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Laurin & Klement SLAVIA B: The history of ŠKODA Motorsport began 120 years ago between Paris and Berlin

- › The Czech car manufacturer's motorsport tradition began in 1901 with the Laurin & Klement SLAVIA B motorbike and works rider Narcis Podsedníček
- › Podsedníček crossed the finish line as the only participant in the motorbike class in the demanding long-distance race Paris – Berlin in 1901
- › Laurin & Klement SLAVIA Type B: Air-cooled single-cylinder engine with 240 cc displacement, 1.75 hp power and a top speed of 40 km/h
- › 120 years of motorsport: To mark the anniversary, ŠKODA AUTO is presenting 18 of the most important sports models in the company's history as part of an in-depth series

Mladá Boleslav, 26 February 2021 – Laurin & Klement's second motorbike model, the SLAVIA B, plays a very special role in Laurin & Klement's corporate history: it was the first motorbike that the Mladá Boleslav-based company entered in an international race in 1901. The long-distance race from Paris to Berlin was considered the toughest challenge of its time. Factory rider Narcis Podsedníček made history on his first attempt: he was the only participant in his class to reach the finish line but was never declared the winner.

When courage and fearlessness combine with a little insanity, the scene is set for legendary success – as was the case in the early days of motorsport at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, determined pioneers systematically broke new ground and pushed the limits of what was possible and achievable – always with a firm belief in technological progress.

Václav Laurin and Václav Klement, the founders of the eponymous bicycle manufacturer from Mladá Boleslav in Bohemia, were among these visionaries. Besides their commitment to offering high-quality and affordable bicycles, they were also united by their passion for racing. The company, founded in 1895 as a small repair workshop, quickly took off: after only one year, the pair employed 21 people and were marketing five different bicycle models featuring the 'SLAVIA' label.

Find out more: [Václav Laurin \(1865 – 1930\) – Technician, mobility pioneer, entrepreneur](#)

Just four years later, on 18 November 1899, the young company presented its first two motorbikes, the SLAVIA A and SLAVIA B. To improve the handling and stability of the bikes, the engine was installed in the lower part of the frame. This design is standard today, but back then, the brainchild of the ingenious engineer Václav Laurin was a true sensation. Thanks in part to Václav Klement's entrepreneurial vision and keen business sense, the manufacturer expanded rapidly in the following years: the professional bookseller secured large orders in his own country and at the same time raised Laurin & Klement's profile in important industrial nations such as Germany and Great Britain. Successes in long-distance races attracted a lot of international attention at the time and served Václav Klement as a means to an end.

Find out more: [Václav Klement \(1868 – 1938\) – Visionary, racing driver, manager](#)

Narcis Podsedníček - the first works rider of the motorbike manufacturer from Mladá Boleslav

The "motorised two-wheelers" from Mladá Boleslav made their motorsport debut in 1901 at the biggest event of the time, the race from Paris via Aachen and Hanover to Berlin. The 1,196-kilometre route was a great challenge for



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man and machine. Works rider Narcis Podsedníček started the three-day race for Laurin & Klement as one of ten participants in the two- and three-wheeler categories. He had already established a career at the company and, thanks to his dedication and outstanding expertise, had quickly risen from toolmaker to sales representative. At the peak of his career, Podsedníček later became the production manager.

The course mostly covered unpaved roads and cobblestones, and there were hoof nails everywhere, causing numerous punctures. In the end, 48 out of 110 vehicles made it to the finish line. Although Podsedníček had been considered an outsider at best in the run-up to the race, he reached Berlin first in his class on the Laurin & Klement motorcycle. His class victory was also surprising because no one was expecting him when he crossed the finish line at three o'clock in the morning: The timekeeping office was closed, and no race commissioners were on duty.

Podsedníček's arrival was initially confirmed by local police officers. However, the organiser did not acknowledge the guards' records and instead chose four Frenchmen on De Dion-Bouton tricycles as the winners, leaving Podsedníček with only a moral victory.

However, these achievements earned his outstanding personal performance and the Laurin & Klement brand a great deal of international attention and enhanced the reputation of the young brand, which presented its first automobile in 1905: The proverbial starting signal for the manufacturer's future, hugely successful involvement in motorsport.

The Laurin & Klement SLAVIA Type B motorbike

The company started producing the Laurin & Klement SLAVIA B in 1899. That November, the motorcycle made its debut at the bicycle racetrack in Prague-Bubny alongside the Type A. The Type B had an air-cooled single-cylinder engine that generated a power output of 1.75 hp from a displacement of 240 cc; the top speed was 40 km/h. As was typical at the time, the motorbike did not have a gearbox; the engine drove the rear wheel directly using a flat leather belt. The riders had to pedal to start the chain-based starter and auxiliary drive themselves. By 1904, Laurin & Klement had built a total of 540 units of the SLAVIA B in Mladá Boleslav.

In 1956, this historic motorbike was given a special honour: it was featured in 'Vintage Car' (Dědeček Automobil), a film that offers a perspective on the 'automotive century'. The script was based on the eponymous book by Adolf Branald.

Find out more: [History of engine development and production in Mladá Boleslav \(1899 - 2019\)](#)

Find out more: [Laurin & Klement SLAVIA Type B – further photos available at ŠKODA Storyboard](#)

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Media images:



Laurin & Klement SLAVIA B

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO



Laurin & Klement SLAVIA B

The SLAVIA Type B motorbike had an air-cooled single-cylinder engine with a capacity of 240 cc, generating 1.75 hp. The engine drove the rear wheel directly using a flat leather belt; the top speed was 40 km/h.

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO



Laurin & Klement SLAVIA B

The engine drove the rear wheel directly using a flat leather belt.

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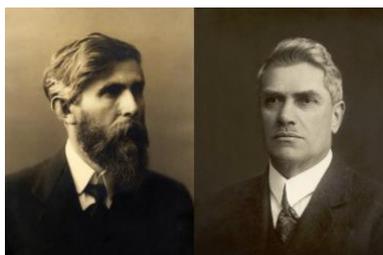


Laurin & Klement SLAVIA B

The SLAVIA Type B motorbike had an air-cooled single-cylinder engine with a capacity of 240 cc, generating 1.75 hp.

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Václav Klement and Václav Laurin

In the early days of the company, the enthusiasm and skill of the founding fathers Václav Klement (left) and Václav Laurin were instrumental in the brand's rapid development.

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Narcis Podsedníček

Narcis Podsedníček represented Laurin & Klement in his first international race with great success: With his SLAVIA Type B, he won the long-distance Paris-Berlin race in 1901 ahead of a strong field of participants, covering a distance of 1,196 km.

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO

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- › is focusing on three priorities with its 'NEXT LEVEL ŠKODA' program for the future: expanding the model portfolio towards entry-level segments, exploring new markets for further growth in the volume segment and making tangible progress in sustainability and diversity.
- › currently offers its customers ten passenger-car series: the CITIGO^e iV, FABIA, RAPID, SCALA, OCTAVIA and SUPERB as well as the KAMIQ, KAROQ, KODIAQ and ENYAQ iV.
- › delivered over one million vehicles to customers around the world in 2020.
- › has belonged to the Volkswagen Group for 30 years. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful vehicle manufacturers in the world. In association with the Group, ŠKODA AUTO independently develops and manufactures vehicles, as well as components, engines and transmissions.
- › operates at three locations in the Czech Republic; manufactures in China, Russia, Slovakia and India mainly through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine with a local partner.
- › employs approximately 42,000 people globally and is active in more than 100 markets.