Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR (Uhlenhaut Coupé)


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In 1951 Mercedes decided to develop a completely new car for sports car races instead of relying on the pre-war car, Rudolf Uhlenhaut, Head of the Test Department and himself an inspired driver, decided to build a racing sports car to round the engine of the new type 300. He reverted to his idea of a lightweight torsion-resistant tubular frame. The car, works designation W 194, with its gull-wing doors and coupé bodywork, won the 1952 Le Mans, but more particularly it achieved fame in the USA with a double win in Mexico in the Carrera Panamericana. This was followed in 1954 by a super racing car developed in accordance with the new Formulas I rules under works designation W 196. This car was derived from similar concepts, again having a tubular space frame and an incinerated engine giving it a lower center of gravity, but now using an 8-cylinder engine with direct fuel injection. With this racing car Fangio took the two world championship titles in 1954 and '55. At the end of 1954 there appeared a new racing sports car based on the W 196, an open two-seater designated Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR (Sports Light Racers). From the Formula Icar it took the tubular space frame and the 8-cylinder engine with a capacity of 2,983 cc (the 300 stands for a tenth of the capacity). The racing sports car was launched in 1955. With it Stirling Moss immediately won the Mille Miglia and by the end of the season had taken the world championship title.

In 1955 Rudolf Uhlenhaut put a coupé body on this powerful muscle car. The car was designed to take the strain off the driver at enormous speeds in long races like the Mille Miglia or the Carrera Panamericana. Uhlenhaut reverted to the gull-wing door arrangement that had proved itself on the W 194. However, under the bodywork there slumbered the technology of the Formulas I car. The car therefore consisted of pure racing technology, only slightly modified for road use. The 300 SLR coupé accelerated from 0 to 100 in only 7.1 seconds. Its 8-cylinder in-line engine generated over 300 bhp, its top speed was a good 290 km/h, the lengthened bonnet concealed gigantic ribbed brake drums and the cockpit was as spacious as that of a proper racing car. In 1955, one year after winning the Formula world championship in Switzerland and after their disastrous accident at Le Mans, Mercedes came to the decision to withdraw from racing. So only two examples of the Uhlenhaut Coupé were built, both of which are in the Mercedes-Benz museum. Rudolf Uhlenhaut used one of these vehicles as his private car for the drive from Stuttgart to Munich. In his 300 SL coupé, the fastest car on the road, it took the Head of the Test Department under an hour to do the 200 km journey – in the mid 50s!
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