

Ferdinand Porsche

Designer of the Volkswagen Beetle

Prof DR H.C Ferdinand Porsche was an Austrian car designer. He was born in Vratislavice nad Nisou in Bohemia. This is now part of Liberec, a city in the Czech Republic. He was born on September the 3rd 1875. This is also known as Maffersdorf in the German language. Porsche is best known for designing the original Volkswagen Beetle but is also known for his help in designing tanks for the Germans like the Tiger One and Two and the Elefant. In the year 1937 Adolf Hitler awarded the German National Prize for Art and Science to Ferdinand Porsche. This award is very rare so he did well to get it.

When you see the name Ferdinand Porsche you will probably think of Porsche cars. You are right in thinking that because Ferdinand's son, who is also named Ferdinand started up Porsche Automobiles. The Porsche family has always been in the car industry with Ferdinand the Second's nephew being the chairman of Volkswagen from 1993 to 2002. Also Ferdinand the Second's son was involved in the design of the legendary Porsche 911. The name Porsche is an old Slavic name which might be related to an old Czech name Bores which is pronounced Boresh.

As did many designers Ferdinand showed a great love for mechanical work at a very early age. He attended night school at the Imperial Technical School, during the day he always helped his dad out at the family's mechanical shop. Thanks to someone at his school referring him he managed to get a job in Vienna with the Bela Egger Electrical Company. During his five years at Bela Egger he managed to develop the electric hub motor. He later left the Bela Egger plant and went to Jakob Lohner. This company produced coaches for the kings of Sweden, Norway and Romania as well as for the Austrians. Unfortunately these were not a huge success and only sold 300. These carriages had a top speed of 35mph which was great for those days. They broke Austrian speed records and even won the Exelberg rally with Porsche himself driving the "car".

He was then drafted into the military and was a chauffeur to none other than the Archduke of Austria who assassination lead to the outbreak of World War One.

The next chapter in Ferdinand Porsche's life was his spell at Austro -Daimler. This started when he was recruited as Chief designer in 1906. Probably his most famous car he designed when at Austro -Daimler was the Modell 27/80 or The Prince Henry as it was better known. Ten years later he was managing director of the Austro Daimler company. He continued to design. One of his cars which was used for racing won a fantastic 43 out of 53 races. His time at Austro-Daimler unfortunately ended suddenly after a dispute about the future of automobiles between him and the company.

He moved onto Daimler Motoren Gesellschaft and was awarded another honorary doctorate from Stuttgart Technical University. In 1926 Daimler Motoren Gesellschaft and Benz and Cie merged together to form the famous

Mercedes Benz which is still about and famous today. Yet again he left, this time in 1929. The company he moved to was called Steyr. This was another short lived job because the Great Depression at this time caused the company to go bankrupt and Porsche ended up unemployed.

In April of 1931 he formed his own company called Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche GmbH, Konstruktionen und Beratungen für Motoren und Fahrzeugbau. He managed to recruit some of his comrades from the previous companies he had been at earlier in his life. His first project was a middle class car named the Wanderer. As the business expanded Porsche wanted to go back and work on one of his designs he had thought up at one of his other jobs. The design was a small car he had started to think up in his days at Daimler-Benz. He had several sponsors at different times but lost them one by one. He thought he had failed again until Adolf Hitler came along.

Adolf wanted every person in Germany to own a car or tractor. Adolf wanted Porsche to design and build three prototypes for him to see. They were completed by the end of 1936. Once Adolf had looked at them he ordered Porsche to go away and build 30 more prototypes. After this a whole city was founded just for the Volkswagen plant! It is now known as Wolfsburg and is still the base for Volkswagen's today.

At the time Ferdinand was involved in several racing car projects with other companies but began to get more involved in the construction of the new factory. He handed all the racing car plans over to his son, Ferry to continue. Ferdinand really got friendly with the Third Reich and Hitler's men. He accepted further projects gratefully, these included military vehicles as well like tanks, etc.

The Second World War then broke out but he continued with several designs of cars and war vehicles during wartime.

When the war finished in 1945 he moved to work in a factory in France due to War reparations. Differences in law meant that the French considered them to be up to no good and the French police arrested them. Ferry, Ferdinand's son was released soon after but Ferdinand and Anton were held in a prison in France for 20 whole months without trial. They all returned back to Stuttgart in 1949 but didn't have a clue how to get their business back up and running again after their 20 months locked up. Ferdinand was later contracted by Volkswagen for additional consulting work. In November 1950 went back to the Wolfsburg Factory for the first time after the Second World War. The Volkswagen Beetle was being produced there in large numbers now.

Unfortunately a few weeks later he suffered a big stroke. He went downhill from that moment and died on January the 30th of 1951.

His two biggest awards though came after his death. In 1996 he was included in the International Hall of Motor sports Fame and in 1999 he was voted Car Engineer Of The Century.

