



Anyone outside his favored clique was emphatically denied invitation to dine. Bottle is Neubauer's favorite tippie Pott Privat 54.

Alfred Neubauer led the unbeatable Mercedes team for twenty years. The team has been disbanded, yet the big man with the watches is still building drivers. They're amateurs but they've been taught the game by...

RACING'S UNLOVED GENIUS

By SIMON BOURGIN

ALFRID NEUBAUER, who is the Mercedes-Benz racing chief, rated the best of his kind, has a right to consider himself a frustrated man. For 26 years he led the greatest racing team in automobile history. His knowledge of cars and drivers was considered unparalleled and was a jealously guarded Mercedes asset.

Yet today, Neubauer, in charge of the private drivers' section at Mercedes, is sharing his precious knowhow with anybody who wants it. Now that Mercedes has quit the racing field, Neubauer's new job is to help amateur drivers prepare for races. Any Mercedes driver who takes the trouble to find Neubauer at the Stuttgart factory can now consult what is probably the most experienced mind in automobile racing, and on the company's time.

A few of these who have are Kurt Reiss, owner of a German canned goods factory, and Rainer Guenzler, a German radio reporter. Anxious to enter racing, these amateurs have gone to Neubauer for advice on improving their cars.

This is a far cry from presiding over Juan Manuel Fangio, champion of the world, Stirling Moss, champion of England, and Karl Kling, the best driver in Germany. This prize-

Having driven a few races himself, the Kaiser of the Mercedes team realized well the problems involved. Here he gives instruction to Fangio.



Photos by Robert Halmi

winning combination, with Neubauer as chief, constituted a "dream" team. Broken up when Mercedes left racing last autumn, it was probably the finest team ever assembled.

But far from being frustrated, Neubauer at his new job is a happy man — or as happy as this scowling, cantankerous figure permits himself to be. In addition to advising amateurs, he is still training drivers: a necessary essential of life for Neubauer. Recently he and Karl Kling, the crack Mercedes engineer who has quit driving to become Neubauer's assistant, were at Monza, Italy, to train the Swiss Automobile Club drivers for the Monza race, and at this year's Nürburgring classic, they were actively advising Mercedes drivers and crews.

Perhaps Neubauer is tranquil at his new job because of the enviable record he established in the last one. Returning to racing in 1952, the Mercedes racers under Neubauer scored an unprecedented number of wins. In 1954 they scooped the British Grand Prix race for the first such quadruple victory in history. "Today's race," reported a correspondent there, "was simply another demonstration of the superiority of German racing cars. Mercedes entered four and the four, with never a pit stop, finished first, second, third and fourth."

In fact, Mercedes by the time it left the racing field had become to the sport what Rocky Marciano is to boxing — a combination of stamina and preparedness that could hardly be beaten. Much of the credit for this belonged to 64-year-old Alfred Neubauer. His method is to test actual performance in advance. No expense was too great: a sample test session might include six drivers, 20 mechanics, one secretary, two engineers and a dozen assorted technicians. These were assembled for a single purpose; to produce the performance reports that are a racing chief's life blood. Shock absorber settings, oil pressure readings, tire wear and gas consumption are dull things, but taken together they make possible the improvement that later win races.

A master among appraisers of such facts, Neubauer on the job looks and acts anything but the conventional expert. He was once observed beginning the day at the Nurburg Ring track in Germany and was described thus: "In his left hand he clutched a briefcase bulging with data. His right hand held a partially empty bottle of 'Pott Privat 54', a harsh German whiskey that he had taken the first nips from at breakfast. Facing his drivers and mechanics, Neubauer barked: "3,800 kilometers, that's what every driver has to do, and I don't give a damn if he likes it or not."

Fat men are usually jolly, and Alfred Neubauer is a fat man. He weighs 265 pounds, and has a 58-inch waistline. It has even been observed that he can enter airplane toilets only sideways. But he is not jolly.

His waistline, in fact, is almost as famous as his capacity for drink. Neubauer's customary liquid intake with dinner is two gins, four beers, and two bottles of wine. Between

dinners he works away at a bottle of "Pott Privat 54." Drink does not, however, slow him down. Nor does he give the impression of being anything but collected at all times.

