

Fascination

Family Celebration

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Sixty years ago, Ferry Porsche developed and built the 356 model in the town of Gmünd, Austria. He adopted some parts from the VW Beetle that his father Ferdinand had conceived. Today, Wolfgang Porsche, Ferry's son and Ferdinand's grandson, is chairman of the Supervisory Board of Porsche Automobil Holding SE. A family outing into the past, to Gmünd and Zell am See—and back to the future.

Supervisory Board Chairman Dr. Wolfgang Porsche on the "Schüttgut" estate in Zell am See—with a visit from a 356 Coupé and a 911 Turbo Cabriolet

The man from Japan won't give up. He begs. He pleads. And when Helmut Pfeifhofer finally does unlock the door to the old wooden hut at the end of the village leading to the Malta Valley, the visitor falls on his knees in Ferry Porsche's former office. "I realized right away: for him the man who designed the first Porsche is like a god," says Pfeifhofer, who runs the Porsche Museum in the Austrian town of Gmünd and who gratified a sentimental impulse by purchasing the remains of the old factory—for his own private use. And yet many guests do come, and not just to see the first Porsche automobiles. The site of the former Porsche factory in Gmünd has become something of a shrine.

The fascination of Porsche has been going strong for more than 60 years. And it seems to have grown even more marked over the course of time. "My 15-year-old son Ferdinand senses more than I did at his age that he is the bearer of a special name," says Dr. Wolfgang Porsche, grandson of the Beetle designer Ferdinand and son of the inventor of the 356, Ferry. He laughs when he hears the story of the Japanese man in Gmünd. The 65-year-old is today the chairman of the Supervisory Board of Porsche Automobil Holding SE. As a young boy, he experienced the beginning of it all with the 140 employees in the wooden sheds; later, in the 1990s, it was the threat of bankruptcy. He now takes an active part in the work of the new automobile company. "I don't know what things will be like in 60 years. But over the coming years, we will be playing at the top echelon with VW," he says—and takes a seat in Zell am See in a coupe built in Gmünd in 1948, which is parked next to a €150,000 911 Turbo Cabriolet. "This is definitely worth more than that new one," he comments, and goes on to talk about his father, who is buried next to his grandfather a few yards uphill in the chapel on the "Schüttgut" family estate.

The trip back into the past ends here at the family property in Zell am See. It began 136 kilometers (85 miles) away in Carinthia—more precisely, in Gmünd. This is a route that the young Wolfgang Porsche often drove at the age of five, first in his grandfather's VW Beetle, then in his father's 356. The experience was the same in both cases. "As a child, I wasn't suited for car travel," the current head of the Porsche family admits. Thus, his father had to stop repeatedly on the Grossglockner road because his son was feeling sick to his stomach while traveling at 60 km/h (40 mph). "And this in a family where everyone was always talking about cars and driving and where grandmother proposed putting wheels on the bed to satisfy grandfather's love of mobility..."

This enthusiasm did evolve in Wolfgang Porsche as well. Junior was constantly asking to go along on the trip to Gmünd. His grandfather had selected the former wood factory in 1944 in order to have a place to work in Carinthia where there was less ▶

Looking back in Zell am See: The chapel on the Porsche family estate is the final resting place of Ferdinand and Ferry Porsche





danger of bombing raids. The Porsche factory that had been relocated to the mountains produced winches for agriculture and for ski lifts. Until Ferry Porsche embarked on the construction of a new creation with the number 356, that is. And that led to the birth—on the basis of the VW Beetle developed by Ferdinand Porsche—of the first Porsche, one that would hit the market with the magical designation “356.” “While my grandfather was in a prisoner-of-war camp, my father realized his dream with this car,” Wolfgang Porsche explains. He wanted to build a small vehicle that would have an ideal ratio of power to weight as well as low air resistance—and therefore strong acceleration capability. He also placed importance on top speed, optimal cornering ability, and a short braking distance. The result impressed even Ferdinand Porsche. The 74-year-old told his son that he wouldn’t have changed a single screw. “For my father, that was the highest honor,” Wolfgang Porsche recalls.

