



Hans-Joachim Stuck im BMW 320i Gruppe 5, 1977 auf dem Nürburgring.
Hans-Joachim Stuck in the Group 5 BMW 320i at the Nürburgring in 1977.

would rise to ever-higher challenges in this series, were mixing it with the front-runners right from the start.

Kicking off the season with a bang

In the very first race, the "Bergische Löwe" in Zolder, Surer took a class win while Winkelhock came third and Cheever fifth to round off a successful season opener for the BMW Juniors. With their brash driving style, the Junior Team not only regularly won points but the hearts of the public as well, despite the fact that these hotheaded youngsters sometimes overstepped the mark. Just before the end of the race at Hockenheim, for example, Cheever sent his team-mate Surer flying into the safety fence – one of many situations that must have had BMW race manager Jochen Neerpasch's pulse rate soaring.

Another sensation was the penalty imposed on Marc Surer in the Nuremberg 200 Miles at the Norisring after the race stewards judged that he had rejoined the field rather too brazenly after a pit stop. The victim of this incident was Hans Heyer in a Ford Escort, the keenest rival of the BMW

drivers in 1977. Surer would set a warning example: not only was he fined, but the committee – for whom the risky driving style of the BMW trio had been a thorn in the side from the outset – eliminated him from the championship and, moreover, suspended him from racing.

For the ensuing airfield race in Diepholz, Jochen Neerpasch turned to the "gentleman team" of Stuck, Hobbs and Peterson. Heavy rain turned the event into a waterfight. At times it seemed there were more cars next to the track than on it. But "Strietzel" Stuck drove his 3 Series as if it was on rails to take his third win of the season, having already stepped onto the top of the podium in the Goodyear 300 and the Eifelrennen at the Nürburgring. After ten championship races, BMW had made it into the winners' ranks eight times, six times with the BMW 320. Manfred Winkelhock finished third overall and was best driver in the 2-litre class. Although he only managed a single win, he displayed the greatest consistency throughout the season with seven podium finishes.

A total of 28 Group 5 BMW 320i units were built in 1977/78. BMW Motorsport GmbH delivered the touring cars as sport kits to racing teams around the world. In 1978, BMW cleared the track in the German Motor Racing Championship for the tuners and private teams, as the Junior Team (the first systematically run junior promotion scheme by a manufacturer in motor racing) were now contesting the European Formula 2 Championship. They proved very successful in this too, with the March BMW 782 dominating the season. Bruno Giacomelli, who had replaced Cheever, took the European Championship title ahead of his team-mate Marc Surer.

Successful tuners and private teams

The German Motor Racing Championship – known in the media as the "Formula One for Production Cars" – was won in 1978 by Harald Ertl in a Schnitzer-BMW 320. The Freilassing-based team were backing turbo power in this event, but in order to compete in Division II for cars up to 2,000 cc, the engine could not exceed 1.4 litres if a turbo-charger was being used. Despite this re-

