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BUGATTI TYPE 35: EPIC RACES AND VICTORIES THAT CREATED A LEGEND



In the annals of motorsport, few cars have proved as successful as the Bugatti Type 35, which made its competition debut 100 years ago. As a race car, the Type 35 was utterly without equal. Ettore Bugatti's visionary design and engineering principles, coupled with his relentless pursuit of perfection, resulted in a car that dominated Grands Prix, hill climbs, and road rallies across the globe, claiming some 2,500 victories during its active period.

From the greatest road races of the age that predated the birth of the Bugatti Type 35, such as the Targa Florio, to epic hill climbs, such as La Turbie in France, the Bugatti Type 35 and its

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derivatives swept all before them. Many are familiar to us to this day, but the Type 35 triumphed at many that have been lost to the sands of time, including France's Grand Prix de La Baule beach race.
At the height of its powers, the Bugatti Type 35 averaged 12 race wins a month. Just two years after its debut race at the 1924 Lyons Grand Prix, the Type 35 won the 1926 Grand Prix World Championship. Between 1925 and 1929, the Type 35 also made the grueling Targa Florio road race its own, taking victory in the mountains of Sicily on five consecutive occasions.

"Thanks to Ettore Bugatti's sublime design, the Type 35 was born a race-winner. Everything about the Type 35, from the overall concept to the tiniest little detail, was executed with ultra-precision to give the car a racing edge.

However, it was more than Type 35's superior design and engineering attributes that contributed to the car's unprecedented success on the race circuit. It was also about how it made its drivers feel. The Type 35 imparted in its pilots a sense of supreme confidence and sheer joie de vivre (joy of life), which spurred them on to victory against the toughest conditions and competitors — time and time again."

LUIGI GALLI
HERITAGE AND CERTIFICATION EXPERT AT BUGATTI

During the Bugatti Type 35's competitive era, success in hill climbing was afforded the same acclaim as victories on the circuit and in long-distance road races. Motor racing was still in its infancy during this era, and the amount of dedicated motor racing circuits was still incredibly small, so hill climbs provided some of the most spectacular competitive motorsport of the Type 35's career. With its agile handling to conquer tight bends and excellent power-to-weight ratio and acceleration enabling it to surge up the steepest inclines, the Type 35 excelled at the discipline, picking up the baton from its predecessor, the Type 13, with which Jean Mabille famously won La Turbie hill climb in France in 1922. In 1930, René Dreyfus followed in Mabille's wheel tracks to victory in a Bugatti Type 35B.

Even though there was no official world title to fight for in 1928 due to the cancellation of events, the year still proved to be a stellar one for Bugatti and the Type 35, with victories in race after race. Of the 26 top-flight international races held in 1928, Bugatti drivers took first place in 23, including 11 Grands Prix and the Targa Florio.

But it was in the following year, 1929, that Bugatti claimed one of its most prestigious wins with the Type 35. Monégasque driver Louis Chiron beat the German automotive industry in its own backyard when he won the Grand Prix of Nations at the Nürburgring, just two years after the circuit had opened. After 4 hours and 46 minutes and 508.77km of faultless running for the Type 35C over the hugely challenging route, Chiron took the checkered flag. He was chased home 12 minutes later by the French ace Georges Philippe, also at the wheel of a Type 35C.

The last year of the 1920s was also when the Monaco Grand Prix ran for the first time. There, a Bugatti Type 35B bore William Grover-Williams to victory over the street circuit, earning the British driver a 100,000 French Franc prize — an absolute fortune at the time. Grover-Williams had already won the 1928 French Grand Prix in a Bugatti Type 35; he would win the race again in the same model in 1929.

One of the less well-remembered events in which the Bugatti Type 35 excelled was the La Baule Grand Prix. Held on a beach on France's west coast at an exclusive resort where the well-heeled motorists of Paris could escape the hustle and heat of the capital in summer, the race was against not only other cars but also the incoming tide from the mighty Atlantic Ocean.

The golden sands of La Baule proved to be a happy hunting ground for the Bugatti Type 35, with British driver Captain George Eyston winning the 1927 event by more than six minutes in his Type 35B. The following year, Pierre Blaque-Belair claimed the win in his Type 35.

After dominating the world of motorsport throughout the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, the Bugatti Type 35's star inevitably began to wane at the highest levels of the sport as the newer, more powerful models emerged from Molsheim.

Today, the Bugatti Type 35 is remembered not only for its numerous victories but also for how it redefined what a race car could be: a masterpiece of engineering that continues to inspire awe and admiration, just as it did when it first took to the track 100 years ago.

But the truth is the Type 35 has never stopped winning. A century later, it is still being driven to victory in races and hill climbs the world over and by Bugatti enthusiasts who keep the legend of this remarkable car alive, not in a museum, but on the track, where it belongs.

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