

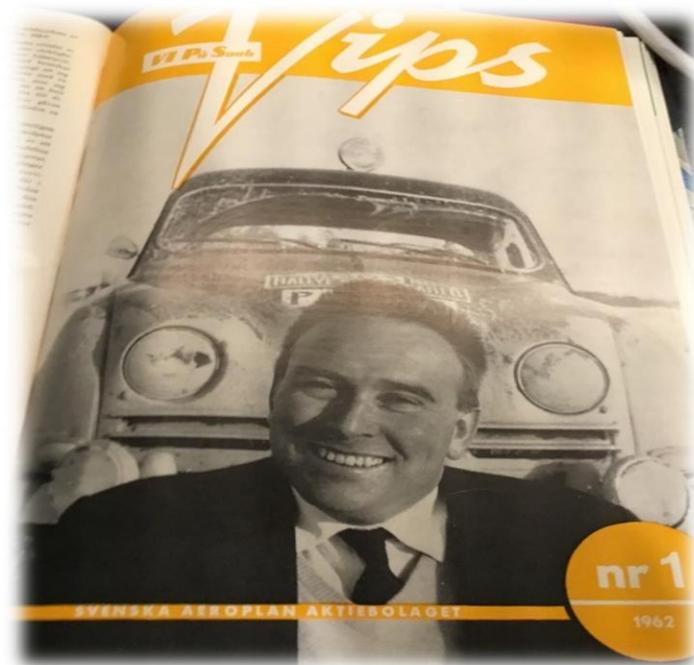
## HISTORICAL SAAB

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## Erik Carlsson's 1962 Monte Carlo Rallye victory is recognised all over the World.



*Erik Carlsson and his winning rally car shown on the front cover of VIPS No.1, 1962.*

Erik Carlsson's sensational performance in winning the 1962 Monte Carlo Rallye, the first in the European Rally Championship, has created tremendous interest throughout the world. Coverage of the rally was broadcasted on television and radio stations throughout Europe and even as far as North and South America.



*The 1962 winner's plaque.*

Erik Carlsson and co-driver Gunnar Häggbom, spent several hours being photographed and interviewed by many of the world's most foremost motoring journalists.

A major French newspaper wrote that the Swedish rally teams' achievement was quite remarkable, a truly historic moment for Saabs rally team and for the country of Sweden.



*Erik Carlsson and his co-driver Gunnar Häggbom with their trophies- Princess Grace of Monaco presented them both with an exclusive cigarette lighter, in Gold!*

After the rally many journalists were keen to learn just what it was that made the Saab so successful, unmatched by other competitors?

No doubt this question was raised following the success that Erik Carlsson had previously winning the highly ranked RAC rally in Great Britain.

Erik gave a short resume of some of the Saabs technical merits with respect to the wintry driving conditions in the alpine special stages.

It's said that it was during the first high speed sections of the rally, after Chambery in the French Alps, where Erik set his claim on the title. His brilliant driving, in extremely hazardous conditions, managed to gain him a 4-minute lead ahead of his closest rival Eugen Böhringer in a Mercedes.



*Erik closely followed by Eugen Böhringers, Mercedes,*

With Ice and Snow covering much of the road surfaces Erik Carlsson took full advantage of the Saabs remarkable road handling characteristics – Erik informed, we overtook five cars during this stage, ‘the last car, the Mercedes, had great difficulty moving aside for us to pass – eventually with a little friendly persuasion, we actually manage to overtake him !



*Erik powering through the wintry Alp sections of the rally ahead of Eugen Böhringers Mercedes.*

On the following four snow and ice-free stages Erik managed to keep out of the way of the faster sports cars. Böhringer in his Mercedes however managed to pick up some valuable time reducing Erik's 4 minutes lead to just 43 seconds.

On the final days the 2,5 km speed stage over the GP track in Monaco was a dramatic chase for drivers attempting to make up some lost time ...

### **First away at the Start of the Speed stage.**

There were 12 cars that started each heat, Erik Carlsson and Eugen Böhringer started together in the first heat. Erik explained ...

I was first away, but just before the S-bend, under a railroad viaduct, I noticed the Mercedes just a meter or so behind me. I gave full throttle through the S. bend and the next time I could see the Mercedes they were 300 meters behind us!

On the next lap Böhringer passed us, but as we were driving against the clock, we were very careful not lose our time advantage.

Erik managed to keep close to the Mercedes for the rest of the speed-stage, and finally securing victory for the Saab team.

According to reports in newspapers and motoring magazines, Erik's victory was classified as a sensation. The French motoring press raised their hats to Saabs achievement, praising the Swedish driver and the Swedish manufactured Saab rally car.

The Paris-Jours newspaper wrote, 'A gigantic Swede wins the rally!'

