

1958

Ferry Porsche in the assembly hall of Plant 2 in Zuffenhausen, standing before 356 A series vehicles



By
Dieter Landenberger

Photos by
Porsche Archive

His Life's Work

The death of Professor Dr. Ing. h.c. Ferdinand Anton Ernst (Ferry) Porsche in March of 1998 meant bidding farewell to one of the last greats of automotive history. Under his leadership in 1948, the first sports car with the name of Porsche appeared, and for decades he strongly determined the course of the company, including advocating its independence. We present a series of reminiscences to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth on September 19, 2009.



1956
Father and son (Ferdinand Alexander) in New York



1956
Sports-car fan Ferry Porsche in the pit lane with the 550 A coupes at the 24 Hours of Le Mans



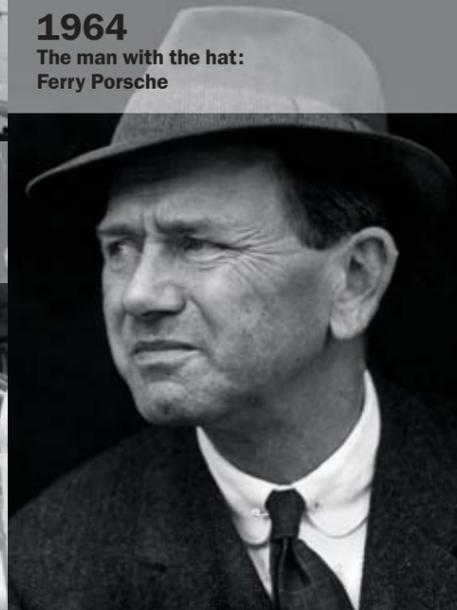
1964
The man with the hat: Ferry Porsche



1956
Boss and designers: Porsche (right) with Heinz Rabe (left) and Erwin Komenda



1955
Design engineer Porsche with the legendary Carrera engine



1948
The son (Ferry) with his father (right) and Erwin Komenda (left) next to the "number 1" in Gmünd, Carinthia

1950
Ferdinand Senior and Ferry Junior have a father-son talk at the Porsche villa



1953
Porsche at Porsche Plant 2—with a 356 featuring a center-creased windshield



1936
Ferry Porsche enjoys driving the Beetle: At the wheel of a Volkswagen prototype on the market square in Tübingen



1997
Ferry Porsche also enjoys driving a Boxster, because "the latest car is always the most beautiful!"



1996
Ferry Porsche celebrates the one-millionth 911 with Wendelin Wiedeking (left) and Baden-Württemberg's Minister President Erwin Teufel (right)



1953
Combined expertise: Ferry Porsche (right) with Huschke von Hanstein in Le Mans



1968
The inventor and his sports car: Ferry Porsche with the 911



“The Porsche embodies my philosophy of individual freedom of motion—which should serve humanity, not burden it.”

One of the quotes Ferry Porsche is best remembered for is, “To have earned the affection of boys is to possess a great emotional treasure.” When he himself was a boy, he already possessed an enormous store of genuine automotive genes. But being the son of the world-famous design engineer Ferdinand Porsche also meant having to emerge from the shadow of his brilliant father to find his own place in the automotive world. Not an easy undertaking, yet a fruitful path as it turned out. When the design office was founded in 1931, he participated from the very beginning in all the projects and the ever more extensive contracts at Porsche GmbH. Surrounded by top-notch engineers, Ferry Porsche learned quickly, and in a short time advanced from an apprentice to the junior boss. Ferdinand Porsche demanded a lot of his son, but also gave him opportunities, such as running the driving tests for the Volkswagen Beetle in 1935, and directing the test department in 1938. When his father was detained by the French in 1945, Ferry took over responsibility for the company, guiding it through the turmoil of the early postwar years. A metaphorical “knight-hood” by his father followed in 1947, when on returning home the professor examined the Cisitalia racing car developed completely under the direction of his son and announced that he would not have placed a single screw differently.

Shortly thereafter, Ferry Porsche made a historical decision that demonstrated boldness in both technology and business. On June 8, 1948, the first sports car carrying the Porsche name, the 356 “number 1,” received its road authorization. The risk taken by the company was astonishing. All of Europe was trying to rebuild after the war, so most vehicles on the market were practical and affordably priced. Yet in this situation, Ferry Porsche unswervingly followed his dream of having his own sports car—and found out that other car lovers shared this dream with him. His personal experience influenced his wish: “I come from a time when no one wanted to view cars anymore as purely a uniform.” In very real terms, his dream was fueled by self-awareness and self-confidence: “I had an idea at the right time and took the risk of putting this idea into practice. The idea was to make a sports car featuring outstanding performance, and the risk consisted of investing all available means into producing it.”

