

# 110 Years Since Mercedes' Dad Bought His First Car

In 1897, successful German-born businessman Emil Jellinek bought his first car from genius inventor Gottlieb Daimler. He became an enthusiastic fan of the automobile, took part in the earliest motor races, and quickly became the largest distributor of Daimler cars. A few months after Herr Daimler's death in 1900, Jellinek persuaded the management of the Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft to have its chief designer, legendary and visionary engineer Wilhelm Maybach, build a fast, lightweight and safe car. Jellinek also made a second suggestion: the new car should bear the name of his daughter, Mercédès, who was then ten years old.

And what a new car it was. More advanced than any other of the time, there's no disputing that it set the pattern for all that was to come for many decades. Essentially, it defined the car as we know it today.

Of course, during the previous 15 years since Karl Benz had patented his three-wheeler, all sorts of contraptions, both European and American, had been produced that proved capable of moving under their own power, more or less, but none but the 1901 Mercedes deserved billing as "The World's First Modern Automobile." Instead of a wooden frame, it featured pressed-steel chassis members. Its front-mounted, four-cylinder 35-horsepower engine was the first to use inlet valves operated by a camshaft. The car's transmission allowed precise selection of any gear at will. Its honeycomb radiator with engine-driven fan was far more efficient (and more visually appealing) than the monstrous lengths of finned tubing used on other vehicles to dissipate excess engine heat. It was altogether quieter, more civilized and easier to operate than any other motor vehicle of the time – and it was quickly copied as the blueprint of cars that would follow.

In September of that year the name "Mercedes" was protected as a registered trademark. Twenty-four years later, DMG merged with Benz & Cie. The companies founded by the two inventors of the automobile, Gottlieb Daimler and Karl Benz, thus amalgamated to become Daimler-Benz AG; and Mercedes became Mercedes-Benz.



Emil Jellinek didn't only love Daimler cars; he also doted on his daughter, Mercédès.



This example of the first Mercedes was owned by U.S. millionaire William K. Vanderbilt. Note how modern the essentials of its design are compared to other cars of the period. It had a low, stable stance, too.



This Benz Velo of just a few years before provides astonishing proof of just how far ahead the Mercedes was. And the Velo was the first successful commercially-produced automobile.