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## **ULTRA-RARE MERCEDES HANS-AM RESTORED**

*“1980s icon now back on racetrack ...”*

With the recently announced demise of the Pontiac brand, it seems appropriate to share the restoration and race-prep of an ultra-rare Hans-Am for the recent 24 Hours of LeMons (24hoursoflemons.com) event at Buttonwillow Raceway in California.

The car featured here is one of the few remaining examples from an almost forgotten partnership during the 1980s between Mercedes Benz and Pontiac. Known as the “Hans-Am” the name combined the legendary Pontiac Trans-Am and German rally-ace Hans Gewurztraminer, who also served as the effort's project manager and champion.

The car was greeted with great expectations. Based loosely on the Mercedes 190E, the car boasted a monster 6.6 liter inline 6 cylinder engine. The “Golden Eagle” model in these pictures was also treated to stiffer springs, Bilstein sport shocks and larger, reinforced sway bar components.

Semi-functional aerodynamics and silly decals play a large role in many American brands, and that was brought over to the European model. Difficult to source, the team fabricated many of the specialized trim parts from existing Trans-Am pieces.

This special edition in these photos also came from the factory with the "spring-o-matic" option. Based loosely on the device Mr. Gewurztraminer used to protect the radiator from wayward tree trunks during his rally career, it continues to be a valuable component in various club racing circuits.

To meet race requirements Team Uber Vogel installed a roll cage, harnesses and race seat, and fire suppression system. Custom fender flaring, radiator cooling system and a resealed oil pan to keep more crude in the car than on the track were also required.

Originally meant to capitalize on the success of the “Smokey and the Bandit” film of 1980, Mr. Gewurztraminer’s lackadaisical project management and wet-lunches caused the launch of the Hans-Am to push until 1987. At this point Burt Reynolds had moved on to such classics as “Malone” and “Rent-a-Cop,” and while his mustache lived on the public had lost interest in the Bandit.

The Hans-Am was a complete technological success at the time and its performance remains impressive even today. The car in this review recently placed 21 out of 99 cars at the Buttonwillow Histrionics 24 Hours of LeMons race held on August 15 and 16 of 2009, beating many newer and more powerful competitors.

Sadly, commercial success for the model did not match its' mechanical excellence. Adding actual fire to the already critical flame of automotive journalists, Mr. Guwerstermeiner drunkenly threw a lit cigarette into a trash bin at the factory, destroying a third of the planned production run in one afternoon. The model was discontinued shortly thereafter in 1988.

As with DeLorean and Tucker, we're all left to think of what could have been had the Hans-Am met a more enlightened consumer base. Alas, to think is to dream. May Pontiac and the Hans-Am rest in peace.

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