The Aurore wrote, 'Victory for a Swedish car and Swedish driver'.

The Sports magazine L'Equipe wrote, 'A great victory for Erik Carlsson and Saab.'

### **The homecoming banquet held in Stockholm and congratulations from Saabs Managing Director, Mr Tryggve Holm**

At the homecoming banquet in Stockholm Saabs Managing Director Tryggve Holm applauded the Saab team and informed of the incredible interest that had been created for the Saab brand.

We have gained an amazing PR boost; this achievement is equal **to that of Edmund Hillary climbing Mount Everest!**



*Erik being congratulated at the homecoming banquet by Saabs Managing Director Tryggve Holm.*

Edmund Hillary's success could not have been made possible without careful planning and a highly skilled team supporting the climbers – Such was the case also for Erik and his rally team of engineers and mechanics.

In Erik's response speech, Erik said that he didn't consider the victory as anything out of the ordinary! `` To start with we had a very good car and after that, we basically did what was required of us to do. We took time to carefully plot what seemed like every 10 meters of the special stages'', he added.

The Monte Carlo rally is not won by just getting into a rally car and accelerating as fast as possible through the course ..... Careful preparations are needed to be made .... for Eric's part this started a full year earlier in the summer of 1961.

Following competing in the Coupe-des-Alpes (Alp rally) he met up with Gunnar Häggbom in Cannes and suggested that it would be good if he was his co-driver, (navigator) in future rally competitions.

On the route home to Sweden the team stopped off in Hamburg to visit a special store selling detailed maps etc of the rally sections which had been assigned as the special stages. It was here that preparations for the next Monte Carlo Rallye seriously began to take shape.

Between Christmas and New Year's Eve, when final details of the Monte Carlo Rallye routes and special stages were released, Erik and Gunnar drove down through Europe to start initial preparations for the rally. They carefully mapped the special stages spending 10 intensive days making notes for the competition.

We had been given information that there was a great risk for mist and poor visibility during the Rallye. This prompted us to monitor the distance of each special stage noting special milestones that could be quickly recognise by the co-driver i.e. telegraph poles, road signs, houses etc. It's the co-driver that gives directions to the driver of the road ahead!

### **A fully prepared and tested Rally car**

Once back in Sweden the final preparations for driving in the competition took place ...A special 60 hp, Group 2 engine with a compression ratio of 10:1 was fitted.

To reduce weight the underbody was removed of all underseal protection and insulation material.

In general, the car was of standard production specification with some added special equipment i.e. twin trip-meters, engine rpm meter and an extra spotlight for the co-driver to use when needed.

The driver's seat was of hard moulded plastic whilst the co-driver's seat was a little more comfortable and could also be reclined when rest was needed.

The car's interior door panels were fitted with special accessory pockets holding spark plugs, fire extinguisher and special tools - all needing to be safely secured leaving nothing free to move around inside the car.

We had also a can of petrol secured in the trunk along with larger, easily accessible tools etc.

The car also had extra spot lights, a regulatory safety cage and special safety belts.

### **Gunnar Häggbom - a Swedish Car Orienteering champion.**

In competitions of this character the cars co-driver plays a very important role towards gaining success. Gunnar Häggbom from Saltsjöbaden, despite being only 26 years old has developed into being an extremely good navigator since he started being a co-driver in 1958. He has participated in several European championships winning Swedish OT competitions with Harry Källström. The first time he was a co-driver in a Saab was at the Tulip rally in Holland with Erik Berger in 1961.

Later was to follow his first Monte Carlo Rally with Eric Carlsson at the wheel.

Gunnar was proficient in French having studied languages at the Sorbonne University in Paris and had also worked in France between March and December the year prior to the Monte Carlo Rallye. His ability to speak French and his knowledge of the French way of life was to be most helpful in the preparations for the forthcoming Monte Carlo Rallye.

Carl -Magnus Skog and Karl-Erik Svensson were also very successful driving another of the Works Saabs. Their car had been enrolled to participate in the Standard class, which they should have won but shortly before the start the standard class cars were hastily grouped

together in a special section for tuned vehicles. In this combined class they finished in fourth place for being the best (un-tuned) standard car amongst the 323 cars that competed in this class.

This was the 31<sup>st</sup>. Monte Carlo Rallye, having various starting points at e.g. Oslo, Paris, Glasgow, Frankfurt, Warsaw, Lisbon and Athens etc.

The Monte Carlo Rallye is the longest of all the European rally competitions and annually attracts many competitors. Winning the competition is a very prestigious achievement, earning contestants several valuable points before the full European rally season starts.

Even today the Monte Carlo Rallye is still one of the foremost events in motor sports, attracting many drivers from all over the world.