

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, 12 October 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.

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- › 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 14 passenger car model ranges: Fabia, Scala, Octavia, Superb, Kamiq, Karoq, Kodiaq, Epiq, Elroq, Enyaq, Peaq, 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 Spain, 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.