



Mercedes-Benz Classic

Press release
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Former Mercedes-Benz chief designer Bruno Sacco has passed away

- The designer from Italy shaped the brand's design idiom for decades
- Working life: From 1958 to 1999, the stylist worked for Mercedes-Benz
- Bruno Sacco was particularly proud of the saloons and coupés of the 126 series

Stuttgart. Bruno Sacco, one of the best-known designers in automotive history, died in Sindelfingen on 19 September 2024 at the age of 90. Born in Italy with German citizenship, he was Chief Designer of Mercedes-Benz from 1975 until retirement in 1999.

“Bruno Sacco left a lasting mark on the company with his iconic designs and his passion for aesthetics,” says Gorden Wagener, Chief Design Officer of Mercedes-Benz Group AG. “In Bruno Sacco, we have lost an outstanding personality and an impressive aesthete. Our deepest sympathy goes out to his family and friends.”

“Mercedes-Benz will always remember this extraordinary stylist and yet humble person,” says Marcus Breitschwerdt, CEO of Mercedes-Benz Heritage GmbH. “Bruno Sacco has defined the shape of numerous icons from Mercedes-Benz. Many of them are still seen today in everyday road traffic, or they fascinate as classics of the brand.”

The E-Class of model series 124 with all four body variants, the S-Class of model series 126 including the Coupé, the Mercedes-Benz 190 (W 201) and the SL of model series R 129: These are some vehicles that were created under Bruno Sacco as head of the design department. At the same time, they and many other passenger cars and commercial vehicles document the guiding theme, which he always followed: “A Mercedes-Benz must always look like a Mercedes-Benz.” In this way, the designer, who was well respected beyond the brand, shaped the design idiom of several model generations. In 1958, Sacco joined Daimler-Benz AG and worked for the company for his entire professional life.

Bruno Sacco was born in Udine on 12 November 1933 as the son of the commander of a mountain infantry battalion. In 1951, at the age of 17, he graduated from his home town as the youngest geometer in Italy. The same year he visited the Turin Motor Show: In this center of modern design ideas, Italy's great automobile designers present new models, studies and designs. Fascinated by the world of automobile forms, Sacco visited the Polytechnic University of Turin from 1952. In 1955 he joined the Carrozzeria Ghia SpA based in Turin and gained experience in model production. Ghia offered exciting studies that resembled futuristic airplanes, but also elegant everyday automobiles.

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*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific carbon emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Guidelines on Fuel Consumption, Carbon Emissions and Electricity Consumption" for new passenger cars, which is available free of charge at all points of sale and from Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH at www.dat.de.

At the end of 1957, Sacco met in Turin Karl Wilfert, the head of Mercedes-Benz body testing at the Sindelfingen plant since the mid-1950s. Wilfert had been building up the new Stylistics department, which Friedrich Geiger headed. Paul Bracq was appointed by Wilfert as the first pure automotive designer. After an invitation to Bruno Sacco at the Sindelfingen plant, he was hired as a second stylist in 1958. Sacco worked in the field of pre-body development and later as head of the Body Design and Dimensional Concept department. During this time, outstanding models such as the Mercedes-Benz 600 (W 100, 1963 to 1981) and the 230 SL "Pagoda" (W 113, production time of the model series 1963 to 1971) were created. He also assumed design project management for safety exhibitions and shaped the Wankel engine experimental vehicles C 111 (1969) and C 111-II (1970). His involvement created widely used vehicles such as the mid-range model series 123 (1976 to 1986).

With his appointment as Oberingenieur (chief engineer) in 1975, Sacco became head of the Stylistics department as Friedrich Geiger's successor. The first vehicle he was responsible for was the station wagon of model series 123, which was presented in 1977 as the brand's first station wagon. During this time, he characterized the form of the elegant S-Class of model series 126 (1979 to 1992) and the associated Coupé (1981 to 1991). He was particularly proud of these cars: "The 126 model series in all design forms is the best thing I have done for Mercedes-Benz," said Sacco decades later in retrospect. No wonder that during his retirement an elegant, dark blue 560 SEC was proudly kept in his double garage.

As a wise and disciplined advocate of his work, he understood how to give design the appropriate significance in the hierarchy of Mercedes-Benz. Thus, the main Stylistics department in 1978 was upgraded to a specialist department, with Bruno Sacco at the top.

