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1987 MERCEDES-BENZ 190E 'HANS-AM'

“The Hans-Am name combined the legendary Pontiac Trans-Am and rally ace Hans Gewurztraminer”



After the recently announced demise of the Pontiac brand, it seems appropriate to share the [tongue-in-cheek] creation of my Hans-Am for the 24 Hours of LeMons (www.24hoursoflemons.com) at California's Buttonwillow Raceway.

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

Based loosely on the Mercedes 190E, it boasted a monster 6.6-litre in-line six-cylinder engine, stiffer springs, Bilstein sport shocks and larger, reinforced sway bar components. To meet race requirements Team Über Vogel also installed a roll cage, race seat and fire suppression system. Custom fender flaring, a radiator cooling system and a resealed oil pan to keep more crude in the car than on the track were also required.

Originally intended to capitalise on 1980's *Smokey and the Bandit*, Mr Gewürztraminer's lackadaisical project management and wet lunches delayed the Hans-Am's launch until 1987. By then Burt Reynolds had moved on to such classics as *Malone* and *Rent-a-Cop*, and while his moustache 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. This car was placed 21st out of 99 cars at the Buttonwillow Histrionics 24 Hours of LeMons race in August 2009, beating many newer and more powerful competitors.

Sadly, commercial success for the model did not match its mechanical excellence after Mr Gewürztraminer drunkenly threw a cigarette into a trash bin at the factory, destroying a third of the production run in one afternoon. The model was discontinued in 1988.

As with DeLorean, we're left wondering what might have been had the Hans-Am met a more enlightened customer base. May Pontiac and the Hans-Am rest in peace.
Rod Diridon Jr, California, USA



Don't expect to find any reference to Rod's tongue-in-cheek history of his Merc 190E in any reference books

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