6:11.13 minutes

09/09/2016 The officials don't believe the time clock when the Porsche 956 flies over the finish line. But it's true: young Stefan Bellof has driven an indelible record into the asphalt for all time.

When Stefan Bellof comes to Porsche in the winter of 1982, the company's expectations are not very high. The 24-year-old driver from Giessen is rumored to be too young, too bold, too cheeky, and too inexperienced. In fact, he exceeds all expectations. This is someone who wants to prove himself. And how.

Nürburgring, late May 1983. The weather in the surrounding Eifel region is cold and miserable, but at least it's dry. Porsche is entering a 956 (chassis no. 007) with 13-inch front-axle rims for the first time. The larger camber angle and modified steering lever enhance the car's turning abilities. Bellof uses that to great advantage. His astonishing time of 6:11.13 minutes for a 12.946-mile lap (slightly shorter than usual due to construction work) in the qualifying session for the 1,000-kilometer (621-mile) race still causes people to shake their heads in disbelief.

Half a minute faster than reigning world champion Keke Rosberg

His fabulous performance serves as a perfect example of the razor-thin line between brilliance and recklessness. Bellof is five seconds faster than former Formula One driver Jochen Mass and half a minute faster than reigning world champion Keke Rosberg. “When the time appeared on the display, I thought, ‘That can’t be right—there must be something wrong with the clock,’” recalls Rainer Braun, who at the time was both the course spokesman and Bellof’s manager. But there was no mistake. Seemingly impossible. But absolutely correct.

“Stefan broke records in that history-making lap,” says Norbert Singer, who was Porsche’s head engineer at the time. Bellof was the first driver to average more than 124 miles per hour for a lap on one of the world’s most beautiful and difficult racetracks. “I could have gone even faster,” Bellof says, as casually as if it were a matter of mowing the lawn. “But I made two mistakes. And a 911 briefly got in my way.”

Those 6:11.13 minutes are legendary. Like the 1,000-kilometer race on the Nordschleife. The last great event there took place in 1983; the new Grand Prix course on the edge of “Green Hell” is now the Nürburgring. Bellof wins the World Sportscar Championship with Porsche in 1984. Sadly, in 1985, he dies in a racing accident at Spa. A great talent gone too soon.

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