

THE STAR

MERCEDES-BENZ CLUB OF AMERICA



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The MAYBACH FOUNDATION

INVENTION, MEMORY,
and the DRIVING FORCE FORWARD

Story
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Photography
MERCEDES-MAYBACH
THE MAYBACH FOUNDATION,
MUSEUM OF HISTORICAL MAYBACH VEHICLES





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Somewhere above Lake Constance, where Germany, Switzerland, and Austria meet, the road winds upward like a ribbon pulled into the sky. In a place where the air becomes thin and metallic, and sound seems to fade into the blue, a procession of Maybachs makes their ascent. Their silhouettes glide between cliffs and cloudbanks, their engines almost silent, as if the cars themselves understand the importance of the moment. This isn't just a tour; it's an awakening.

Nearly a century ago, in 1925, Karl Schmid, general manager of Zeppelin Works and an early supporter of Karl Maybach, took his young bride across these same ridges in a Maybach SW 38. The photos he left behind resemble scenes from a lost film — furs and goggles, picnic baskets on mountain passes, Saint Bernards lounging in the snow, border guards standing beside the car.



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- (1., 4.) Wedding journey in 1925: Alpine tour in a Maybach Type 22/70 hp W3 automobile. Photography: Collection of the Museum for Historic Maybach Vehicles, Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz.
- (2., 3.) The St. Bernard dogs on the Great St. Bernard Pass.
- (5., 6.) Maybach car of the type 22/70 PS W3 (built 1921-28) with a body by Spohn, Ravensburg, but also the license plate number of the time III Z 6276.
- (7.) Wedding couple enjoying the visage during their trip to the Alps in a Maybach, 1925. Photography: Collection of the Museum for Historic Maybach Vehicles, Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz.

Those images stayed in a diary for nearly 100 years ... until Ulrich "Uli" Schmid-Maybach discovered them at the Museum for Historic Maybach Vehicles. The moment he did, something stirred. "It was simply an archival story that deserved to live again," Uli said. So, the Maybach Alps Rally was reborn — not as nostalgia, but as a continuation. When the Maybach cars depart Friedrichshafen, Germany, the birthplace of Zeppelins and where the Maybach family once walked the factory grounds, they aren't just rolling into the Alps ... they're rolling through history.

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(Above) Mercedes-Maybach SL 680 leads the way.

(Opposite) A remake of the Maybach Alps Rally organized by Mercedes-Maybach. A row of Maybach vehicles throughout history, enjoying the scenic Alps.

A man with a grey beard and sunglasses, wearing a white button-down shirt and olive green cargo pants, stands waist-deep in the ocean. The water is a deep blue with gentle ripples. In the background, a white seaplane is visible on the water, and distant mountains rise under a clear blue sky. The man's reflection is clearly visible in the calm water.

Land. Air. Sea.
MAYBACH

THE MAYBACH ETHOS

The rally is romantic, yes, but the soul of Maybach has always been built in a workshop rather than on a postcard. The ethos behind every Maybach engine, from Zeppelin powerplants to the modern V12, boils down to three words spoken by one of Karl Maybach’s former employees, the legendary 105-year-old Klaus Obermeyer: “Quality. Quality. Quality.”, via Uli Schmid-Maybach. When Uli sat down with Professor Hermann Gauss, the man whose final project was the first modern Maybach after a lifetime working on the S-Class, he uncovered a striking truth. A typical car tolerates 150 minor flaws. A luxury car, maybe 60. “On a Maybach, we do not allow any.” -Professor Gauss, as quoted by Uli. That was the original Maybach instinct: refusing to compromise on engineering integrity. That instinct made the Maybach Alps Rally meaningful. The scenery was impeccable, but the continuation of the craft was the true fulfilled purpose.



(Above) The Maybach monogram standing proudly on the C-pillar of the Mercedes-Maybach S 680.

TECHNOLOGY OVER MYTHOLOGY

There is one line that defines Uli’s stewardship of the family name: “Heritage is a compass, not an anchor.” And that compass, Uli believes, should never point backward just for its own sake. In his view, the same forces that powered early combustion engines and lifted Zeppelins into the sky were not merely mechanical; they were human. Recognition. Mentorship. Opportunity. The belief that mobility, whether mechanical or social, starts with someone seeing potential in someone else. Already here, the line between engineering heritage and the Maybach Foundation’s work begins to blur. If Maybach engines once enabled people to cross geographic borders, the Foundation now helps people cross personal and societal ones. While most marques drown in their own mythology, Maybach leverages its past to guide its future. The unseen part — the true engine behind this family’s legacy — is the story that predates all cars: a young orphan named Wilhelm Maybach and the man who recognized him.

