
Return of the BMW M1 Procars

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It was almost 30 years ago that the last official BMW M1 Procar Series race was held... until last weekend, that is. Okay, so the support race for the 2008 German Grand Prix at Hockenheim didn't include - as in days gone by - the five fastest Formula One drivers from the Friday practice sessions... but it was nonetheless a feast of motorsport heroes who took to the track in 10 identical 470bhp BMW M1 Procars.



Six-times Grand Prix winner **Jacques Laffite** and three-times World Champion **Niki Lauda** (who said the experience was “a hoot”) joined **Christian Klien**, **Marc Surer**, **Christian Danner**, **Dieter Quester** and **Harald Grohs**, among others. In the **Andy Warhol BMW M1 Art Car** was **Jochen Neerpasch**, chief of **BMW Motorsport GmbH** at the time and thus responsible for initiating the original **Procar Series** together with **Bernie Ecclestone** and **Max Mosley**.



The first race in the original one-make Procar Series was on 12th May 1979, at Zolder. Italy’s **Elio de Angelis** carved his way through the field from 15th on the grid to take the chequered flag but, by the last race of the season, at Monza, it was the then-double Formula One World Champion **Niki Lauda** who led on points: and he claimed the series with three outright wins and one second place. **Lauda** was duly rewarded with a large prize purse – and a brand new BMW M1!

No doubt such incentives helped focus the mind, though Formula One drivers don’t need any encouragement to be competitive. Whatever the truth, the Procar Series was a huge hit with spectators and drivers alike. Hence Nelson Piquet’s quip after one particularly successful Formula One practice session: “Maybe I was only quick today because I was hoping to drive the BMW.” And with three consecutive victories in the final trio of races in 1980, Piquet showed fine form in scooping the BMW M1 Procar Series’ second – and last – title.



In 2008, however, the races were 'demos' and we heard it suggested that the **Andy Warhol Art Car** was supposed to lead the field (presumably because of its unimaginable value and the danger of damage in close racing). But the **Art Car** didn't get off to good start on the Saturday; hence **Niki Lauda** crossed the line first. Most appropriate.

"The very mention of this pioneering one-make concept in a modern Formula One paddock still provokes enthusiastic reactions," said Director of BMW Classic **Karl Baumer**, shortly before last weekend's races, which were held as part of the 30th anniversary celebrations of the birth of the BMW M1 sports car.



Text: Charis Whitcombe

Photos: BMW

You can download Classic Driver wallpaper of the 1979 BMW M1 'Art Car' by Andy Warhol at Le Mans:

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