

Škoda Sport (1949): The long-distance runner from the other side of the Iron Curtain

- › **The Škoda Sport took part in the 24-hour race at Le Mans in 1950 and is the last ever Czech car to compete there**
- › **The vehicle impressively held its own against the competition before retiring after 13 hours due to a minor technical defect**
- › **The Škoda 1101 'Tudor' presented in 1946 was used as the technical basis**

Mladá Boleslav, 14 May 2026 – Among all the sports models and special vehicles in Škoda's history, the Škoda Sport enjoys a unique position – to this day, it is the last Czech car to have taken part with a Czech crew in the famous 24 Hours of Le Mans.

In the 1950s, motorsport did not seem to have much of a future in Czechoslovakia, motorbikes were the most popular means of transport. However, the first international races were being held at this time. In 1949, for example, the famous 24-hour race in Le Mans was staged again for the first time after the Second World War, and a year later the newly founded Formula 1 series was launched.

Škoda Sport based on the Škoda 1101 'Tudor'

Czechoslovakia also wanted to face the international competition with a locally built vehicle so that the durability of series-produced parts could be tested and Škoda vehicles could be promoted abroad. The decision was therefore made to build the Škoda Sport, a sporty derivative based on the Škoda 1101 'Tudor' presented in 1946. The racing car had a weight-optimised chassis from the Škoda 1101. Due to the vehicle's low height, the powertrain was repositioned, and the central tube was shortened by 400 mm, while the fork of the skeleton frame was lengthened at the front. The designers also adjusted the placement of the steering and the pedals. The car was given a low, open body that was made by hand from sheet aluminium. The fuel tank was placed behind the two seats and the fuel was supplied by an electric pump. The radiator grille had five ribs and the front headlights were set into the front section. Mostly standard parts from the 'Tudor' were used to construct the Škoda Sport, including the 12-volt onboard electrical system from the PAL company and Barum tyres. Two blue-painted cars with 1.1-litre engines were built. One of these racing cars was to compete in the class up to 1500 cm³ and delivered 56 hp with an extra Roots supercharger, while the car intended for the class up to 1100 cm³ had 42 hp without a supercharger.

From Brno to Le Mans

Both cars competed for the first time on 25 September 1949 in the Brno City Prize, the last Czechoslovakian Grand Prix for monopostos. Jaroslav Netušil drove to victory in the class up

to 1100 cm³ in the car without a supercharger, while Václav Bobek took second place in the class up to 1500 cm³ in the Škoda Sport with a supercharger.

For the competition at Le Mans, it was decided to use the vehicle without a supercharger and to further optimise the Škoda Sport. In line with French regulations and the experience gained so far, the wheelbase was extended by 180 mm and two additional headlights were fitted to the sides of the radiator grille. The car, now painted in the national colours, was also fitted with a windscreen in front of the passenger seat and drove on Michelin tyres for its race at the Sarthe. With a full tank of fuel and tools and spare parts, which were the only ones allowed for essential repairs during the race, the car weighed in at just 700 kilograms. Under the bonnet was the tried and tested, water-cooled four-cylinder engine with a displacement of 1089 cm³ that delivered 50 hp (37 kW) at 5200 rpm thanks to a compression ratio of 8.6:1, a Solex 40 UAIP carburettor and other technical modifications. With the racing fuel common at the time – a mixture of petrol, ethanol and acetone – the Škoda Sport reached a top speed of 140 km/h with a consumption of just 12 litres per 100 km. It was possible to drive for four hours straight on a full tank – a clear advantage for Václav Bobek and Jaroslav Netušil, who were able to cover longer distances without stopping for fuel than their rivals.

Škoda Sport in the 24 Hours of Le Mans 1950

The race began on 24 June 1950 at 16:00 with the classic Le Mans start – the cars were lined up on one side of the track, the drivers on the other. With the starting gun, they sprinted to their race cars and jumped behind the wheel. The organisers allowed 60 participants out of 112 interested parties. Václav Bobek and Jaroslav Netušil successfully held their own against the competition for a long time and soon held a promising position. Thirteen hours into the race, however, the car lost power on the 121st lap forcing the team to retire. The cause was a broken piston pin fuse – a minor technical defect. However, only parts carried in the car could be used for the repair and a replacement fuse was not on board.

Until they pulled out, Václav Bobek and Jaroslav Netušil had fought their way to second place in the class up to 1100 cm³ at an average speed of 126 km/h. Their fifth place in the power coefficient special classification, which was common at the time, was also impressive. With this outstanding performance, it was little consolation that none of their rivals in the up to 1100 cm³ class finished, either.

For political reasons, Škoda did not enter any vehicles in the following run of the Le Mans race. Although the Škoda Sport did not return to the Sarthe, it successfully took part in a further 80 races in Central and Eastern Europe over the next twelve years, with teams from other countries of the Eastern Bloc competing.