But unlike other fat men, Neubauer is not a joker or a funny man. His closest approach to humor is to tease. He asked Stirling Moss for months why, since his pet Maserati racer was always breaking down, he didn't send his pay directly to the Maserati factory.

The view that Neubauer takes of life is dour, and he is regarded dourly by many of his colleagues. He is liked by some, but it would be hard to find anybody in racing who loved Alfred Neubauer. Typically, one of his close collaborators remarked, "Neubauer has a dog, and while I've never seen the dog it must be a bastard."

Neubauer's rudeness is proverbial: sometimes he is merely brusque, as when he awoke a driver two hours early with, "Man isn't here to sleep, but to live." His contemptuous remark to a mechanic about to garage a car — "Can you drive?" — is more characteristic.

He regarded his drivers as nobles who should not consort with ordinary mortals. The Neubauer table, whenever the Mercedes team was dining, was a closed circle — woe to outsiders who pulled up a chair without invitation. In fact Neubauer brooded over his drivers like a clucking mother hen. He ordered their food and drink, and told them when to arise.

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Ample supply of grooms kept Mercedes stable in top efficiency. Here, Neubauer supervises pit stop.

Backyard Le Mans

THE LE MANS organizers didn't invent 24-hour races — Eugene Mauve did. Mauve's fantastic Bol d'Or, first staged at Whitsun in 1922, jumped the start on Le Mans by more than a year. Too, Mauve mixed stronger medicine in his bowl of dubious gold than anything the Automobile Club de l'Ouest has ever dared serve.

In these effete days, of course, twosome crews are obligatory in both of France's *Vingt-Quatre Heures*. But back between the wars, when single-handed drivers were merely tolerated at Le Mans — and practically everybody in the act opted for a partner anyway — the Bol was strictly on a solos-or-nothing basis. To make it tougher still, the St. Germain circuit, original home of the Bol d'Or, was only 2½ miles around. Like most French road courses, it consisted of two straightish and reasonably surfaced legs and a third that was hell on wheels — a twisty, narrow byway with the potholes built in permanently. Apart from fixing an engine displacement limit (1100 c.c. in the beginning, 1500 c.c. later) and barring relief drivers, M. Mauve's thinking was altogether *formule libre*. Competitors could be of either sex: once the Bol was actually won by a woman — a high-tensile Parisienne by the name of Violet Morris. Previous experience wasn't necessary. Cars could have either three or four wheels, and any sort of fuel was okay. Specifications could be anything from full race to watertight stock.

Fields, in the result, had a riotous variety, both personal and mechanical. Established manufacturers like Salmson and Amilcar would usually provide a lonely element of respectability with teams of recognizable automobiles, handled by drivers of international standing; but for the rest, the lineup was a bedlam of screwball amateurs on every sort of backyard contraption the mind could conceive: three wheels, four wheels, engines at the back, engines in front, at the side, drive by chain, by belt, by shaft and by luck more than judgment.

That no-experience-necessary concession was a surefire attraction of the Bol, and in an average race at least 20 percent of the runners were total tyros. The consequences of this learn-as-you-go formula could be seen to advantage at the first corner on the opening lap. There was one thing Eugene Mauve didn't invent and that was the Le Mans start. He simply lined his clientele up in rows across the pit area, Grand Prix style, and when he dropped the flag they clutched in and went. The only trouble was, of course, that they all arrived together in a wild hub-rubbing stampede at the first turn, which came dangerously soon after the takeoff. Entanglements from this cause sometimes crippled six or seven cars, temporarily or otherwise, before the race was a half-minute old. Casualties were specially prevalent among entries consisting of a driver who had never raced before and a car that had never *run* before.

Once this first-round mayhem was over, things would generally settle down until early morning. The last hour of darkness always brought its crop of one-way trips into the surrounding forest. Some drivers just nodded off to sleep at the wheel. Others, bugged by the strain of navigating by lamps giving about as much illumination as a cigarette lighter, turned thisaway when the course went thataway.

