

Ferdinand Porsche

Ferdinand Porsche's technical skills, innovative strength and entrepreneurial spirit prepared the way for the subsequent global success of the Porsche brand.

Ferdinand Porsche was born on 3 September 1875 in Maffersdorf in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now known as Vratislavice nad Nisou in the Czech Republic. The third of five children, Ferdinand was ultimately expected to take over the tinsmithing business owned by his father Anton but instead found himself fascinated by electricity. Upon completing an apprenticeship as a tinsmith, he therefore joined the Vienna-based electrics company Bela Egger & Co. in 1893. He patented an electric wheel-hub motor in 1896 before taking up a role with Jacob Lohner & Co. in the same city. The Lohner-Porsche featuring a wheel-hub motor was enthusiastically received at the Paris world fair a mere four years later. Porsche married Aloisia Johanna Kaes in 1903 and the couple would go on to have two children: Louise and Ferdinand Anton Ernst, nicknamed 'Ferry'. After eight years with Lohner, Porsche was named technical director at Austro-Daimler and subsequently won the 1910 Prince Heinrich Tour in an Austro-Daimler he had designed himself. In 1922, he followed this up with the 'Sascha' racing car that recorded a class win at the Targa Florio.

Ferdinand Porsche was appointed technical director and member of the board at the Stuttgart-based firm Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft in 1923. He oversaw the continuing development of the Mercedes supercharged car, which went on to win the 1924 Targa Florio. Following this triumph, he was awarded an honorary engineering doctorate and the corresponding German academic title 'Dr. Ing. h.c.' by Stuttgart Technical University. He took up the role of technical director at Steyr-Werke AG in 1929 before founding his own engineering office in Stuttgart a mere one and a half years later, naming the company 'Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche GmbH'. Having long dreamt of building a small car, the Volkswagen represented his ninth attempt at achieving this goal – and thanks to a contract concluded with the Reich Association of the Automotive Industry on 22 June 1934, it finally became a reality. The world-famous Volkswagen was born. However, the advent of the Second World War meant that it was to serve as the basis for military vehicles. Ferdinand Porsche was named an honorary professor in 1940 and acquired the 'Schüttgut' estate in Zell am See one year later. Until the war was over, he lived there and at the engineering office that had been relocated to the Carinthian town of Gmünd. Following a disagreement between Renault and Peugeot in relation to the development of a French 'Volkswagen' with the assistance of Ferdinand Porsche, Peugeot accused the German engineer of war crimes. Arrested by the French secret service in December 1945, Porsche was bailed in August 1947 and formally released in May 1948. Returning to Gmünd, he praised his son Ferry for the design of the 356 'No. 1' Roadster and the Cisitalia racing car: 'I wouldn't have done a single thing differently.' Having lived to see the 356 enter series production in Zuffenhausen, Ferdinand Porsche passed away on 30 January 1951. His ashes were buried in the court chapel at the Schüttgut estate in Zell am See.