Sacco described himself as an aesthete, he placed value on expression and symbol strength. One of his claims: In the case of a Mercedes-Benz automobile, the model series identity is to be retained from one model generation to the next in order to prevent a generation from appearing old after the presentation of the following generation. In addition, every Mercedes-Benz should be recognizable as a representative of this brand all over the world. A striking detail introduced by Sacco 1979 were the side protective strips in the design of the front bumper of the 126 series S-Class. This design element would be found in the following years in the innovative compact class (W 201, 1982 to 1993), model series 124 (1984 to 1997), model series 140 S-Class (1991 to 1998) and model series R 129 SL (1989 to 2001).

Distinguishing features of individual models are desired despite this strong family identity. Sacco placed value on the SLK (R 170, 1996 to 2004) setting itself clearly apart from the larger SL (R 129) in order to avoid internal competition. Sacco still appreciated this SL 30 years later: "I still like the R 129," he said in retrospect. In 1993 Sacco became a member of the group of directors of the company. In this capacity, the design of Mercedes-Benz commercial vehicles fell within his area of responsibility.

With Sacco as head of design, Mercedes-Benz was increasingly emphasizing aesthetics and aerodynamic efficiency. Proportions and lines were clear, functionality was emphasized. Sacco's philosophy of timeless elegance also appealed to a younger audience. This initially applied to the model 190 (W 201), which unlocked new buyers into the brand. Sacco's signature style became particularly evident during the product offensive in the mid-1990s, when the A-Class (model series 168, 1997 to 2005), M-Class (model series 163, 1997 to 2004), SLK (R 170), CLK (model series 208, 1997 to 2003), and V-Class (W 638, 1996 to 2005) significantly expanded the model range of the

automobile manufacturer. The last models Bruno Sacco was responsible for before retirement were the 220 model series S-Class (1998 to 2005) and the CL-Class luxury class coupe of model series C 215 (1999 to 2006).

Sacco was close to the formal responsibility of the brand; this is not just about the vehicles. He initiated the new Design Center in Sindelfingen, which was designed by Italian star architect and industrial designer Renzo Piano in cooperation with Gaggenau architectural firm C. Kohlbecker.

His ability to harmoniously combine aesthetics and technology made Bruno Sacco one of the most influential designers in automotive history. On 31 March 1999, he retired with numerous awards. Peter Pfeiffer succeeded him as chief designer of Mercedes-Benz. Bruno Sacco received the honorary doctorate from the University of Udine in 2002, he was admitted in 2006 to the "Automotive Hall of Fame" in Dearborn, Michigan, and in 2007 to the "European Automotive Hall of Fame" in Geneva. Bruno Sacco said after two decades of retirement: "Mercedes has been my life, and I stand for that time one hundred percent."

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Captions

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Bruno Sacco, Chief Designer of Mercedes-Benz from 1975 to 1999. Photo from 2019.

24C0288_002

Bruno Sacco, Chief Designer of Mercedes-Benz from 1975 to 1999, in his personal Mercedes-Benz 560 SEC (C 126). Photo from 2019.

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Mercedes-Benz model series 124 sedan in design development. Directly at the vehicle's front left: The then Mercedes-Benz chief designer Bruno Sacco. Photo from 1984. (Photo signature of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Archives: 84F216)

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Bruno Sacco, Chief Designer of Mercedes-Benz from 1975 to 1999. Photo with a model of the Mercedes-Benz compact class of model series 201; the C-Class sedan of model series 203 can be seen in the background. (Photo signature of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Archives: A2000F81)

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Bruno Sacco, Chief Designer of Mercedes-Benz from 1975 to 1999. Photo in front of designs for a Mercedes-Benz Coupé. (Photo signature of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Archives: A92F559)

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Bruno Sacco, Chief Designer of Mercedes-Benz from 1975 to 1999, awarded with the “Best Designer” award of the magazine “Car”, presented by three-time Formula 1 world champion Jackie Stewart in 1996. (Photo signature of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Archives: A96F5333)

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Bruno Sacco, Chief Designer of Mercedes-Benz from 1975 to 1999. Photo with a model of the S-Class Coupé of model series 126. (Photo signature of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Archives: C32704)

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Mercedes-Benz S-Class Coupé, model series 126. (Photo signature of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Archive: D690244)

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Mercedes-Benz SL Roadster of model series 129. (Photo signature of the Mercedes-Benz Classic Archive: A93F1531)