

Original returns to the track: Škoda Sport competes in 2023 Le Mans Classic

- › **The 1950 Škoda Sport is making its second appearance in the vintage Le Mans Classic race, driven by Kafka/Velebný duo and sporting its original starting number 44**
- › **This sporty variation of the popular 'Tudor', of which only two were ever made, once zipped along at speeds up to 140 km/h powered by a four-cylinder 1089 cm³/50 hp (37 kW) engine**
- › **A host of festivities to commemorate the centenary of the 24-hour Le Mans race**

Mladá Boleslav, 29 June 2023 – The Škoda Sport, built on the reliable 'Tudor' platform, took part in the renowned 24-hour Le Mans race in 1950. This year, the meticulously restored original model is returning to the famous circuit at the vintage Le Mans Classic 2023, where the 'Pancake' – a nickname inspired by its low, aluminium body – will once again bear its original starting number 44.

24-hour Le Mans 1950: Impressive performance from the 'Pancake'

In September 1949, the two-seater Škoda Sport made its grand debut at the Czechoslovak Grand Prix in Brno. It combined the proven technology of the 'Tudor' with a sleek, all-aluminium, pontoon-shaped body, earning it the affectionate nickname 'Pancake'. Powered by a four-cylinder 1089 cm³ engine, this unique racer produced 42 hp (31 kW) at 5100 rpm, leading it to success in the up-to-1100 cm³ class.

To boost Škoda's standing in the French and Benelux markets, where the 'Tudor' was already very popular, the brand decided to enter the 18th staging of the famed endurance race, the 24-hour Le Mans in 1950. To comply with the 24-hour race regulations, the 'Pancake' was fine-tuned; additional headlights were added for night stages, and openings were incorporated into the front grille to enhance drum brake cooling. Even with a wheelbase extended to 2150 mm for enhanced stability, the vehicle's weight, complete with tools and spare parts, never exceeded 700 kg. The performance of the water-cooled four-cylinder 1089 cm³ engine, originally 32 hp (23.5 kW) at 4200 rpm, was boosted thanks to a higher compression ratio and a racing fuel mix of petrol, ethanol, and acetone, allowing it to reach up to 50 hp (37 kW) at 5200 rpm. Equipped with 15-inch Barum diagonal tyres, a PAL 12V electrical installation, and other components, the Škoda Sport achieved speeds of up to 140 km/h. Its low fuel consumption of around 12 litres per 100 km was a major advantage, minimising time spent refuelling during the race.

Factory crew Václav Bobek and Jaroslav Netušil embarked on the traditional Circuit de la Sarthe on 24 June 1950. Racing in the under-1100 cm³ category, they claimed 2nd position

and climbed their way up to 5th place overall based on the performance coefficient. However, after 13 of the 24 hours, their hope for a spectacular finish was dashed by a trivial technical failure: a cracked piston pin circlip. Little did anyone know that this would be the last start for a Czech car with a Czech crew in the 24-hour Le Mans for many years. The tense political climate of the 'Cold War' thwarted plans to deploy a pair of modernised Škoda Sports in the 1951 race.

Le Mans Classic 2023: Up to 7000 rpm

The Škoda Sport is making a comeback to the Circuit de la Sarthe for the vintage race, Le Mans Classic, first held in the summer of 2002. Only models that competed in the original 24-hour race are eligible. This event includes a series of races featuring models from 1923 to 1981, divided into six basic and several special categories. Each category is allotted 2 hours and 9 minutes, split into three 43-minute races. Halfway through each race, there is a pit stop for a driver change. The final race starts in the traditional 'Le Mans' style, with drivers running from a designated spot to their cars on the starter's signal, before starting their engines and hitting the track.

The 2022 Le Mans Classic saw the debut of one of the two 'Pancakes' that had originally participated in the 24-hour Le Mans 1950. The meticulously restored car was manned by the team of Stanislav Kafka and Michal Velebný. The vehicle finished 47th and ranked 43rd out of 74 starting crews in its class based on a coefficient that takes power and engine capacity into account.

The Škoda Sport remains true to its original design, relying on original lever shock absorbers and worm steering. In brake testing, the four-cylinder engine clocked up to 7000 rpm. On Friday, 30 June 2023, the class 2 qualifying will begin at 14:00, featuring cars manufactured between 1949 and 1956. The Škoda Sport, manned by the Kafka/Velebný team, will once again bear its original starting number 44.

Host of festivities

The appeal of the Le Mans Classic vintage race is enhanced by the 100th-anniversary celebrations of the legendary 24-hour race. A grand display awaits spectators, with over 800 historic cars, representatives from all 17 inaugural brands, and a collection of nearly 90 cars – including 65 victorious models from past Le Mans races – marking the Le Mans Classic centenary.

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Media images



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The original Škoda Sport from the 24-hour Le Mans 1950 is hitting the track of the Le Mans Classic vintage race once again this year, with the Kafka/Velebný duo and original starting number 44.

Source: Škoda Auto



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In June 1950, the Škoda Sport manned by Bobek/Netušil was running in 2nd position in the up-to-1100 cm³ class until a trivial technical malfunction occurred. Overall, they were ranked at an impressive 5th place based on the performance coefficient.

Source: Škoda Auto



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The Škoda Sport was derived from the popular Škoda 1101 'Tudor' model, manufactured from 1946 onwards. Its success in motorsport contributed to the car's popularity in foreign markets.

Source: Škoda Auto



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Divided into six groups, the cars and crews will face three heats, including night and very early morning races. The final race on Sunday starts in traditional style, with drivers running to their cars across the finish straight.

Source: Škoda Auto

Škoda Auto

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- › aims to be one of the five best-selling brands in Europe by 2030 with an attractive line-up in the entry-level segments and additional e-models.
- › is emerging as the leading European brand in important growth markets such as India or North Africa.
- › currently offers its customers twelve passenger-car series: the Fabia, Rapid, Scala, Octavia and Superb as well as the Kamiq, Karoq, Kodiaq, Enyaq iV, Enyaq Coupé iV, Slavia and Kushaq.
- › delivered over 731,000 vehicles to customers around the world in 2022.
- › has been a member of the Volkswagen Group for 30 years. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful vehicle manufacturers in the world.
- › independently manufactures and develops not only vehicles but also components such as MEB battery systems, engines and transmissions in association with the Group.
- › operates at three sites in the Czech Republic; has additional production capacity in China, Slovakia and India primarily through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine with a local partner.
- › employs over 40,000 people globally and is active in over 100 markets.