

Porsche mourns the death of Eberhard Mahle

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22/12/2021 The team at Porsche is mourning the death of Eberhard Mahle, the former racing driver who died on 21 December at the age of 88.

Eberhard Mahle was European Hill Climb Champion in 1966 and the first driver to take an international title in a Porsche 911. He had previously achieved success with other brands, such as in the 1957 German GT Championship in an Alfa Romeo and at the 1959 German Hill Climb Championship in a Volvo. He was a works driver for Abarth, Borgward and Mercedes-Benz.

He also enjoyed early successes with cars from Zuffenhausen. In 1959, he finished second in the Targa Florio at the wheel of a Porsche 550 Spyder and the following year he won the Solitude Rally in a Porsche 356 Super 90. “We are greatly saddened by the news of his death. Our thoughts are with his wife Karin, his family and the clubs in which Ebs Mahle was active into his old age,” says Achim Stejskal,

Head of Porsche Heritage and Museum. “We would like to thank him for his successful racing endeavours and the numerous assignments he undertook for the museum as a contemporary witness, for example at the Solitude Revival or at the Gaisberg."

Petrol in his blood

Mahle, who was born on 7 January 1933, had petrol in his blood. His father Ernst founded what is today Mahle GmbH, along with his brother Hermann. The first Mahle high-performance pistons were tested in the Porsche 356 in the early 1950s. From then on, the Mahle company became an original equipment manufacturer for Porsche.

Mahle began riding motorcycles and driving cars as a teenager and in 1954 he began his racing career with a DKW 3=6 at the Solitude Rally, where he won his class. He bought his first Porsche that same year and despite its 1,100 cc boxer engine offering a rather modest 40 PS, he finished sixth in the Achalm hill climb near Reutlingen the following year.

By 1963, the young Swabian had competed in around 210 races and rallies, driving to six overall wins and more than 150 class victories. After a serious accident with a go-kart through no fault of his own in 1964, Mahle spent 18 months in hospital. In 1966, he had recovered to such an extent “that I wanted to have another go,” as he put it. He would go on to not only win a trophy but also a title in the GT class without engine capacity limitation at the European Hillclimb Championships. “That was just right for me,” he later recalled.

When Mahle wanted to try out a 911, Porsche racing manager Huschke von Hanstein was sceptical: he only had rally cars available, and he told the eager racing driver “besides, you can never win if Ferrari and Ford are competing with over 300 PS”. However, Mahle was not to be deterred and, through his friend Gerhard Mitter, he bought a second-hand 1965 911 with an output that had been boosted to 165 PS. The high-horsepower competitors dominated at the first event on the Rossfeld, a relatively well-built track with few bends, but he still came in third.

Eberhard Mahle and his 1965 911

The other tracks suited the driver and vehicle much better: lots of bends, lots of heavy braking, lots of acceleration. It was just right for the agile 911. “And a good driver can compensate for any performance deficit on such tracks,” he once said.

Impressions from Eberhard Mahle's racing career

In 1966 he proved himself to be the best. The Swabian driver won all the other races in the GT class with the exception of the finale on the Gaisberg, where he collided with a guardrail before getting out

and surveying the damage. He had only dented a wing, but abandoned the race due to the time already lost. No drama: “I already had an unassailable lead in the European championship before the Gaisberg.” He knew the road up the mountains around Salzburg very well from races before his European Championship year. “A very, very twisty and extremely difficult route to drive,” he said, before adding “Actually, it's a pity that I didn't finish that race.”

This one DNF did not diminish his pride in winning the European hill climb title. “That was my greatest success,” said Mahle. “Especially because all the experts said you will never win it like that.”

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Astrid Böttinger

Spokesperson Heritage and Porsche Museum
+49 (0) 170 / 911 2065
astrid.boettinger@porsche.de

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