Press Release

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The history of motor sport at BMW.

Competing in sporting events has been an integral element of BMW’s identity from the beginning. The company has always been concerned to prove the sporting prowess of its products. These achievements are documented by numerous records and championships attributed to BMW aero-engines, motorcycles and automobiles.

**Flying high: BMW aero-engines.**

The first products manufactured by the fledgling company already made an impact on the sporting world. The BMW IV aero-engine was an optimised version of the first BMW aero-engine BMW IIIa. This engine carried a human being to an altitude of 9,760 m for the first time ever on 17 June 1919. BMW was also successful on long-distance flights. Walter Mittelholzer was the first person to cross the African continent from Zurich to the Cape of Good Hope flying the Dornier Do B/See flying boat powered by the BMW V12 in 1924. The first circumnavigation of the world in a flying boat took place in 1932. Wolfgang von Gronau piloted his Dornier “Wal” (Dornier Whale) fitted with two BMW Vlla engines round the world starting on the island of Sylt and finishing in Friedrichshafen. In 1933, the BMW VI accelerated the Heinkel He 70 “Blitz” (Lightning) to 377 km/h making it the fastest commercial airliner in the world. A total of 98 world records had been broken with BMW aero-engines by the outbreak of the Second World War.

**BMW motorcycles: racing for records.**

At the end of the 1920s, two-wheelers also became the focus of attention as record-breaking vehicles. In 1929, BMW works rider Ernst Henne set up the first record in his career when he achieved a top speed of 216.75 km/h. This record-breaking ride was the beginning of a long series of world records for the “White Phantom”. In 1937, Henne succeeded in achieving an absolute world speed record of 279.5 km/h on a BMW motorcycle which held for 14 years.

The BMW racing motorcycle Type 255 formed the basis for most of the successful machines. BMW racing motorcycles achieved international success at the legendary Six Days off-road race held in England. Design engineer Rudolf Schleicher lined up at the start as a private rider on a BMW R 37 and went on to win a gold medal. By 1926, BMW had achieved 240 first prizes in racing competitions.

German Champion and European Champion Georg Meier succeeded in winning the Senior Tourist Trophy in 1939 riding a BMW supercharged racing motorcycle. He was the first foreigner to achieve this distinction at the most famous motorcycle race in the world at the time, owing to the lightweight design and superior engine technology.

**Out in front from a standing start: BMW automobiles in motor sport.**

As in motorcycle racing, BMW also pitted its automobiles against competing makes from the very beginning by entering competitions. Only four weeks after the launch of sales, the company registered three BMW 3/15 PS DA 2 automobiles for the International Alpine Rally – and won the Alpine Gold Cup from a standing start in 1929. After further successes were achieved, the management in Munich decided to intensify their racing activities. The first BMW 319/1 and BMW 315/1 roadsters provided an outstanding platform for this endeavour from 1934. In 1936, the engineers in Munich succeeded in building an even more athletic and more powerful model: the legendary BMW 328. The pure-blooded roadster established the sporty image of the BMW brand and became the most successful sports car in the late 1930s. The highly-tuned motor-sport versions achieved some notable successes - for example, the BMW 328 Touring Coupé took a class victory at Le Mans in 1939. The high points of the BMW 328 racing story are the outright victory and the coveted team prize at the Mille Miglia in 1940.

**Success continues: motorcycle racing after war.**

The first motorcycle races were already held in 1946. Georg Meier took the first German Championship Title riding a BMW machine in the Royal Class up to 500 cc in 1947. The Munich company claimed a total of 119 victories and seven German Championship Titles between 1947 and 1949. In May 1950, the International Motor-sport Federation (FIM) lifted its exclusion on German riders from international races for the 1951 season. However, the successful supercharged engines were no longer authorised to compete in races and the existing power units were converted to naturally aspirated engines at short notice.

BMW succeeded in building the BMW RS motorcycle weighing only 130 kg and this dominated the sidecar combination championships for years to come. BMW had taken a total of 19 drivers’ titles and 20 constructors’ titles in the World Championship in succession by 1974 – no manufacturer has ever dominated any discipline in motor sport to such an extent before or since. BMW succeeded in breaking 21 endurance world records as well as the absolute world record with 280.2 km/h in 1955.

However, the crisis besetting the company in the second half of the 1950s forced it to make cuts in its commitment to motorcycle racing. There was also internal competition from automobile racing. During the 1960s and 1970s, the main successes in motorcycle racing were with sidecar combinations. Private riders in solo racing continued to achieve international successes with the BMW R 90 S. The company itself continued to seek challenges in off-road racing. Riders on the new BMW G/S were first across the finishing line at the Paris-Dakar rallies in 1981, 1983, 1984 and 1985, winning the most difficult and heavily publicised off-road race in the world. BMW only returned to the dirt tracks in Africa at the end of the 1990s and won an outright victory in the legendary rally for the fifth time in 1999. One year later, Richard Sainct repeated the success riding a new single-cylinder Enduro based on the BMW F 650. Places one to four were all taken by BMW riders.

**Automobile racing: legendary sports car.**

During the 1940s and 1950s, the company was initially unable to continue the international successes of the BMW 328. The BMW 700 changed the trend when the small car powered by a 2-cylinder Boxer engine generating 60 hp notched up numerous victories in hillclimb and circuit races. In 1964, the “New Class” was also launched on the race track with the BMW 1800 TI. Hubert Hahne immediately became the German Circuit Champion driving this car and in 1966 he drove the BMW 2000 TI to become European Touring Car Champion. During the same year, he achieved a sensational first on the Nürburgring: never before had a touring car driven round the North Loop in less than 10 minutes. Subsequent years saw BMW also celebrating numerous successes in international rallies with cars based on the “New Class” and the BMW 02 Series.

