



Damian Mateu Bisa

Hispano Suiza was founded in Barcelona in 1904 by Damián Mateu and Marc Birkigt, two men who shaped a brand that, during the first decades of the 20th century, became synonymous with elegance, luxury, sportsmanship, innovation and technology. This is the history of Hispano Suiza.

Despite that disappointing first year, Mateu and Birkigt did not give up because they were aware of the potential the brand had. In 1906 they began to manufacture 20 and 40 hp models.

It was they who, in 1907, created the first six-cylinder car made in Spain: with a power between 60 and 75 hp they managed to go from Perpignan to Paris in 22 hours. Quite a feat for the time. A year later, the Hispano Suiza Alfonso XIII arrived, a luxury saloon that became one of its most famous models.

However, the road traveled by Hispano Suiza cars was not rosy. In 1910, the workers of the factory they had in La Sagrera called a strike that led to the opening of a plant in France: they diverted production, a winning move since the new factory surpassed the one they had in Barcelona.

In 1914 World War I began and production on Gallic soil would suffer the consequences. The government of France lobbied to nationalize the company and that is how the Société Française Hispano Suiza was born, which specialized in the manufacture of bodywork vehicles and aircraft engines. From those production lines came 50,000 powerful and light aircraft engines, which were essential in the victory of the Allies. That subsidiary would eventually separate from the brand to become part of Snecma, a French manufacturer of aerospace engines.

It would not be the last time that a contest intersected with the history of Hispano Suiza, but until that moment arrived, the Barcelona brand launched models that represented a turning point such as the 32 CV, the Hispano Suiza 56, the Hispano Xenia or the K6 among others.

In 1936, with Spain plunged into the Civil War, the different industries began to be collectivized until their management ended up in the hands of the National Institute of Industry (INI). It was then that Hispano Suiza began to manufacture buses and commercial vehicles, but it was not enough to avoid the fall. In 1946 INI created ENASA, the company that absorbed the Suqué Mateu family brand... which stopped manufacturing cars.