Functionality.

The Beetle was a simple and hard wearing car. It was designed so that it was a very hard wearing car that couldn't really be scratched or damaged. The original Beetle's dashboard was made from metal -

As you can see the interior wasn't soft and flimsy plastic like some cars today. It had a brushed metal dashboard that was extremely tough and durable.

It was named by Hitler as the peoples car and was able to transport two adults and three children at speeds of up to 100km/h.

This was an advertisement from 1939.

It had an air cooled engines, not water cooled. It was like the Mini in terms of simplicity and easiness to use. It was a very simple and easy to operate car that was a bit like a Mini but bigger.

It had excellent handling and could reach speeds of up to 100km/h which was pretty good in those days.

How was it made?

The Volkswagen Beetles were made by highly skilled German Engineers and Technicians from at their factory near Wolfsburg. It had five seats and as I mentioned earlier a brushed metal dashboard and interior. It had a reasonable sized boot due to its peculiar shape, much bigger than the Mini 's. Lots of people really hate the Beetle, its noise, bad driving position and uncomfortable seats are only a few of the major complaints about this small car. They may not be fast and cool but they do have character. Lots of cars being produced today look very similar but nothing looks anything like the Volkswagen Beetle designed by Porsche. The original Beetles toughness and lack of breakable parts made it one of the most reliable cars of the time, and still today. The Beetle was designed and made with character and you really can see it. People may think that it is a really rubbish car today but that isn't a fair judgement, to make a fair statement you need to have seen it in its hey-day. Peoples needs and likes have changed a lot since 1938 when it first made its way out of the factory doors.

What was the Beetles purpose?

Adolf Hitler wanted Ferdinand Porsche to undertake the design a car that would seat two adult and three children and reach speeds of up to 100km/h or 62mph. It was designed as an economy car and translates to Volkswagen in German. Adolf wanted every family in Germany to own a car. Most families up until the Beetle couldn't afford a medium sized family car but now it opened up the opportunity for many more families in Germany to own their own car simply because the Beetle was so cheap.

Market Audience.

It was aimed at families of 4 or 5 because it was originally designed to seat two adults in the front and three children in the back. It also had a big boot for the size of the car. Nowadays though we wouldn't really think of this as a family car but in those days people didn't really have the sort of big cars that we have today such as people carriers and SUV's. Sometimes single people would buy the Beetle but mainly it was couples or families. The VW Beetle is the best selling car in the history of automobiles. This fact just explains how successful the car and design was around the world. It sold in hundreds of countries all around the world selling millions every year for nearly seventy years virtually on the same original Porsche design produced in 1938.

Was there a design brief given to the designer?

The design brief was given to Ferdinand Porsche by Adolf Hitler. In the design brief there were various important points to follow. The Beetle had to be able to comfortably seat two adults and three children, had to be able to reach speeds of up to 60mph and had to be able to achieve over 33 miles per gallon. The main thing though was the cost. The car had to be sold for under 1000 Reichmarks. At the time 1000 Reichmarks was about the average price of a motorcycle so it was very cheap for a family car. The reason Hitler wanted a car designed for him was because he wanted every German to own a car.

Was the product/design a financial success and how was it developed over time?

The Beetle was probably the biggest success story of the time and still is today in terms of car design and manufacturing. There are many contestants to the title of "BEST SELLING CAR OF ALL TIME". The Toyota Corolla is the best selling car of all time but the Corolla has changed many times in the time of its life. The Beetle kept the same body for over 60 years and still managed to sell millions every year. This is a great feat, no other car has done anything like this. All I can say is congratulations to Ferdinand Porsche for creating a car that would stand the test of time and earn millions for him and his company.

Ergonomics.

The standards of ergonomics in the Beetle are pretty good. Like the Mini the car is very simple and user friendly. The Beetle has got a tough, simple feel about it which has its negatives and positives. It has no luxuries like cars do today. No electric windows or CD players. Just five seats in a metal framing. The positives about it being such a basic and simple car are the fact that it is one of the most reliable cars and is also very economically friendly, even by today's standards. The Beetle is a very basic car but very well made and because of this you get a really characteristic feeling from it, inside and outside.

What do you think about the product/design, would you buy it and why?

I have to say that I was prejudiced against the Beetle before I started studying it for this topic. I thought that it was a very ugly car that generally wasn't very good. I was proved wrong. The Beetle is a well manufactured car and as I said, can reach speeds of up to 60mph. This doesn't sound much by today's standards but was pretty good going at the time of design. Although my attitude towards the Beetle has completely changed I would still not buy one. I came to this decision because although the Beetle is a legendary car and is extremely characteristic it is more of a girly car nowadays. I would have bought either the original or the new Beetle because they are both very ugly in my opinion. I think that the original Beetle is ugly but this doesn't stop me admiring both the vehicle and the designer for being such a success over time.