

ADMINISTRATIVE PANEL DECISION

Mercedes-Benz Group AG v. Pauline Zitouni
Case No. D2025-2788

1. The Parties

The Complainant is Mercedes-Benz Group AG, Germany, represented by Heumann Intellectual Property Law, Germany.

The Respondent is Pauline Zitouni, France.

2. The Domain Name and Registrar

The disputed domain name <merceedes-benz.com> is registered with Hostinger Operations, UAB (the “Registrar”).

3. Procedural History

The Complaint was filed with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (the “Center”) on July 15, 2025. On July 15, 2025, the Center transmitted by email to the Registrar a request for registrar verification in connection with the disputed domain name. On July 16, 2025, the Registrar transmitted by email to the Center its verification response confirming that the Respondent is listed as the registrant and providing the contact details.

The Center verified that the Complaint satisfied the formal requirements of the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Policy” or “UDRP”), the Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Rules”), and the WIPO Supplemental Rules for Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (the “Supplemental Rules”).

In accordance with the Rules, paragraphs 2 and 4, the Center formally notified the Respondent of the Complaint, and the proceedings commenced on July 18, 2025. In accordance with the Rules, paragraph 5, the due date for Response was August 7, 2025. The Respondent did not submit any response. Accordingly, the Center notified the Respondent’s default on August 8, 2025.

The Center appointed Fabrizio Bedarida as the sole panelist in this matter on August 14, 2025. The Panel finds that it was properly constituted. The Panel has submitted the Statement of Acceptance and Declaration of Impartiality and Independence, as required by the Center to ensure compliance with the Rules, paragraph 7.

4. Factual Background

The Complainant in this administrative proceeding is Mercedes-Benz Group AG, a German company. The Complainant is a worldwide renowned automobile manufacturer. Its trademark MERCEDES-BENZ has enjoyed protection around the world for nearly one hundred years.

The Complainant is, inter alia, the owner of:

- German trademark MERCEDES-BENZ (word), registration number 375067, registered on October 7, 1927;
- European Union trademark MERCEDES-BENZ (word), registration number 000139865, registered on February 2, 1999;
- International trademark MERCEDES-BENZ (word), registration number 414857, registered on December 14, 1974.

The disputed domain name was registered on February 16, 2025.

The disputed domain name resolves to an inactive website.

5. Parties' Contentions

A. Complainant

The Complainant contends that it has satisfied each of the elements required under the Policy for a transfer of the disputed domain name.

Notably, the Complainant contends that the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to the Complainant's MERCEDES-BENZ, prior trademarks, the only difference between the Complainant's trademark and the disputed domain name being the addition of a letter "e" in the second syllable; that the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name; and, the fact that the typo squatting nature of the disputed domain name, combined with the passive holding of the disputed domain name and the renown of the Complainant's trademark, show the Respondent's bad faith in registering and using the disputed domain name.

B. Respondent

The Respondent did not reply to the Complainant's contentions.

6. Discussion and Findings

In accordance with paragraph 4(a) of the Policy, the Complainant must prove that each of the three following elements is satisfied:

- (i) the disputed domain name is identical or confusingly similar to a trademark in which the Complainant has rights; and
- (ii) the Respondent has no rights or legitimate interests in respect of the disputed domain name; and
- (iii) the disputed domain name has been registered and is being used in bad faith.

A. Identical or Confusingly Similar

It is well accepted that the first element functions primarily as a standing requirement. The standing (or threshold) test for confusing similarity involves a reasoned but relatively straightforward comparison between the Complainant's trademark and the disputed domain name. WIPO Overview of WIPO Panel Views on Selected UDRP Questions, Third Edition, (["WIPO Overview 3.0"](#)), section 1.7.

The Complainant has shown rights in respect of a trademark or service mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.2.1.

The Panel finds the mark is recognizable within the disputed domain name. Accordingly, the disputed domain name is confusingly similar to the mark for the purposes of the Policy. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.7.

