

## INCONTRO CON ELLY BEINHORN ROSEMAYER

di Aldo Zana



Elly Beinhorn al posto di pilotaggio del suo Messerschmitt Bf 108 "Taifun" nel 1937 quando compì il volo Germania-Capetown e ritorno assieme a Bernd Rosemeyer.

### Introduzione dell'autore

Il pezzo che segue è stato scritto in giugno 2003 subito dopo l'incontro con Elly Beinhorn Rosemeyer, allora 96 anni, in una elegante casa di riposo a Ottobrun, nei dintorni di Monaco di Baviera. L'incontro era stato reso possibile dal figlio, il professor Bernd Rosemeyer Jr., conosciuto grazie a Cesare De Agostini. Elly era stata molti anni prima a Mantova, ospite di De Agostini, per rendere omaggio alla memoria di Tazio Nuvolari, rivale sulle piste di suo marito Bernd Rosemeyer.

Elly è nata a Hannover (Germania) il 30 maggio 1907 e si è innamorata del volo a 21 anni, prese il brevetto di pilota su di un monoplano Klemm KL-20 nel 1930 e nel 1931 iniziò i voli a lungo raggio dalla Germania alla Guinea Portoghese, Africa Occidentale.

Sulla rotta del ritorno, un guasto la obbligò a un atterraggio di fortuna nel mezzo del Sahara. Venne salvata da una carovana di Tuareg sui loro cammelli che la portarono a Timbuktu. Da lì volle tornare al suo aereo per recuperarne parti e strumenti. Quando rientrò in Germania venne accolta come un'eroina.

Nel 1932 volò fino all'Australia. Allora era la seconda donna ad arrivarci in volo. La prima era stata Amy Johnson (1903-1941), inglese, nel 1930.

Nel 1933 effettuò il periplo dell'Africa a bordo di un monomotore Heinkel He 71. Celeberrima, raccoglieva i fondi necessari ai suoi voli tramite conferenze e

scrivendo articoli per i giornali. Pubblicò anche il suo primo libro: "Alleinflug" (Volo in solitaria), che divenne un best seller.

In uno dei suoi tour di conferenze, capitò a Brno (Brünn, in tedesco), Cecoslovacchia, il 29 settembre 1935, giorno del Gran Premio che vide la prima vittoria di Bernd Rosemeyer. Si incontrarono a un ricevimento post-gara, si piacquero, nonostante lei fosse allora una celebrità e Bernd solo un pilota emergente. Il matrimonio fu celebrato il 13 luglio 1936 e il viaggio di nozze fu ritardato a luglio 1937 quando Bernd e la squadra Auto Union viaggiarono sul transatlantico "Bremen" in rotta per New York per la George Vanderbilt Cup, che Bernd vinse.

Bernd Jr. nacque in novembre 1937 e Bernd Sr. morì il 28 gennaio 1938 mentre pilotava l'Auto Union Stromlinienwagen (carenata) sull'autostrada Frankfurt-Darmstadt per riconquistare il record di velocità sul miglio lanciato, Classe B

Elly continuò a volare fino a 79 anni.

Il suo libro più famoso e venduto è: "Mein Mann, der Rennfahrer" (Mio marito, il pilota) ripubblicato più volte, l'ultima delle quali nel 2007 in occasione del suo centesimo compleanno.

Elly Beinhorn Rosemeyer è morta a Ottobrunn il 29 novembre 2007. Riposa nel cimitero di Dahlem a Berlino accanto al marito in una tomba vicina a quella di Ernst von Delius (1912-1937), pilota Auto Union.

*Il pezzo che segue è stato lasciato nell'originale inglese come pubblicato a suo tempo nella newsletter dello Speed Record Club britannico.*



A sinistra: Elly davanti al suo Heinkel sull'aeroporto di Francoforte durante la gara del Giro di Germania 1933. A destra: Momento di tenerezza dopo la vittoria di Bernd nel GP di Germania 1936.

## MEETING ELLY

*by Aldo Zana*

She sits at a coffee table, opposite the door. White shirt and a black skirt. Her snow white hair perfectly trimmed and combed.

Bernd, her son, enters first: "Hallo, Mom. How do you feel, today? Good? Good: we've visitors".

She turns the head up, carefully setting down a cup of iced tea.

She doesn't wear glasses.

Her eyes: light blue, sharp like those of a flying pilot. It's a matter of a split second and she has seen, checked, validated, and acquired us: she is again mastering the scenario, ready to cope with the expected and the unexpected. Like one has to do when flying, even if the joy of flying solo is quite remote from this nice, unassuming yet classy retirement house.

Another table waits for us in a private room, on it a small cardboard sign: "Reserved": German precision.

Bernd lovingly pushes the wheelchair into the room and we sit at the table: she's in front, Bernd in the middle, to help with our talk.

To initiate what has to be a controlled talk, I hand over to her a photo from her early twenties, 70-plus years ago. Bernd comments: "See, Mom, what a lovely girl". The answer comes quick and sharp: "Yehaa, of course, it's me".

Another photo: the same girl standing, nicely dressed, goggles around the neck, in front of a sports plane. "Do you remember where and when?"

"Yes, it's the old airport in Berlin: the building in the background is the Zeppelin Halle. I was at the start of a race around Germany".

Correct: the plane has a racing number on the engine cowl.

"There are two open canopies: does it mean that you had someone else on board?"

"No, I always flew solo".

"What make of plane is that?"

"A Klemm".

Small letters on the fuselage show the word Heinkel (it's actually a Heinkel), so another question arises: "Sorry, ma'am, but it looks like a Heinkel".

