The talented all-rounder

01/08/2019 Gerhard Mitter was considered one of the best and most versatile German racing drivers of the 1960s. His greatest successes were those he celebrated as a Porsche works driver. On the 50th anniversary of his death, we take a look back at his successes.

Whether he was in a sports car or a touring car, a formula racing vehicle or a prototype, on the race track or in the mountains – in the 1960s, Gerhard Mitter was one of the drivers to beat. After initial successes in motorcycle racing in the 1950s, in 1959 Mitter swapped his bike for a racing car. The trained mechanic initially started in Formula Junior and became the most successful German driver in this racing class, attracting attention along the way by constructing his own cars and driving more powerful DKW engines.

In 1964, Mitter became a Porsche works driver and soon afterwards entered the European Hill Climb Championship, following in the footsteps of Edgar Barth, who died in 1965. Mitter emulated Barth in taking three European Hill Climb Championship titles and doing it in three consecutive years. In 1966, he achieved this with the Porsche 906 Carrera 6. In 1967 and 1968, he defended his title with the Porsche 910/8 Bergspyder. With his ability to focus all his energy and concentration for a few short minutes, Mitter became virtually unbeatable in hill climb races.

On May 4, 1969, Gerhard Mitter celebrated his greatest victory. Together with driving partner Udo Schütz, he won the Targa Florio with the Porsche 908/02. Just one week later, he competed at Spa-Francorchamps, with the new Porsche 917 making its racing debut. Although a broken valve spring forced him to retire after just one lap of the 917's first race, it was in this year that he was part of the works squad that won the first World Championship for Makes in Porsche's history. At the same time, the technically skilled Gerhard Mitter had established himself as the primary contact for the engineers Peter Falk and Hans Mezger.

Despite his success in the European Hill Climb Championship and in the World Sportscar Championship and World Championship for Makes, Mitter never lost sight of his Formula racing career. He was set to make his breakthrough to Formula 1 in 1970 and had already signed a contract with Ford. But on August 1, 1969, the BMW Formula 2 racing car he was driving round the Nürburgring suffered a suspected steering failure. Gerhard Mitter crashed between the Flugplatz and Schwedenkreuz sections of the track, and died at the age of 33.

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