

book review

THE BIG RACE

By Ernst Rosemann, with illustrations by Carlo Demand.
English translation by E. Evand.
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"THE Story of Motor Racing" is the subtitle to this book, but a far more appropriate one would be "The Story of German Participation in Motor Racing." While Ernst Rosemann follows the history of auto racing in Europe, with an occasional reference to such U.S. events as the Indianapolis 500 and the old Vanderbilt Cup races, the emphasis is almost exclusively on German cars and drivers.

Rosemann's history runs from the "first motor race in the world," Paris to Rouen, France, in 1894, to the Aintree Grand Prix won by Stirling Moss in a Mercedes in 1955. Between these dates he covers a wealth of races, cars, drivers and teams. The first race was won by a Peugeot carriage equipped with a Daimler engine, although the first to cross the line was Baron de Dion in a steam carriage.

In this book we see the birth and development of the fabulous line of Mercedes cars, named after the niece of the "Royal and Imperial Austro-Hungarian Consul General Jellinek," described by Rosemann as a smart business man who knew exactly where to put his hand on easy money. He was also representative for the Daimler Motor Company.

Rudolf Caracciola, a German with an Italian name and a leading driver for Mercedes in the 1920's and '30's, comes in for a big treatment in this book, as does Bernd Rosemeyer, driver for Auto Union in the big, 12-cylinder rear-engine cars designed by Dr. Ferdinand Porsche. Other drivers of that era whose careers are followed include Hans Stuck, Manfred von Brauchitsch, Tazio Nuvolari, Hermann Lang, Rene Dreyfus, and the American Ralph de Palma (who won the 1915 Indianapolis 500 in a Mercedes).

Post-war drivers and cars get plenty of attention too, perhaps even more than their predecessors. There's Juan Manuel Fangio, the Argentinian who became world champion as a driver for Mercedes; Stirling Moss; the Frenchman Jean Behra; Karl Kling; Hans Klenk; Alberto Ascari; and Dr. Nino Farina. The victories of the Mercedes cars in the Mexican Carrerra in 1952 and Mille Miglia in 1955 are described, as well as the tragedy at Le Mans, and the constant, grueling competition in the '50's between Mercedes and Ferrari. Porsche cars in competition also got a good play.

And throughout, the figure of Alfred Neubauer looms (and it's quite a figure). As team captain for Mercedes, he was to a large extent responsible for the almost unending string of victories for his cars.

This book is certainly well written; Rosemann gives life to his drivers, races and cars. The illustrations by Carlos Demand are excellent. They show a feeling of speed and action that is lost in most race photography.

The major drawback to this book is the placement of these illustrations and their captions in relation to the text. For some reason, all the drawings come at the tail end of the story. Like the story itself, the 128 full-page illustrations follow the history of racing. Captions for the pictures come at the very rear of the book. Thus checking a picture with the appropriate story text and/or caption requires considerable page juggling. It would have been far more pleasant if Demand's drawings had been scattered through the book, at least in the vicinity of the appropriate text.

—T.R.B.