A fellow who was both smart and lucky, however, could deal with the mind-over-Morpheus problem very satisfactorily. It was Mauve's habit to divide his race into a multitude of classes and subclasses, because he liked people to be happy; and this system enabled him to donate the maximum of almost worthless prizes. So, after a few retirements had taken place, a driver would likely find himself the only surviving runner in his particular subclass. As, therefore, he couldn't lose, he sensibly pulled off into some convenient glade and took a couple of hours out for sleep.

Eugene Mauve was — and for all I know still is — a man of massive build and incredible endurance. On paper, the Bol d'Or was organized by the A.S.M.C.C.F. — l'Association Auto-Moto-Cycle-Cariste de France; in fact, though, big Eugene was the A.A.M.C.C.F. in its entirety. He not only filled every official post, but was also the only paid-up member.

If Eugene Mauve put a lot into his beloved races, he also took a lot out. Attendances at the St. Germain circuit reached 70,000 in the peak years, and kept Mauve in comfort for the rest of the year. In spite of his trophy's grandiose name, his prize bill was nothing to worry him. The Bol wasn't gold at all. It was tin, with peeling remnants of gilt veneer. Moreover, the winners never took it home. Mauve did.

By Dennis May

Unloved Genius

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Neubauer's conversation, conducted simultaneously in German, French and English, the languages of his drivers, pours forth like a torrent. It is 90 percent concerned with cars, 10 percent with women. Those who listen collect such nuggets as these. The object of racing: "To get the sport of driving from the race tracks to the highways, that's what we're after." Mass production of cars: "I'm against it. To make a car as individual as possible, to give it its own character — that's sport."

He dislikes being interviewed. Said Neubauer to a journalist who wanted to write his life story: "Don't ask me any questions if it concerns cars. As for your book, I'm writing three myself — and don't ask me about what."

This attitude has not endeared Neubauer to the press, and some of his own company officials speak of him as "difficult." But it is not Neubauer's aim in life to be liked. He is single-mindedly and passionately devoted to improving the performance of Mercedes automobiles. This preoccupies him totally.

He has certainly been successful. In racing Neubauer is regarded much as the late Knute Rockne used to be in football — a giant in his field.

Chief among the qualities that have won him this regard is a vast Teutonic thoroughness. Under the Neubauer regime, every detail is planned in advance — nothing is left to chance.

Added to this is a colossal memory. "Neubauer can tell you," said a driver, "about every race a Mercedes has ever been entered in: the driver, the time, the condition of the car, the other drivers and their cars, plus the barometric pressure and the temperature of the road and air that day. Altogether not a bad man to have around."

But it was in the race itself that his enormous experience was put to acute use. "He was the key man," said Stirling Moss of him, defining the racing chief's role. "He fixed the strategy of the race. It was Neubauer who set the pace and who by signals to the drivers and mechanics decided if the race should go faster or slower."

The pace that Neubauer set was best described by someone who watched Moss and Fangio leading the field in the British Grand Prix and Aintree. "Both sat in their cars with the comfortable ease of chauffeurs at a wedding, and yet the pace they set was so fast that the opposition fell to pieces

around them."

As the race proceeded Neubauer watched from the pits. The fourth silver Mercedes was trailing a red Maserati for fifth place. As the Mercedes driver, Piero Taruffi, sped by, Neubauer signaled him: beat the Maserati. Taruffi hounded the Maserati till, blackened with its exhaust, he inched by to take the lead. He came in fourth to give Mercedes a clean sweep and to establish, in Neubauer's sight, the right order for the day.

Neubauer feels that no racing chief can know his job unless he has been a driver first. "Otherwise you can never know what the driver is up against." But while Neubauer was a driver — in 1924 he was third in the Targa Florio, 13th in the Coppa Floria, and second at Semmering, a fierce test of uphill climbing — he was not a very good one. "He thought he was fast at Semmering," says somebody who was present, "but his mother scolded him for not doing better."

The remarkable fact is that he still drives for speed, even occasionally. The size of his paunch prevents Neubauer from tying his shoelaces. Yet just two years ago he drove a Mercedes 300 SL around the Nurburg Ring. "He had to get in with a shoe horn," remarked another driver admiringly, "but he drove it fast."