Over time, the Škoda Sport was equipped with increasingly powerful engines, most recently in the carburettor version with 120 hp and an engine with two superchargers that generated 190 hp. After some aerodynamic modifications, the Le Mans car set the Czechoslovak speed

record in the class up to 1100 cm³ in 1953 at 160.1 km/h. After being dropped from Škoda's racing team, the special cars went to private drivers who raced with them until 1963.

In 2020, the fully restored Škoda Sport should have taken part in the Le Mans Classic commemorative race to mark the 70th anniversary of its appearance at the Sarthe, but the organisers were forced to cancel the event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The long-awaited return of the original 1950 Le Mans car finally came in 2022, when it lined up at Le Mans Classic with its historic starting number 44. In July 2025, the Škoda Sport was back on the famous circuit once again, underlining its lasting place among the legends of endurance racing.

Contact

Jan Hrbek

Motorsport Communications

+420 730 867 534

jan.hrbek@skoda-auto.cz

<https://skoda-motorsport.com>

Škoda Motorsport:



Media images:



Škoda Sport (1949)

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Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Sport (1949)

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Škoda Motorsport

- › Škoda celebrates 125 years of Motorsport since the first efforts in 1901, garnering success in rallies as well as in circuit racing.
- › Highlights include winning the 1981 European Touring Car Championship (ETCC) with the Škoda 130 RS.
- › Since 2009, the Škoda Fabia celebrated numerous successes for the Czech manufacturer on rally stages worldwide.
- › Until 2014, the Škoda Fabia S2000 (2.0 naturally aspirated engine, four-wheel drive) secured 50 international titles and national rally championships. The Škoda Fabia S2000 also helped to win the FIA European Rally Championship (ERC) and the Intercontinental Rally Challenge (IRC) three times each.
- › The successor model Škoda Fabia R5 (1.6 turbo engine, four-wheel drive) entered the scene in 2015. Later renamed to Škoda Fabia Rally2 and followed by the further developed Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo, the model collected nearly 2,000 victories in 68 countries until the end of the 2022 season.
- › During this period, Škoda Motorsport factory drivers Jan Kopecký (CZE), Esapekka Lappi (FIN), Pontus Tidemand (SWE) and Kalle Rovanperä (FIN) won the FIA World Rally Championship's support category WRC2/WRC2 Pro. Škoda Motorsport also took the WRC2/WRC2 Pro Manufacturers' title five times in a row from 2015 to 2019.
- › Beginning with the 2020 season, Škoda Motorsport changed its strategy to supporting private teams. The success story continued: Driving a Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo run by Toksport WRT, Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR) und Emil Lindholm (FIN) became WRC2 Champions in 2021 and 2022. Mikkelsen became WRC2 Champion again in 2023 with team Toksport WRT, when the all-new Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 entered the scene. The Škoda Motorsport supported team Toksport WRT also won the WRC2 Teams' title three times in 2020, 2022 and 2023. In 2025 Toksport WRT took another WRC2 Teams' title and Nikolay Gryazin/Konstantin Aleksandrov of Toksport WRT become WRC2 Challenger drivers' and co-drivers' champions respectively.
- › Škoda Motorsport customer teams have also won titles in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC), FIA European Rally Championship (ERC), the FIA African Rally Championship (ARC), the FIA North American and Central American Rally Championship (NACAM), the FIA South American Rally Championship (CODASUR) and the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC).

Škoda Auto

- › is successfully steering through the new decade with the Next Level Škoda Strategy;
- › aims to become one of the top three best-selling brands in Europe by the end of the decade by offering its customers the best of both worlds through a range of attractive BEV, hybrid & ICE products;
- › effectively exploits the potential in important growth markets such as India, Vietnam and the ASEAN region;
- › currently offers customers 12 passenger car model ranges: Fabia, Scala, Octavia, Superb, Kamiq, Karoq, Kodiaq, Elroq, Enyaq, Slavia, Kylaq and Kushaq;
- › delivered more than 1,040,000 vehicles to customers worldwide in 2025;
- › has been part of the Volkswagen Group, one of the world's most successful car manufacturers, for more than 30 years;
- › is part of Brand Group CORE, an organisational merger of the Volkswagen Group's volume brands, with the aim of achieving joint growth and significantly increasing the overall efficiency of all five volume brands;
- › independently develops and produces components such as MEB battery systems, engines and transmissions for other Volkswagen Group brands;
- › operates three production plants in the Czech Republic; has production capacities in Slovakia, Kazakhstan and India, mostly through group partnerships, as well as in Vietnam and Ukraine in cooperation with a local partner;
- › employs around 40,000 people worldwide and is active in almost 100 markets.