Zell am See may thus be the Porsches’ family seat, but Gmünd is the birthplace of the first Porsche. And although the choices for tourists range from back-strengthening exercises to concerts by the Carinthian double sextet, the marketing coordinator for the region is convinced that the town of 2,600 inhabitants owes its renown mainly to Porsche. “I am from the neighboring town of Trebesing. No one has ever heard of it, but a lot of people know

Supervisory Board Chairman Dr. Wolfgang Porsche in the 356 his father Ferry developed: “Grandfather’s praise was the highest honor for him”

Gmünd,” says Siegfried Neuschitzer, who runs a “baby hotel” that offers ten different flavors of baby food for breakfast alone. But how can that measure up to Porsche? Gmünd records 60,000 overnight guests a year, and Pfeifhofer’s Porsche Museum receives 60,000 visitors. “And in the beginning, everybody thought Pfeifhofer was out of his mind,” Neuschitzer says. Wolfgang Porsche knows him, too: “That Pfeifhofer is a Porsche fanatic—in the positive sense.”

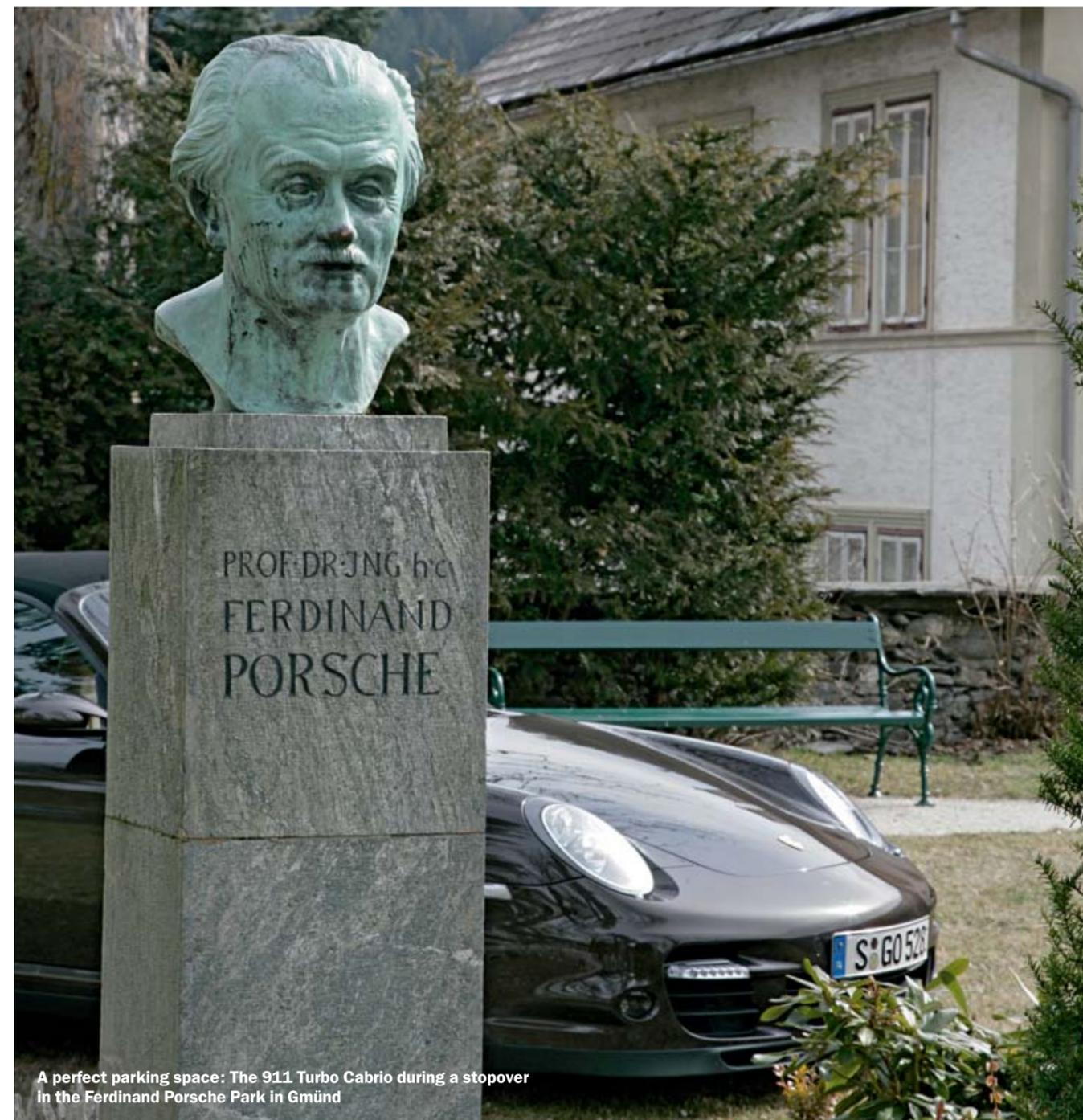
The Porsche fanatic created a new mecca for other Porsche fanatics in May 1982—a museum in the former stables of the Count of Lodron. It is the only recognized Porsche Museum aside from the much larger one in Stuttgart. He had earned the money for the expensive classics by selling farm antiques (“I worked day and night”). In 1987, when he decided to save also the former Porsche huts from the bulldozer, his wife threatened divorce...

