Timing Is Everything: Hans-Joachim Stuck's record lap at Le Mans

09/06/2023 In 1985, Stuck drove a lap time in the 962 C that was second to none. The best time was not beaten until 32 years later.

"Without question, the Porsche 962 C is the best car I've ever sat in!" To this day, racing legend Hans-Joachim Stuck still gets excited whenever he thinks about his thrilling laps in the extraordinary race car. Group C vehicles, which competed exclusively in the prototype class 41 years ago, are unparalleled. At its 1982 premiere, the Porsche 956 was a dominating force from the very first moment. To ensure compliance with the regulations of the different racing series at that time, development of the 962 and 962 C derivatives kicked off in 1984. Three race cars for maximum success – and still the most successful Porsche race cars of all time.

Stuck was a part of this era. His first success came at the start of his time in Group C. In the qualifying for the 24 Hours of Le Mans on June 12, 1985, Stuck set out to break a new record behind the wheel of a 962 C.

"You never forget something like that!" says the tall former race car driver. Decades later, the memory is still fresh in his mind. "We were very well prepared. I was in the pit, and our racing engineer Walter Näher was watching the action. Then came the signal – and it was time to head out for the qualifying. Just me, the vehicle, enough gas for three laps, and my mission. I headed for the grid and finish line, accelerated – and everything felt right. I made virtually no mistakes, and the braking points were spot-on. Below me, this 620 PS 962 C with its extraordinary speeds on curves, the ground effect, and its optimal cornering forces. I realized things were going well and felt confident. But I needed to return the car to the pit undamaged and still push it to its limits. A balancing act full of adrenaline."

When Stuck returned to the pit, his team was ecstatic. The then 34-year-old had achieved something extraordinary. Lap time: 3:14.8 minutes. Average speed: 251.815 kmh. Record! In the classic race's 62-year history, no one had ever been faster on the 13.624-kilometer lap. The highlight: Stuck and his partner Derek Bell took third place in the race and finished the exciting season with the world championship title for drivers.

When two chicanes were incorporated into the approximately five-kilometer-long Mulsanne Straight for safety reasons in 1990, Stuck's speed seemed unattainable for all time. "But then in 2017, I was watching TV and saw Kamui Kobayashi," says the former Le Mans champion. The Japanese race car driver completed the lap in three minutes and 14.791 seconds, breaking Stuck's record by mere fractions of a second. Stuck doesn't get worked up about it though. "After all, it held for 32 years. When I think about how someone was even faster in a modern car despite the new chicanes – that's unbelievable!"

Info

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