



Wolfgang Hatz, flanked by the Le Mans-winning 936/77 Spyder and the 918 Spyder

# Quick on the Uptake

*Two years ago, Wolfgang Hatz joined the Porsche Board of Management as the head of research and development. This brings to a full circle a career that began in the Porsche racing department in 1989. An engineer by training, he views his present and future tasks as considerably more sports-oriented than they were back then.*

By Karl Kroiss  
Photos by Christoph Bauer

**W**olfgang Hatz revs up quickly on the job. Not only on test and trial tracks but also when analyzing, explaining, interpreting, and implementing future-oriented technologies. Friendly and engaging in conversation, concentrated and factual on the topic of prototypes, visionary and pragmatic in his job—as an engineer, Wolfgang Hatz always moves in the upper rpm range in his various professional settings.

Hatz has just returned from the Nürburgring. Whenever the opportunity arises, the director of development takes a seat behind the wheel himself and marks the track with his ideal line. That line might not always mirror those in the textbooks, but just like the man of action at the wheel, it is invariably direct, sometimes unconventional, occasionally extreme, and always marked by a resolute quality that earns the respect of professional drivers as well. “Theory and practice belong together,” says this 54-year-old engineer who feels as comfortable on

the Nordschleife and the company’s test grounds in the southern Italian town of Nardò as he does in motorized escapes from the offices in Zuffenhausen and Weissach.

“For a Porsche to drive as a Porsche should, regular test-drives are both a must and a pleasure,” he observes, adding that “this applies to the entire board of managers, by the way, including the boss.”

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Wolfgang Hatz knows the company better than many of his colleagues, for this is his second term of office under the black, red, and gold of the Porsche crest. A specialist in drive systems, Hatz became intimately familiar with Porsche’s philosophy of technology from 1989 to 1993. The company’s racing department at the time was not only the bedrock of its motorsport success, but also provided ambitious engineers with a superb springboard to career advancement.

After holding positions at Knorr-Bremse, Opel Motorsport, and Fiat, this technical specialist joined the VW Group in 2001 and was appointed head of Engines and Transmissions Development in 2007. In February of 2011, his career came full circle when he was appointed to the Porsche Board of Management in charge of Research and Development.

“You can’t plan on these career moves,” says the man with the 14-hour workdays. “But of course it’s obvious that a dream came true for me with this position.” How much has the company changed in the last twenty years? “In 1989 we had 6,000 employees, whereas we had 17,000 at the end of 2012,” he notes. “And that more or less says it all. The company has grown, it has expanded to meet its aims, and it has become significantly broader in scope while at the same time more focused. Porsche has a strong stride, and I have a hand in shaping this stride—you can’t wish for more than that.”

Hatz went through different periods at the company back in his first sojourn with Porsche, including a crisis in the beginning, followed by the burgeoning turnaround with the 996 and the Boxster. And now the company is right in the middle of its next great leap, which will position the brand both more broadly and more distinctly worldwide. Porsche continues to clock one record lap after the other, it is further expanding its model range, and the entire VW Group will soon be benefiting from the expertise at the think tank on the outskirts of Stuttgart.

Which visions will best accommodate the rapidly changing framework conditions? How will the brand values

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have to change over the medium and long terms? Where will Porsche be in the year 2025? The answer comes even before the last question has been formulated: “We will expand and consolidate our position as the number one sports-car maker.” Superior driving dynamics is the key to success, he adds, which is why the sports car is the core of the brand expertise. “It requires constant care and attention. It needs to be optimized and adapted, and powered by a healthy mixture of innovation and sustainability. Sportiness has many facets—as demonstrated by the Cayenne and the Panamera. But the DNA that animates these

two series has its origin in the sports cars. The Boxster and the 911 will work without the Cayenne or the Panamera—but the converse is not automatically the case.”

A modular approach to technical development is shaping ideas and action at Porsche as well. Many people even claim that this modular system was invented in the Swabian region of Germany, with the platform shared by the Boxster and the 911 (986/996). Hatz is seeking to further expand this expertise. The means to this end consist of two different architectures which are to be made available to the Group’s other premium brands as well.



