After the seasons start there was never any doubt who would be world champion.



Stirling Moss in his Mercedes W196 with race number 6 during the Monaco Grand Prix 1955. Untypical, this race was no success for Mercedes. Halfway during the race Fangio was leading Moss, but on lap 50 Fangio stopped, a tiny screw in the valve gear had failed. Fangio's only retirement in 12 Grand Prix races for Mercedes! Then on lap 81 a plume of white smoke billowed from the engine of the Moss Mercedes, as it approached the Casino. Moss pulled into the pits to retire. To his own big surprise Maurice Trintignant won the race in an old Ferrari F625. It was Stirling Moss who later said about his career with the Mercedes team: "If you didn't made a mistake and went off, you were pretty sure to become first or second..... more likely second as Fangio was in the same team!".

In 1955 Fangio was teamed up with the young Englishman Stirling Moss, who won the British Grand Prix at Aintree, just 1/10 of a second in front of Fangio. Whether this was a gesture of Fangio or not, will never get a proper answer. Was Fangio ordered to let Moss win, or was Moss simply the best man that day? A bit of both is probably the answer, for a) Moss drove superbly that day on a circuit he knew very well and b) Daimler-Benz would have been fully aware of the publicity value of a Moss victory in his home Grand Prix. And at Aintree Fangio already had three wins to Moss's two second places with only two races left of the season, so Fangio had nothing to lose if Moss won. Fangio was a deeply honourable man, and he has never made any suggestions, that he was ordered to let Moss win. But Moss has always believed that Fangio was simply the best and that he could have won the race, had he wanted to!



Mercedes W196 and 300SLR were identical cars, just with different bodyworks. Carrera 25421 is a fine copy of the car, in which Stirling Moss and his co-driver, the English motor sports journalist Dennis Jenkinson, won the infamous Mille Miglia in 1955. The model has many fine details, starting with the correct race number 722, the almost vertical, asymmetric wind-screen and ending with the beard of Mr. Jenkinson. Only fault in my humble opinion is the visor on Jenkinson's egg shell helmet.

Anyway. The season belonged to Mercedes W196 if ever a season has belonged to a single car. Sadly, Daimler-Benz withdraw their Silver Arrows after the 1955 season. They had proved what they wanted to by conquering the motor sport world, and after the disaster at Le Mans that year, where a Mercedes 300SLR were thrown into the spectators killing more than 80 of them, including the driver Pierre Levegh, motor sport racing got a bad reputation in many countries. Mercedes was not to blame for the accident, if any (and I mean IF any) it would be Mike Hawthorn in his Jaguar D Type, starting the disaster. The rest of the Mercedes were withdrawn, and together with Ivor Bueb Hawthorn went on to win the race. Hawthorn was by all fairness never officially blamed for the accident.

In the years 1954-55 Mercedes W196 participated in 12 Grand Prix, winning 9 of them! Five of the 9 would be 1-2 victories and one a magnificent 1-2-3-4 result! What other car can look back on such results?



The German Karl Kling in his Mercedes W196 #14 on his way to third place on Aintree on July 16th 1955. After his second place at the debut on Reims back in 1954, this would be Karl Kling's second trip to the rostrum. But there could have been many others, had it not been for his outspoken bad luck. Some even nick named him "Karl The Unlucky". Working as an engineer at Daimler-Benz before the war, he gave his international race driver debut in a mature age in 1951. His greatest successes being his win in 1952 of the third Carrera Panamericana Mexico race in a Mercedes 300 SL and victory in the Grosser Preis von Berlin on AVUS in his Mercedes W196 in 1954 (a non championship race). Of special interest are the race numbers of his car on Aintree. Always painting their race numbers red outlined in black, the Mercedes team choose to paint them all black on Aintree. This is to be seen as an act on mourning towards the casualties of the tragedy at Le Mans just a month prior to this race.