"Yes, I flew Heinkels, but I never owned them".

Today I'm talking about events from 70 years ago with a lady who is one of the most daring and amazing women-flyers of the last century. She is also a star of the grandest time of motor racing, the Age of Titans, in the second half of the Thirties. She is Elly Beinhorn, the wife of Bernd Rosemeyer.

And the one Bernd assisting her so lovingly and professionally is professor Bernd Rosemeyer, today a prominent orthopaedist, then the 10-week old baby in the arms of his father, looking with him at the scale model of the P-Wagen in their home at 10 Bayernallee, Berlin-Charlottenburg. It's a well-known photo, taken on January 25, 1938. Three days after, Bernd Rosemeyer died along the Frankfurt-Darmstadt Reichsautobahn.

I've been kindly instructed to avoid questions on the accident, while I had green lights on any other topic. Flying is the ice breaker of our talk.

She's clearcut about the best plane she ever flew: the Messerschmitt Bf. 108 Taifun, marked D-IMXA. Even if it was the one in which she had to give up her last own fiefdom: flying. She had to share it with Bernd when he got his flying licence. She calls it: "A pretty outstanding aircraft".

"Who was in charge of planning your transcontinental flight to South Africa and back on the Taifun, for the January 1937 races?"

"Of course, it was my own idea. Of course, I was in charge of everything, but, when flying, Bernd was a valuable partner. We laughed a lot during our flight".

It's somehow surprising to think about Bernd playing second fiddle to anyone, but Elly Beinhorn Rosemeyer, "die Fliegerin" (the woman-flyer) was undisputedly the master of the place, navigating over the Mediterranean and Africa.

To underscore her role, she points out that long range flying in those years, without radio, had to rely exclusively on the compass and experience. And Bernd, the best racing driver in the world at the end of 1936, didn't yet have a flying experience anywhere near comparable to Elly's, the Fliegerin.

She now looks more confident and interested in talking to this stranger: I dare to show a photo of the happy couple, both nicely dressed and smiling in front of a glittering new Horch. "Oh yes, it's the second Manuela". And Manuela was the nickname of the Horch which was Bernd's daily drive.

I look at her eyes, quiet yet sharp. Maybe, I'm influenced by that name, Rosemeyer, but to her, too, belong the eyes of the few gifted drivers: just before the start of a race, they don't stare at anything and see everything.

Her face didn't change, no clouds shadowed her eyes while looking at the smiling young man, who is 28 for ever, like she wrote in the final, moving section of her book, "Allein Flug".

I sense that the time has come to approach the key issue of our talk without hurting her most beloved memories. My next questions deal with the Age of Titans. To use the precious little time we have, I avoid either what has already been written or it's well known from her books: we know that they didn't talk technical stuff at home, her ranking of the top drivers is also duly mentioned in the books. My questions deal with women, managers, officials.

The answers come with the crack of a whip, still full of sharp edges after some 70 years. Yet they are concise and clear: Elly Beinhorn Rosemeyer keeps the approach of the acclaimed author at selecting concepts and words. Today, at her grand age, she can afford to say exactly what she thinks, still looking adamant.

Eberan von Eberost, technical director of racing car development, Auto Union: "A gentleman".

Professor Porsche: "Unique in his league. A genius".

Dr. Karl Feuereissen, director of racing car department, Auto Union: "A good guy in his job".

Adolf Hühnlein, the annoyingly ever present, obnoxious head of the Nazi Organization for Motor Racing: "Manure. Always around, unwanted. He would never have made it into our friend's circle".

Alice Trobeck Hoffman Caracciola, the classy and fascinating lady, born in New York, half Swede half Norwegian, married to a Hoffman of the Hoffman-La Roche chemical and pharma group, manager of a team of grand prix cars, fluent in six languages, second wife of Rudi Caracciola: "Nothing special".

Paula Stuck, among the top 5 German professional tennis players, wife of Hans Stuck, hampered by the Nazis because of some Jew grandparents, defined as a friend, together with her husband, in Elly's books. But what went so wrong with her after 1938 to prompt such a vicious definition: "A despicable individual"?

Lydia Lang, the unassuming wife of Hermann Lang, the former mechanic graduated into the fastest driver of the 1938 and 1939 seasons, always looking as taken by surprise in a faraway world: "A small girl without any personality".

Kay Petre, the Canadian-born lady driver who was at the Cape for the January 1937 races. She, 33 that year, met the Rosemeyers and got along well with them: so well that rumors arose about something having started between her and Bernd. 66 years have come and gone, Kay Petre has been dead since 1994, her name was one of the many in a list, yet the answer flows unprompted, the longest of the whole talk: "Oh yes, I remember her well. She was so sweet, a real personality. A good driver, above average. We quickly became friends. She didn't dare to start any flirt with Bernd because she immediately understood that she was going nowhere".

It's six-o'clock. A nurse enters the room. She is soft spoken and determined: "Sorry gentlemen, but it's time to retire". She manoeuvres the wheelchair like a Ludwig Sebastian shaking down Bernd's P-Wagen in the garage yard of the old Nürburgring. She clears my chair and skirts the inner pillar of the door aiming at the elevator. Maybe, again, is the magic of that name: Rosemeyer.

(On May 30, 2003, Elly Beinhorn Rosemeyer turned 96. The interview took place on May 24, 2003 in Southern Germany. The actual place is left unnamed to respect her privacy).





A sinistra: In posa, elegantissimi, dietro la loro Horch 835 "Manuela". A destra: Elly e Bernd al Nuerburgring nel 1937. Il 13 sul foulard di Elly era il numero fortunato di Bernd.