THE MENTORSHIP THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Before there were engines, there was a boy. A boy in an orphanage in Reutlingen, Germany, sketching gears and mechanisms on scrap paper. Willhelm Maybach was brilliant, but brilliance is nothing without recognition. His life changed because someone saw him; first Gustav Werner, then Gottlieb Daimler. “It was the mentoring of his talent and discovery ... that changed everything,” says Uli Maybach. That mentorship produced many firsts. The first high-speed internal combustion engine. The first powered boats. The first motorcycles. That is why the Maybach Foundation exists. It is not about the cars; it is about possibility and what happens when someone gives another human being a chance to become extraordinary. Uli often says that the most powerful inheritance the Maybach family carries is not the technology; it is the mindset that created it. The instinct Gottlieb Daimler had when he recognized Wilhelm Maybach’s brilliance is the same instinct the Foundation now applies to people who have been overlooked by society. The Foundation’s mentoring work today extends far beyond engineering: into prison recidivism projects, homelessness interventions, digital mentor-matching systems, and cross-cultural international leadership programs. The common thread is simple: give someone the structure, support, and belief they’ve never had, and watch what becomes possible. Just as Wilhelm needed a mentor to rise, modern participants need someone to walk beside them through the steepest parts of their lives. It is mentorship as engineering. Human mobility is designed with the same precision as mechanical mobility.

THE POWER CENTURY Maybach’s Technological Prowess



If the Alps Rally is the romantic spine of the story, the next century of Maybach is its industrial crescendo. This is where the narrative accelerates. The Zeppelin Age - Power in the Clouds. Karl Maybach did not inherit a factory. He inherited a frontier. When Count Zeppelin needed engines capable of lifting massive airships into the stratosphere, only one engineer dared reinvent aviation power at altitude. Karl built the engines that motorized the Zeppelins after the accident at Echterdingen, developing high-altitude powerplants that allowed Zeppelins to dominate the skies through the 1910s. It was not luxury. It was courage - mechanical and conceptual.

(Above) An assortment of Maybachs.

BY LAND, AIR, AND SEA The Industrial Empire

After aviation came the ground revolution. Maybach engines powered trains like the Fliegender Hamburger, which cut Berlin-Hamburg travel time in half, and early diesel-electric propulsion systems. Maybach engines also built marine engines that eventually became the backbone of MTU in Friedrichshafen, powered NATO armored platforms, and provided additional military mobility solutions in postwar Europe.

By the 1960s and 70s, Maybach’s descendants were shaping German industrialism itself.

Uli vividly remembers the conference rooms at MTU, the executives in thin ties, and the Mercedes-Benz managers who would later become global leaders. “I was exposed to what would then become leadership at Mercedes ... they were middle managers on the way up.” -Uli Schmid-Maybach. He grew up around the test stands, watching engines “as big as a bedroom” roar to life. He learned how German industry operated from the shop floor to the executive suite.

THE REBIRTH (1997–2002)



When BMW, VW, and Mercedes-Benz competed over Rolls-Royce and Bentley, Mercedes-Benz ultimately chose a different path. They revived their own history with the Maybach lineage and created a modern flagship worthy of that name. Olivier Boulay’s Tokyo design center developed the winning concept in 1997, featuring illuminated exterior pinstripes. Five years later, the first modern Maybach was delivered to the Maybach family. Even with the rebirth of the Maybach 57, Uli recognized that the family’s responsibilities extended beyond just automobiles. The legacy couldn’t stay stuck in the past; it had to evolve, grow, and serve the world. That evolution now has a physical space: the Schaudenpot in Friedrichshafen, a living archive and story-telling laboratory directly across from the Zeppelin Museum. The pop-up exhibition will highlight the Alps rally and showcase diary excerpts, serving as a catalyst for new generations to understand what Maybach truly represents: ingenuity, resilience, invention, and care.

And this same philosophy guides the Foundation’s social work. In San Francisco, where the contrast between innovation and inequality is stark, the Maybach Foundation has started applying its century-old principles of precision and support to people whose lives are at risk of being overlooked. Mentorship becomes a stabilizer. Connection serves as a corrective force. Human dignity becomes the new frontier of engineering.

If Maybach once built the engines that conquered the Alps, the Foundation now works on the invisible mountains within modern society: disconnection, recidivism, homelessness, and uncertainty. In many ways, the Foundation is still doing what Maybach always did: identifying a hard problem, engineering a solution, and helping someone reach a place they could not reach on their own.

Part II explores this next ascent.

(Above) Ulrich Schmid-Maybach



(Above) 1939 SW 42 Pullman sedan