



PORSCHE

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Porsche Museum Presents Special Exhibition of Rare VW Beetle Prototypes

## **Seventy-Five Years Ago: Porsche Receives the Order to Construct the Volkswagen**

**Stuttgart.** 22 June 1934 was not only one of the most important days in the early corporate history of the Company now known the world over as Dr. Ing. h. c. F. Porsche AG, Stuttgart, but also the day that changed the history of the entire automotive industry: It was on that day that “Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche GmbH, Konstruktionen und Beratung für Motoren- und Fahrzeugbau” received the go-ahead from the “Reichsverband der Automobilindustrie (RDA)” (the Association of the German Reich of the Automotive Industry) to construct and build the Volkswagen.

In those difficult economic times, automobile constructors had had the idea time and again to build an inexpensive car for the population at large. One of them was Ferdinand Porsche who, in the course of his career, had constructed no less than seven compact and small cars for various manufacturers. As the ultimate result of these projects in terms of technology and design he finally developed the Volkswagen concept in 1933, presenting the car to the Reich Ministry of Transport on 17 January 1934 in his “Study for the Production of a Germany People’s Car” (quite simply, the “Volkswagen”).

At the end of the day the political leaders back then were also convinced of the concept Porsche and his constructors had developed. So five months after submitting the study, Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche GmbH received the order to develop the car at the initiative of the Reich Government. And while the original agreement was to build only one prototype of the Volkswagen, the RDA increased the order on 7 December

1934 to three cars assembled in the garage of Ferdinand Porsche's private residence.

The first Volkswagen prototype, the V1 (V = Versuchswagen or Test Car), was ready to go almost exactly a year after the official development brief, Ferdinand Porsche presenting the saloon to an RDA Technical Commission on 3 July 1935. The second test car, a convertible code-named the V2, set out on its maiden trip on 22 December 1935.

After construction of three further Volkswagen prototypes code-named V3 had started in February 1936, resistance to the project began to build up in the RDA. Quite simply because, with its central tube frame, the torsion bar suspension invented by Porsche and the air-cooled four-cylinder boxer engine at the rear, the Volkswagen was now seen – and feared – as a serious competitor to existing models. A further series of 30 prototypes (VW30) was nevertheless built in 1937 by the then Daimler-Benz AG and tested in a large-scale trial covering a total of 2.4 million test kilometres.

Contrary to the first idea to build the Volkswagen in a joint venture of German car makers, the Reich Government decided on 4 July 1936 to build a separate plant for the new car, the Volkswagenwerk. So the "Gesellschaft zur Vorbereitung des Deutschen Volkswagens mbH" or "Gezuvor" for short (the "Company for Preparation of Deutsche Volkswagen Ltd") was established on 28 May 1937.

As one of the three managing directors of Gezuvor, Ferdinand Porsche received the official order for the technical development and planning of the future production plant, with construction work starting in May 1938 in the small town of Fallersleben, now Wolfsburg.

On two study trips to the USA, Ferdinand Porsche gained the latest know-how on modern automobile production and the rules to be observed in the production process.

By the second half of 1938 the prototypes, now having reached the level of VW38, had achieved a point in the development process hardly different from the subsequent production model. So now potential purchasers were able to save five reichsmarks a week for the Volkswagen in the meantime re-christened as the “KdF-Wagen” forming part of the German Reich’s “Kraft durch Freude” or “Strength through Happiness” strategy.

Priced at an extremely low 990.- reichsmarks, the Volkswagen was really to be everybody’s car, easily affordable for the average purchaser. But due to the War not one of the roughly 340,000 investors reached his savings target and not one single Volkswagen was delivered to a private customer.

Starting in 1939 Porsche developed further variants of the Volkswagen parallel to the “KdF-Wagen“ which were however intended for military use. Indeed, more than 60,000 of the jeep-like Kübelwagen, the amphibian Schwimmwagen, and the higher-ranking Kommandeurwagen (the commander’s car), some of which featured all-wheel drive, were built by the end of World War II.

Another model based on the Volkswagen was the Type 64 Berlin-Rome Car built in 1939. This motorsport version of the Volkswagen was developed for the Berlin-Rome long-distance race planned for September 1939 and is acknowledged by car historians as the great-grandfather of Porsche sports cars today. With its streamlined aluminium body and upgraded VW boxer engine, the Berlin-Rome Car reached a top speed of 145 km/h or 90 mph.

Regular production of the civilian Volkswagen started in Wolfsburg in summer 1945 – and bearing the nickname “VW Käfer” or the “VW Beetle”, the Volkswagen became as popular the world over as hardly any other car before or after.

The VW Beetle also sets the record in terms of its production life and volume, production of the last VW Beetle still coming off the line in Mexico continuing until July 2003. And accounting for 21.5 million units built, the Beetle is by far one of the highest-production vehicles of all times.

The Porsche Museum is dedicating a Special Exhibition to the 75th anniversary of the order to build the Volkswagen, held from 22 June – 31 July 2009. Apart from detailed information and original pictures from the Historical Archives of Porsche AG, the Exhibition also presents a rare pre-war prototype of the Volkswagen. This very special VW38 from the Volkswagen Foundation Collection was used personally by Professor Porsche, also on many business trips. Another rare car is the prototype of a VW Beetle powered by a diesel engine and built by Porsche in the early 1950s.

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Note: Images on 75 Years Volkswagen Order are available to accredited journalists in the Porsche Press Database at <https://presse.porsche.de>