Porsche currently holds the leading position in systems for sports cars with rear and centrally placed engines. In addition, a nucleus is being developed for dynamic front-engine cars with rear-wheel drive and an all-wheel option. As Hatz explains, “Following Wolfsburg and Ingolstadt, Weissach is the third-largest development center in the VW Group. Porsche stands for concentrated technology in its most sports-oriented form. We are specialists in dynamics, but we by no means view everything in black and white and with tunnel vision. On the contrary, we aim to develop new modular structures with additional facets, a higher degree of integration, and greater variability. Time, respect, and freedom are needed to put these things into practice. But it will pay off—I’m completely convinced of that.” While the sports-car rear and centrally placed engine systems store the incipient hereditary characteristics of the next 911, Boxster, and Cayman models, the standard foundation serves as an incubator

for the Panamera successor and all of its derivatives. These architectures are linked with developments in the drive system that are equally modular in structure: the boxer engine here, the V engines there, and in addition the diesel variant especially adapted to the brand.

And what’s the word on alternative drive systems? The overseer of innovation greets this query with a mischievous smile. “It’s a matter of differentiated downsizing. That might mean a four-cylinder instead of a V6. Or less displacement and weight for a better package. What I don’t

see at the moment at Porsche, however, is a purely electrical car—range and performance speak against it. Instead, we’re working on the plug-in hybrid. Which is why the 918 Spyder is a very important project, because it puts what is currently technically feasible into practice. The greatest challenge, in my opinion, is not so much the lightweight construction, the performance electronics, or the battery quality, but rather how to integrate the three different sources of torque.” The result is an absolutely fascinating sports car which in many respects has no comparison.

Our conversation keeps returning to the most beautiful form of driving, which is to say a Porsche-typical form. For Hatz, “Porsche-typical” means just one thing: in-

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spired by the 911. A native of Baden, he cultivates not only technical expertise in every nerve of his body but also the passion found in a true lover of cars. This means that right from the start he was one of the 911 fans known as the cast-iron contingent from the era of air-cooled engines with their buzz-saw sound, while in addition becoming one of the instinctive countersteerers born of the Turbo lag, and on top of that being a mileage junkie with finely tuned calf muscles in his clutch leg and an elongated right arm from shifting into the upper two gears.

It was under his direction that the 964 RS 3.8 was born, a classic car whose drift action is not for the faint of heart. Directional stability at the time was not yet a matter of ESP tuning, but rather a product of courage, quick reactions, and trust in God. Today, nearly twenty years later, Hatz is still fond of powerfully spiced Porsche models with rear engines. His current trio of company cars speaks for itself: The white 991 Carrera 4S is the preferred all-weather vehicle for short sprint distances; the GT3-gray 997 Turbo S with a bi-color interior will occasionally even compete with ICE trains; and the fiery orange GT3 RS 4.0, which already hums hoarsely in idling, is for relaxing short excursions.



The general outlines of Porsche’s future were already glittering in an imaginary crystal ball before Wolfgang Hatz took up his position. So where is the room for placing new

and individual accents? “Now that the latest sports-car generation with the 991, the new Boxster, and the Cayman has been launched so successfully, we should be devoting our attention to front-engine models,” he says.

The next Panamera will continue to do full justice to its role of setting standards in driving dynamics. But there is much more to be derived from this box of building blocks, for it is lightweight and is blessed with flexible dimensions and an ideal wheel-load distribution. “With this as a basis, a number of possibilities jump to mind. Unrivalled driving characteristics are every bit as important. On the one hand we need a wider spread between comfort and sport; on the other, the Sport Plus features

can be further sharpened. Simpler access to the different driving modes, more intuitive ways to combine different tuning options, and new parameters such as torque vectoring will help to adapt the cars’ sets of properties even better to drivers’ expectations and skills. Steering and braking are the only things we’re not seeking to broaden, but rather deepen—true to the ideals of ‘straightforward, dependable, linear.’”

Where will the career of Wolfgang Hatz go from here? What are his goals, ambitions, secret desires? Following a Porsche victory in Le Mans, would he be halfway satisfied to enter retirement, or is the idea of the Formula One still playing in his mind? Hatz takes a deep breath and puts on his most serious expression.

“I’m one of the old-timers,” he says, “a true Porsche veteran. I grew up in the racing department in Weissach. The fact that one of us joined the Board is phenomenal in itself. The solidarity in the company is another great thing; otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to live up to my opportunities. Of course I have dreams. Many of them I’m living. For example, developing a new car on the same racetrack where it can later go to the starting line—and with a little luck cross the finish line first. That gives me greater satisfaction than any career advancement. I wouldn’t have the slightest problem with this job being my last, stopping at this position.”

There’s a long pause and then a brief afterthought: “But if possible, rather a little too late than too early.” ●