



The story behind . . .



You will have to search far to find an international status symbol with as much recognition value as the Mercedes-Benz three-pointed "star." Arabian oil sheiks are as likely to covet it as any newly rich American. It was designed by Herr Gottlieb Daimler to symbolize the application of his gasoline motors to land, sea and air vehicles.

Daimler sketched the symbol in 1885, a year before he built the first practical gasoline-powered automobile. His engines also drove the first motorboat and the first zeppelin (this was 18 years before the Wright brothers' plane flew).

Another German, Karl Benz, built a similar automobile within weeks of the time Daimler put his together. The two inventors never met, even though they lived only 60 miles apart, Benz in Mannheim and Daimler in the then tiny village of Cannstatt. They went their separate ways, each producing cars of advanced design and superb engineering. As his trademark, Benz used an oak leaf cluster set inside a circle, a symbol whose meaning is lost in the company's lore.

In the mid-1920's, their companies merged, creating the parent of the present firm. An obvious problem was how to blend the two trademarks. You can see the results by examining any Mercedes-Benz. On the front end is the Daimler star, starkly positioned inside a circle. It also appears at the rear, on the hubcaps and other places on the car. The Benz oak leaf is seen only once: as part of a double circle on the radiator grill, together with the name of the car and the three-pointed star. That's the only place where low-key Mercedes-Benz displays the name of its product.

How come Daimler's name does not appear anywhere on the cars now? That's a story in itself.

It seems that in 1901, one Emil Jellinek was the Austro-Hungarian consul general in Nice, scene of famous auto races of the day. He knew Daimler, and hearing of his fine sports cars, he went to Germany to see for himself. He was so impressed that he made a deal with Daimler. He would undertake to sell the company's entire production that year (36 cars) if it was victorious at the Nice "speed week" and if the car's name was changed to Mercedes, in honor of Jellinek's daughter.

Daimler agreed. His entries ran away with honors at Nice, but in the process Daimler forfeited the right to use his name on the car in favor of Mercedes. The three-pointed star remained, of course. And when the merger took place about 25 years later, the car's name became not Daimler-Benz but Mercedes-Benz.

Mercedes, incidentally, was the granddaughter of a rabbi, a fact that was undoubtedly never known to Hitler and other Nazi bigwigs as they surveyed the scenes of their brutalities from the back seats of their personal, custom-made Mercedes-Benz automobiles.