



90 years Le Mans – Bugatti dominates the French Grand Prix 1929

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It is a demonstration of performance with no equal: amongst the six first through the finish line are five Bugatti drivers. 1929 was the year for the French constructor. After the victories in Australia, Antibes, Algeria, Monaco and Targa Florio, the drivers during 15th the French A. C. Grand Prix the 30. June 1929 are unstoppable. The first through the finish line is William “Williams” Charles Frederick Grover driving a Bugatti Type 35 B. He is followed by André Boilot driving in a Peugeot and by the two Bugatti factory drivers, Caberto Conelli and Albert Divo, as well as by the two privateers Robert Sénéchal and Robert Gauthier driving their Bugatti.

85 kilograms of petrol should be enough

No fault allowed, the rules are very strict. The race cars have to use no more than 14 kilograms of petrol and oil for 100 kilometers. The tank is visible, mounted behind the seats with markings giving the information of the volume contained. The day before the race, the cars are filled with 85 kilograms of gas, the cap is sealed and the cars securely locked in the Parc Fermé. On race day, trailers pull the cars to the starting line. Only five minutes before the start, the drivers, with the help of their mechanics, are allowed to start the engine. A very short time to do any technical checkups.

Still, the cars are well prepared. On the starting line are aligned eleven cars, amongst which seven are Bugatti. The battle between Williams in the Bugatti and Boilot in the Peugeot is greatly awaited. The spectators are not disappointed. From the start, the two leading pilots are in pursuit. Boilot gets the better start and leads the race for the first of the 37 laps, with a total of 605 kilometers. To do the 16,36 kilometers lap of the Sarthe circuit of Le Mans, Boilot needs 7:35 minutes, with an average speed of 132,35 km/h. But just behind him: Williams in his Type 35. Whilst the rain starts to fall, the drivers have to reduce their pace and the race gets more intense.

For the second lap, Boilot is going at an average speed of 137,92 km/h, but slows down during the fourth lap. Williams, on the contrary, is gaining in speed. On the sixth lap, the Bugatti driver takes the lead and needs only 7 minutes to do a lap – his average speed is 140 km/h. It is the fastest lap.

Williams leads from the 12th lap on

From the 12th lap on, Williams has a comfortable lead. This thanks to his skills on track, but also thanks to his car: the Bugatti Type 35 B with its straight six-cylinders, 2,3 liter engine and its compressor, manages to produce 140 bhp at 5000 rev/min. With a total weight of 919 kilograms, including liquids and driver, the Type 35 flies on the Le Mans track. With this weight, the car is just 19 kilograms above the minimum weight allowed by the rules – the other cars are heavier.

Regularly, the drivers check their tank level, slow down if necessary, to keep their chances to overtake the preceding car. Williams keeps his pace lap after lap with his relentless car. Boilot has to stop in the garage because of technical problems and loses precious minutes. After 19 laps and despite the rain coming back, the speeds aren't decreasing.

Williams leads after 22 laps, 2 hours and 38 minutes with a lead of almost two and a half minutes and manages to extend that lead to three minutes over the following five laps. During the last third of the race, with the rain pouring down, Williams calmly slows down to insure his victory. His fierce rival sees an opportunity and accelerates his pace to close the gap separating them. But Williams isn't disturbed and calmly finishes his race.

Williams wins after four and a half hours

After 37 laps, 4 hours and 33 minutes, Williams crosses the finish line in first place. His tank remains only eight liters of petrol. Boillot arrives after a minute and 18 seconds, followed by the two Bugatti factory drivers Cabert Conelli and Albert Divo as well as the two private Bugatti owners Sénéchal and Gauthier. The drivers are exhausted by the events, but happy. The company founder Ettore Bugatti, who naturally followed the French Grand Prix, thanks the three first drivers and company owner Jean-Pierre Peugeot, in his style: he goes for a celebration lap in his personal Type 41 Royale, the most luxurious and best driving car of the world at the time. This was exactly 90 years ago.

Concerning William “Williams” Charles Frederick Grover

The Anglo-French driver was born on the 16th of January 1903 in Paris, from a British father and a French mother. Aged 20, he is hired as private chauffeur by a famous painter of that period. The latter supported the young driver by lending him a car so he could participate in races – under the name W.Williams. With Louis Chiron, Grover opens shortly after a dealership, buys his first Bugatti, a Type 35 and becomes professional driver. After his first victories, Ettore Bugatti sees his talent and makes him factory driver. William Grover will thank him soon afterwards by winning the 1929 Monaco GP and will continue to successfully drive for the French brand until 1933. With the beginning of the second World War, Grover flees to Great-Britain, enrolls in the special forces and is parachuted near of Le Mans. There, he would organize an efficient resistance against the German troops until he arrested in in 1943. He was executed in 1945 in the Sachsenhausen Camp, shortly before the arrival of the Americans.

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