in vain. Even Pfeifhofer senior shook his head in despair when his son refurbished the gatehouse and the office of Messrs. Porsche—and repurchased the drafting table they used. “With that money,” Pfeifhofer senior opined, “we could have bought a cord of firewood.”

In all likelihood, Helmut Pfeifhofer was the first Porsche fan ever. At the age of eleven, the 70-year-old recalls, he used to grab his mother’s milk can to go get water from the well at the Porsche factory. “The gatekeepers would turn a blind eye, because they

knew how crazy I was about cars,” Pfeifhofer explains. He also tells of how he and his fellow students would stop listening to the teacher when one of the factory workers drove by on the way to the test track at Katschberg mountain. “I got goose bumps whenever I saw or heard a Porsche,” Pfeifhofer says.

Today, Gmünd has a Ferdinand Porsche Park with a bust of the grandfather next to the museum at Lodron Castle, and Christoph, Helmut Pfeifhofer’s son, drives a Porsche 964 RSR at the “Historie-Cup.” The Kohlmayr guesthouse on the main square, where ▶



A perfect parking space: The 911 Turbo Cabrio during a stopover in the Ferdinand Porsche Park in Gmünd



Helmut Pfeifhofer in his museum in Gmünd: “I used to get goose bumps whenever I saw a Porsche”

the bachelors among the workers were put up years ago, is now the venue where Porsche Clubs from around the world meet. And sometimes the Porsche family as well. “Then we have to make Maffersdorf-style potato salad with lots of eggs. Ferdinand Porsche, who was born in Maffersdorf, used to love that salad,” says innkeeper Hubert Kohlmayr.

Sixty years later, many things in Gmünd still center on Porsche. On Ferdinand. On Ferry. And on their cars. The young Austrian soldiers who happen to stop over in Porsche-Town naturally visit the museum—but when they spy the new 911 Turbo parked out front, there is no holding them back. How much horsepower has it got? 480. What does it cost? 150,000 euros. What kind of gas mileage does it get? About 20 miles per gallon. “The newest car is always the best,” says Wolfgang Porsche, quoting his father.

Time has passed, but the fascination has remained. And so people still hang on every word Wolfgang Porsche says when he talks about the founder of the company. His grandfather was someone who developed one thing and then moved on to the next task. He



was a restless person who worked day and night. And when he did find time to take his grandsons to the movies, he fell asleep during the film. “I would always ask him afterward how he liked the movie,” Wolfgang Porsche relates. And his grandfather would always reply: “Wonderful.”

There are wonderful stories that surround the 60 years of Porsche. Very personal stories. And they exist in all languages. “If I hadn’t been so firm, that Japanese guy would probably still be in the hut,” says Helmut Pfeifhofer. ◀

A Visit to Gmünd: Where Time Stands Still

Many things in Gmünd evoke the old days. Helmut Pfeifhofer's Porsche Museum, for example, along with the gatehouse of the former Porsche factory, the residential area with the little houses where the workers used to live, and of course Ferdinand Porsche Park on the grounds of Lodron Castle. The residents of Gmünd remember how things used to be. They were very willing to take our photographer Markus Leser—who was on the road in a new 911

Turbo Cabriolet looking for traces of the past—to places where Porsche cars had been photographed in years gone by, such as the former factory entrance or the town gate. Sixty years later, Gmünd once again shows its Porsche face. Up to the year 1950, when Porsche returned to Stuttgart, 44 coupes and 8 cabriolet versions of the 356 were built in Gmünd. The production capacity in those days was sufficient for only five vehicles a month.