Production of the first standard-series 356 coupes and convertibles began in Gmünd (in Carinthia, Austria) in the second half of 1948 and then shifted to Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen in the spring of 1950. The fact that Ferry possessed not only solid technical expertise but also long-term business sense was demonstrated

when he signed a contract on September 17, 1948, with Volkswagen on VW component supply and VW distribution network usage. Ferry Porsche also had VW agree to pay a license fee for every Beetle that it built, in recognition of the fact that the car had been developed before the war by Porsche. This agreement with VW brought security for the young Porsche company, especially in financial terms. The foundation was now laid for Porsche KG to expand as a sports-car maker, and this was the result of Ferry Porsche’s own philosophy. He was known to say the following: “There are countless books with formulas on how to achieve success, and they contain all manner of good ideas. I’ve never read any of them.” At the same time, his own approach was summed up in statements such as “Progress has to be reasonable,” and “You can’t force things in life. There is little that I detest more than force.”

An important factor in the success of the young Porsche company was also its early readiness to export. Ferry Porsche was already shipping the first cars to America in 1950. The Porsche 356 won the hearts of sports-car drivers in the largest and most important market in the world and, not least of all, caught the attention of many Hollywood stars. With models like the 356 Speedster, Ferry Porsche instinctively responded to the wishes of American consumers, who accounted for half of total annual production by 1955. He held a strong conviction that people and cars are meant for each other. “Cars offered enormous freedom. And that freedom, I think, has changed people.” This view of life also had its playful sides: “You can tell people’s characters by the way they drive.”

In addition to exporting, Ferry Porsche also was passionate about racing, which served as a catalyst for the success of the Porsche brand. Instead of doing advertising or marketing, he wanted his sports cars to speak for themselves by racing to victory before the eyes of spectators. Racing also meant constant technical advances, because the experience gathered there flowed directly into perfecting standard road models—which sharpened the competitive spirit of this passionate engineer. “There has never been a quiescent point in the evolution of the automobile. We face many problems today, and once we’ve solved those, we’ll face many new ones. We will keep on striving for perfection. Motorsports has always been able to make important contributions to solving these problems, and will continue to do so in the future.”

Ferry Porsche sought to advance his company not only in technical matters, but also in terms of social responsibility. He introduced a company pension plan in 1956, and a Porsche foundation subsequently provided assistance to employees who encountered financial difficulties through no fault of their own. Business acumen and a humane approach were not mutually exclusive for Ferry Porsche, but rather logically connected or even the very basis of his success. He understood how to read the signs of the times and to recognize changes in the market. The 356, which despite its entire development program could not deny its close relationship with the VW Beetle, was facing only minimal chances for continued success at the close of the 1950s. Rather than further develop this proven model, Ferry Porsche decided on a new concept that would be based on the proven Porsche design with an air-cooled rear-mounted boxer engine. This was no easy job for him and his team, for after a

decade and a half, the 356 had become a revered modern classic. A well-directed stream of self-examination accelerated his wish for evolution: “There is no such thing as the perfect car. But as engineers and designers, we have to do everything in our power to approach this ideal.” Once the decision was made, it was easy for him to stick to it: “We simply built the car that we felt was right.”

The decision for the 911 designed by his eldest son, Ferdinand Alexander, was visionary, given that the car differed both in style and in technical fundamentals from everything that had come before. The fact that Ferry Porsche recognized the future potential of the uncompromisingly innovative 911 design is one of his greatest accomplishments. Behind it was a very personal wish: “If you manage to create something that withstands time, something that remains untouched by the eccentricities of a particular age—something timeless, in other words—that is the greatest achievement.”

The success of the 911 series was based on the model policy of constant evolution, which eventually developed the 911 into an ideal sports car. But Ferry Porsche also showed openness to new ideas. As chairman of the Supervisory Board, he continued to influence the company’s course. He was pleased to have his engineers excite and persuade him with their ideas. On developing types 914, 924, and 928, Porsche left familiar waters—not always to the delight of the company’s die-hard customers. But these models also contributed to the company’s success; after all, every second Porsche produced in the 1980s was a front-engine sports car. Ferry Porsche’s love of freedom knew hardly any limits, except for this one: “You may always modify a Porsche, but its character and inimitable quality must be maintained.”

In his later years, Ferry Porsche saw his company enter a crisis that threatened its very existence. But when Porsche, too, became a takeover candidate, he was adamant in emphasizing the importance of independence. Against losing hope he had this to say: “It all comes down to never giving up, and to responding to crises with the right answers.” When the company succeeded in turning around economically under the direction of CEO Dr. Wendelin Wiedeking, he saw his life’s work regain the path to success. With his death on March 27, 1998, an era came to a close—the last air-cooled 911 left the production line in the same year.

A vibrant entrepreneurial life had come to an end. Yet a similarly vibrant piece of wisdom has remained for Porsche: “We all harbor a wish to be immortal. That’s why we try to leave some-

Porsche Museum Exclusives

The book *Ferry Porsche 100 Jahre/Years* will be released on September 19 as a publication of the Porsche Museum. It is a bilingual edition (German/English) numbering 220 pages. ISBN: 978 398 128 1620 Price: €12.90



Ferdinand Anton Ernst (Ferry) Porsche

Born: September 19, 1909, Wiener Neustadt (Austria)

Died: March 27, 1998, Zell am See (Austria)

Marital status: Married Dorothea Reitz (1911–1985) in 1935; four sons: Ferdinand Alexander (born 1935), Gerhard (born 1938), Hans-Peter (born 1940), and Wolfgang (born 1943)

An engineer and entrepreneur, Ferry Porsche was the son of the automotive designer Ferdinand Porsche. He turned his father’s design office into the Porsche sports-car maker, and gave the 356 its original form. He was the managing director of Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche KG until the Porsche family withdrew from company operations in 1972. Ferry Porsche then directed the Supervisory Board of Porsche AG and became its honorary chairman.

thing behind which shows that we were here and that we accomplished something of meaning. The search for a purpose in our lives is universal, and will never change. Finding an aim in life is the essence of the human spirit. That is why functional designs are so marvelous... and so reassuring.”

