

Honor to whom honor is due

Von Hans-Robert Richarz

World record for a Mercedes-Simplex 60 hp "Roi des Belges" built in 1903: as of this month, the car from the early days of the automobile is the most valuable vehicle built before 1930 and ever sold at auction. The car, which had belonged to the family of British publisher Alfred Harmsworth (1865-1922) for 121 years, fetched 12,105,000 US dollars (11,136,600 euros) at a Gooding & Company auction on Amelia Island, an island in the Atlantic off the coast of Florida. "Roi des Belges" ("King of the Belgians") refers to a body shape once used in luxury automobiles with two rows of seats and rounded curves. It was named after the Belgian King Leopold II, who ordered a car with this shape in 1901.

Newspaper magnate Harmsworth (including the "Times", "Daily Mail" and "Daily Mirror") bought the open-top car with a body shell from French coachbuilder J. Rothschild et Fils in 1903. At that time, the Mercedes-Simplex 60 hp dominated the world of motor racing, winning speed trials, hill climbs and circuit races and winning the Gordon Bennett Cup in Ireland in 1903. It is understandable that the journalist and automobile enthusiast made his Mercedes-Simplex one of his favorite cars, in which he traveled all over Europe.

Developed in 1902 and launched in 1903, the Mercedes-Simplex 60 hp followed in the footsteps of its 35 hp and 40 hp predecessors and offered a completely new standard of performance. It was comfortable, spacious and powerful. The "luxury and motorhome" drew its power from a nine-liter four-cylinder engine. This made it possible to reach speeds of up to almost 130 km/h - something that no other series-produced vehicle in the world was capable of at the beginning of the 20th century. (aum)

Images for article



Photo: Autoren-Union Mobilität/Gooding & Company