The establishment of BMW Motorsport GmbH on 24 May 1972 generated new stimuli in touring-car sport. One year later, the BMW 3.0 CSL took to the race track as a lightweight version of the large coupé. The car generating 365 hp did not disappoint. BMW won the Manufacturers’ Category and the European Championship. The successful racing coupés gained six European Championship Titles in seven years between 1973 and 1979. American artist Alexander Calder converted a BMW 3.0 CSL packing 450 hp into an extravagant artwork on wheels for the 24 Hour Race at Le Mans in 1975 – a world first in motor sport. The first Art Car was born and now there are 17 of these unique automobiles.

BMW Motorsport GmbH succeeded in making a big advance with the BMW M1 in 1978. The forebear of all BMW M models created a sensation in the BMW Procar Series introduced especially for this car. This series gives private drivers an opportunity to compete against Formula 1 drivers – all the drivers compete driving the BMW M1 generating 470 hp. The racing version of the BMW 3 Series had been celebrating successes since 1977 when the Munich engineers launched its successor on the road in 1987. The BMW M3 won the three most important titles of the season from a standing start: the Touring Car World Championship, the European Championship and the German Touring Car Championship (DTM). The BMW M3 masterfully dominated the international touring-car racing scene for five years. This track record of success makes it the world’s most successful touring car to this day. The tradition was continued during the 1990s with numerous victories in the drivers’, constructors’ and team placings, including wins on the American continent. In 1998, BMW won the 24 Hour Race at the Nürburgring with a 320d. This was the first outright victory ever in an endurance race with a diesel-powered vehicle.

Alongside commitment with the BMW 3 Series, BMW joined forces with McLaren to develop a new super sports car. The McLaren F1 went into series production in 1994 and was soon rated as the fastest sports car in the world with its output of 627 hp and a top speed in excess of 370 km/h. As the F1 GTR, the car took victory in the overall placings for the 24 Hour Race at Le Mans one year later. In 1999, BMW lined up its own sports car on the grid. The open-top BMW V12 Le Mans won a commanding victory at Le Mans and gave BMW its first triumph as a works team.

As early as 1967, BMW had also been involved in Formula 2. Numerous victories and a total of five European Championships by 1984 defined the race series during this period. After the successes in Formula 2, BMW broke new ground in 1982. BMW teamed up with partner Brabham for its first foray into Formula 1. Nelson Piquet driving a BMW BT 52 Turbo already forged ahead in the second race season and brought home the first Formula 1 World Championship Title. In 1987, BMW bade farewell to the Formula 1 circus and concentrated entirely on touring-car sport.

BMW returned to Formula 1 in the 2000 season beside Williams as engine supplier. Over the coming years, the BMW WilliamsF1 Team (2000-2005) was highly successful and posted 10 wins. Starting in 2006, BMW continued autonomously in Formula 1 with the newly formed BMW Sauber F1 Team and immediately attained a position as the top team. During the 2008 season, the team contested the World Championship Title to the last race and ultimately took third place. In Canada, Polish driver Robert Kubica took the first and only Grand Prix victory on 8 June 2008. BMW withdrew from Formula 1 at the end of 2009 as part of a realignment of BMW’s motor-sport commitment. Since that change in direction, the profile in production-car racing has been continually expanded and has been raised to a new level with the return to the German Touring Car Masters (DTM) in 2012.

For more information please contact:

**BMW Group Corporate and Governmental Affairs**

**Technology Communications**

Manfred Grunert

Spokesman Heritage and Driving Experience

Phone: +49-89-382-27797

mailto: [Manfred.Grunert@bmw.de](mailto:manfred.grunert@bmw.de)

Internet: [www.press.bmw.de](http://www.press.bmw.de)

**BMW Group Classic**BMW Group Classic is responsible for all activities within the BMW Group associated with the history of the company and its three brands BMW, MINI and Rolls-Royce. This ranges from the Group Archives, which are available to anyone as a centre of expertise for all the facts and figures surrounding the history of the company, the brands and the products, through the BMW Museum, which receives more than 400,000 visitors each year, to the BMW Classic Centre where all the facilities are provided that drivers require to satisfy their passion for classic BMW vehicles from spare parts to full restoration. Another aspect is planning and implementation of participation in all the classic events attended, and administration and expansion of the vehicle collection with more than 1,000 exhibits.

**The BMW Group**

With its three brands – BMW, MINI, Husqvarna Motorcycles and Rolls-Royce – the BMW Group is one of the world’s most successful premium manufacturers of cars and motorcycles. It operates internationally with 25 production and assembly plants in 14 countries and a global sales network with representation in more than 140 countries.

During the financial year 2011, the BMW Group sold approximately 1.67 million cars and more than 113,000 motorcycles worldwide. The profit before tax for 2011 was € 7.38 billion on revenues amounting to € 68.82 billion. At 31 December 2011, the BMW Group had a workforce of approximately 100,000 employees.

Long-term thinking and responsible action have long been the foundation of the BMW Group’s success. Striving for ecological and social sustainability along the entire value-added chain, taking full responsibility for our products and giving an unequivocal commitment to preserving resources are prime objectives firmly embedded in our corporate strategies. For these reasons, the BMW Group has been sector leader in the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices for the last seven years.

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