The disputed domain name contains the Complainant's MERCEDES-BENZ trademark with the addition of a letter "e" in the second syllable and the generic Top-Level Domain ("gTLD") ".com". In this sense, [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.9 states: "A domain name which consists of a common, obvious, or intentional misspelling of a trademark is considered by panels to be confusingly similar to the relevant mark for purposes of the first element." The gTLD suffix is generally disregarded under the test for confusing similarity for the purposes of the Policy as it is viewed as a standard registration requirement. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 1.11.

The Panel finds the first element of the Policy has been established.

B. Rights or Legitimate Interests

Paragraph 4(c) of the Policy provides a list of circumstances in which the Respondent may demonstrate rights or legitimate interests in a disputed domain name.

Although the overall burden of proof in UDRP proceedings is on the complainant, panels have recognized that proving a respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in a domain name may result in the difficult task of "proving a negative", requiring information that is often primarily within the knowledge or control of the respondent. As such, where a complainant makes out a prima facie case that the respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests, the burden of production on this element shifts to the respondent to come forward with relevant evidence demonstrating rights or legitimate interests in the domain name (although the burden of proof always remains on the complainant). If the respondent fails to come forward with such relevant evidence, the complainant is deemed to have satisfied the second element. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 2.1.

Having reviewed the available record, the Panel finds the Complainant has established a prima facie case that the Respondent lacks rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name. The Respondent has not rebutted the Complainant's prima facie showing and has not come forward with any relevant evidence demonstrating rights or legitimate interests in the disputed domain name such as those enumerated in the Policy or otherwise.

The Panel finds the second element of the Policy has been established.

C. Registered and Used in Bad Faith

The Panel notes that, for the purposes of paragraph 4(a)(iii) of the Policy, paragraph 4(b) of the Policy establishes circumstances, in particular, but without limitation, that, if found by the Panel to be present, shall be evidence of the registration and use of a domain name in bad faith.

Paragraph 4(b) of the Policy sets out a list of non-exhaustive circumstances that may indicate that a domain name was registered and used in bad faith, but other circumstances may be relevant in assessing whether a respondent's registration and use of a domain name is in bad faith. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.2.1.

Owing to the distinctiveness of the Complainant's trademarks and reputation, and the misspelling nature of the disputed domain name, it is reasonable to infer that the Respondent registered the disputed domain name with full knowledge of the Complainant's trademarks, and so the Panel finds that the Respondent was aware of the Complainant's trademarks when registering the disputed domain name.

Furthermore, panels have consistently found that the mere registration of a domain name that is almost identical (particularly domain names comprising typos) to a famous or widely-known trademark by an unaffiliated entity can by itself create a presumption of bad faith. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.1.4.

The disputed domain name is currently inactive. Panels have found that the non-use of a domain name (including a blank or "coming soon" page) would not prevent a finding of bad faith under the doctrine of passive holding. Although panelists will look at the totality of the circumstances in each case, factors that have been considered relevant in applying the passive holding doctrine include: (i) the degree of distinctiveness or reputation of the complainant's mark, (ii) the failure of the respondent to submit a response or to provide any evidence of actual or contemplated good faith use, (iii) the respondent's concealing its identity or use of false contact details (noted to be in breach of its registration agreement); and (iv) the implausibility of any good faith use to which the domain name may be put. [WIPO Overview 3.0](#), section 3.3. Having reviewed the available record, the Panel notes that in the circumstances of this case, especially the well-known status of the Complainant's trademark and the misspelled nature of the disputed domain name, the current passive holding of the disputed domain name does not prevent a finding of bad faith under the Policy.

Finally, the Panel notes that the Respondent's failure to respond to the Complainant's assertions made in this proceeding regarding its bad faith in registering and using the disputed domain name is further inference of bad faith use and registration of the disputed domain name.

The Panel finds that the Complainant has established the third element of the Policy.

7. Decision

For the foregoing reasons, in accordance with paragraphs 4(i) of the Policy and 15 of the Rules, the Panel orders that the disputed domain name <mercedes-benz.com> be transferred to the Complainant.

/Fabrizio Bedarida/

Fabrizio Bedarida

Sole Panelist

Date: August 22, 2025