The author, Dieter Landenberger, is the director of the historical archives of Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche AG

Also to mark the 100th anniversary of the birthday of Ferry Porsche, the museum shop is offering a metal plaque that can be mounted on a ventilation grille. It has a diameter of 95 millimeters (3.7 inches), and costs €24.90. It can also be ordered via e-mail at: shop.museum@porsche.de



More information at: www.porsche.com/museum

The Porsche Legend – Thanks to Ferry Porsche

An essay marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of the company founder

By Wolfgang Peters, Technology and Automobile Department editor for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

Maybe everything can in fact be traced to a single sentence. Everything that Professor Dr. Ing. h.c. Ferry Porsche initiated, undertook, and successfully completed in his long and active life, and everything that he also celebrated with his unique, reserved, and introspective delight, might all be linked to this one statement: “I would have approached it exactly the way you did!” That is what Ferdinand Porsche said to his son Ferry in August of 1947, clapping him on the shoulder after carefully inspecting the design sketches for the Cisitalia racing car developed by Ferry Porsche. As might be imagined, the son was relieved and proud—and knew that he was on the right path. On a path that had to be his own.

Back in 1947 it could not be anticipated, of course, that this path would lead to a company whose stature figures as prominently in the world at large as it does in the dreams of boys. During those years, men (and women too, naturally) did what they could and what they had to. The fact that Ferry Porsche and his employees (one almost wants to say “followers” given the circumstances at the time) began building a sports car in 1947 and 1948 may appear in retrospect like a dream. Europe lay in ruins. Refugees were seeking new homes. Only the essentials were available. Yet it was at this point that a handful of engineers decided to build a sports car. The reasons are easy to find. Ferry Porsche felt he was capable of doing it, and he believed it would be a success. He had already drafted plans for a sports car back in 1939, figuring that he could use technology from the Volkswagen under development at the time. There is a famous photo from this period, three-quarters of which is dominated by the rounded nose of a low automobile. From the perspective of the viewer, two men stand to the left of the car. The hands of the older man are in his pockets, and his face shows an expression not exactly surly but certainly skeptical. Next to him stands Ferry Porsche, his active body language nevertheless signaling a calm and confident nature. Incorporating both youth and the future, the son stands with an upright posture, slightly inclined head, and a reserved smile on his lips and in his eyes. No sign of excessive pride or rebelliousness, but rather a sense

of certainty that he can hold his own next to the genius and supremacy of his father. But without any belittlement of the father’s legacy. From this instant on, Ferry Porsche began to live a life of self-assured respect. He would assume responsibility for a rapidly growing company and its people, for his family, and for his name.

As a young man, he was ready to take on a mantle of responsibility in this time of need and bare essentials. He developed an overarching approach in his quiet way: the designer, the visionary, and the entrepreneur all came together in the person of Ferry Porsche. Everything that he subsequently set in motion with his sons and his family now looks like the result of personal pleasure. Every new decision radiates the ease of logical consistency. As if the rise of Porsche and Ferry Porsche himself happened of their own accord. That of course was not the case. What came first was a rapid succession of early Porsche vehicle types, an expanding range of models, and avid dedication to racing, combined with successes that no one would have foreseen for this brand, which had, after all, emerged from a beaten and stricken people—if we take the German-speaking region as a whole. This was followed by an unswerving dedication to retaining the character of the sports car once created; namely, an insistence on the clear, purist lines and technical precision of an automobile that functioned reliably and with consummate ease and that could be treasured by drivers during these gray times yet without becoming a diva on wheels. It was no coincidence that Ferry Porsche had the same name as his cars. And then the process that enabled the essence of the brand to be transferred without being lost. That was the real basis for the birth of the Porsche legend.

At issue in the early 1960s was not just another model. It was no less than the reinvention of Porsche—but under the condition that it kept its core appeal. This led to the 911, as it was promptly christened following the protest by Peugeot, for the French had trademarked every three-digit number with a zero in the middle. Ferry Porsche made a quick decision. Just like he believed that his son Ferdinand Alexander was the right man for the design. And so it transpired. Confidence in his family was the crucial factor for Ferry Porsche. Plus his unerring belief in the streamlined quality and technical orientation at the heart of his cars. And his dream of a Porsche with four doors, never entirely fulfilled during his lifetime but now a reality, is an encore to his success. The new Panamera also follows the lines laid down by Ferry Porsche. One hundred years after his birth. And it all started with a single sentence. ◀