

Behind the Badge

Mercedes-Benz's Three-pointed Star

One of the world's most recognized emblems



1909



1909



1916



1926



Today

BY JEFF KOCH

Mercedes' legendary three-pointed star has long stood for quality—lauded worldwide as a car for kings and cab drivers, for Ladies who Lunch and lorry drivers, for businessmen and bus drivers. It's said to be one of the five best-known trademarks on Earth.

There have traditionally been two logos on a Mercedes-Benz car: the three-pointed-star hood ornament (in the grille on sportier models, trucks and buses) and the more formal logo, with lettering and a laurel wreath, that appears on grille shells.

Daimler and Benz started as separate entities. By 1882, Gottlieb Daimler had quit his job as technical director at the Deutz engine plant, feeling that the answer to Germany's transportation needs was a smaller, lighter engine than the massive industrial units of the era. Daimler Moteren Gesellschaft (DMG) was born. The resulting engine powered a motorcycle by the mid-1880s, and later a converted horse-drawn carriage, which got power down via a selection of belts to a countershaft and gear drive, in 1886.

Karl Benz, meanwhile, had patented a two-stroke engine in the early 1880s, but abandoned it in favor of a four-stroke shortly thereafter; his car, known today as the Patentwagen, was an integrated design. Benz & Cie's original logo, a gearwheel, was replaced in 1909 by a laurel wreath.

After his passing in 1900, Daimler's own name ended up being replaced at the dawn of the 20th century by the name Mercedes (Spanish for "grace")—then a popular girl's name. As early as 1897, Emil Jellinek,

a wealthy fruit importer living in France, had adopted the name of his daughter Mercedes as a racing pseudonym. Jellinek not only had a taste for adventure and motorsports, but by 1900 had acquired such standing that he was appointed to the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Nice, France. The appearance of "Monsieur Mercedes" was a great joke at the time, but the name quickly became associated with Daimler cars and racing success. He won the 1899 event outright in a specially prepared 23hp Daimler, again using his daughter's name.

When the new lower, more powerful 1901 Daimlers launched, Jellinek was so impressed that he submitted an order for 36 cars, paying 550,000 gold Marks (something approaching \$4 million ... in 1901 dollars!) He sought to sell the new cars in France, Austria, Hungary, Belgium and America; Panhard et Levassor raised an objection, claiming that they were the sole Daimler concessionaire in France. The Mercedes name came in handy yet again: He simply switched badges. Furthermore, a team of Mercedes-badged cars was taken to the 1901 edition of Nice's race, and shut the competition out completely. Thus established as a winner in competition, the Mercedes name stuck and was used from then on; it was registered as a trade name in 1902.

The star still wasn't in use, however, until later in the 1900s. Daimler's sons, Paul and Adolf, recalled a picture postcard of Cologne that their father had sent their mother before the company achieved great success. Gottlieb had drawn a three-

pointed star on the front, and wrote, "One day this star will shine over my work." By 1909, DMG submitted trademark applications for both three- and four-pointed (just in case) stars. Both were approved, but the three-pointed star was ultimately chosen: The three points were said to symbolize Daimler's and Maybach's desire to use their engines on land, in the water, and in the air.

The star evolved over time: By 1916, the three points were within a circle, with four smaller stars on an outer band, and either the Mercedes name or the name of one of the two Daimler plants beneath. Another change came in 1921, when the radiator (and later, hood) emblem was surrounded by a ring. This symbol was patented in 1923, and has remained essentially unchanged since.

In the meantime, Germany was hit with a severe economic depression following WWI, and sales of luxury items like high-end cars went into free-fall. To survive, the two oldest car companies on Earth, both German, formed an association of common interest, to increase efficiencies on matters like materials purchasing, advertising and sales, as well as standardizing design and manufacturing. By June of 1926, Daimler Moteren Gesellschaft and Benz & Cie were merged into a single entity: Daimler-Benz AG. The new logo, predictably, was a combination of the two: The three-pointed star remained, as did the laurel wreath encircling it. The Mercedes and Benz names combined, and have remained thus for more than 80 years. 🌐