Mercedes pre-eminence in racing did not come cheaply. It used to cost the company four million dollars a year to be represented on the race tracks: the approximate cost of maintaining the famous Racing Division, with its 260 employees. Now that Mercedes is out of racing, no other company spends anything like it. Why, with the superiority of their cars proven many times, did Mercedes do so?

Neubauer's answer is to the point. "It sells cars. The public has to be educated in cars that are individually produced. We can't advertise in newspapers all over the world, but we could enter races all over the world."

Today, says Neubauer, the formula has changed. "Now one reaches peaks of performance to transfer *parts* of experience into practice. How far can you carry this thing? Well, it's like working for your doctorate — it shows you are trying to improve."

The chief point, Neubauer adds, is that racers don't stand still in development. "Our 300 SL reached 260 kilometers per hour on the Frankfurt autobahn, so we can say it was tested for that. The Volkswagen, which goes 66 miles per hour, doesn't need testing — it stands still."

"Sure racing costs money. But we gained advertising and experience."

"General Motors and Ford might sell more cars too if they raced. But they don't need to. Under the U. S. system of mass production, the product speaks for itself. We have to prove our product is good."

Fortunately for the public, says Neubauer, a company doesn't like to see its car break down in a race. The result is enormous planning and a close check of performance.

"So the public benefits. Look at what today's racers have that are bound to be absorbed on tomorrow's cars. We have fuel injection, speeds up to 10,000 rpm, the new single-joint rear axle — which we've transferred to our '220' and '300' production series, and tires that wear only two millimeters per 500 kilometers as compared with prewar tires that were finished after only 120 kilometers."

Of course, says Neubauer, the evolution of the car has differed in the U. S. and Europe. In the U. S. the sports car gets produced out of sheer public demand — racing has nothing to do with it. "But here in Europe it's the other



Portly Herr Neubauer paces the pits in a relaxed moment during practice runs.

way around. This year's racer becomes next year's sports car. And the improvements on the sports car later get transferred to the touring car."

It was a Mercedes driver, Pierre Levegh, whose racer, wrecking freakishly at Le Mans, caused the loss of 87 lives. So understandably the Mercedes staff have strong feelings about an issue which has rocked racing since. Are racing speeds today suicidal? So great are the risks for drivers and public, it has been claimed, that racing is no longer sport.

The Le Mans disaster cost Mercedes the race. Though holding a seemingly incontestable lead, the Mercedes racers were withdrawn upon instructions from Stuttgart, out of deference to the terrible toll of lives. "The race is over for us. Too many dead. That's all I have to say," said Neubauer, stalking out of the pits. However, when three drivers were killed in the Tourist Trophy Race at Belfast last Septem-

ber, Mercedes remained in and swept the first three places.

Mercedes returned to competition only in December 1951, after an 11-year lapse, entering its blown three-litre pre-war race car in the Argentine Grand Prix. The next year, Mercedes captured the major races — Le Mans, Mexico, the Mille Miglia, and the Nurburg Ring. In 1953 Mercedes sat it out, and spent the year retooling for its 2½ litre unsupercharged racer under the new Grand Prix formula. The unprecedented series of wins that followed in 1954-55 are well known.

Nevertheless, production of the 2½-litre racing car at Mercedes has halted. "We've gotten everything out of it that we can," says Neubauer. To admit to having reached the limits of racing-car development sounds a boast. But coming from Neubauer it is a simple fact of engineering.

"Next year," he adds, "our Grand Prix cars might be a bit quicker, but not much — we've about hit the maximum. Any forward steps would be

small in relation to the effort. So we're going into sports car production."

This year, when he reaches 65, Neubauer will be eligible for retirement. It has been rumored he pushed for abandonment of racing car production as a personal end. Neubauer has after all captained history's classic racing team and established the superiority of German cars for his time. He might well like to burn behind him the bridges that led to his fame.

But not even Neubauer's enemies accept this. Friends and critics alike have come to see Neubauer instead as the last of a breed. Like a trumpeting king elephant who dominates the field, Neubauer hovers over the racing scene, his priority unquestioned. "I'll admit," remarks a business associate of Neubauer's, "that he's the king of his class. I just wish he wouldn't behave like a king with a pain in his rump." #