

Porsche in the USA – Max Hoffman

Austrian-born Max Hoffman helped Porsche achieve its breakthrough in the USA. North America has remained one of the brand's most important markets to this day.

In autumn 1950, Ferry Porsche sat down to talk with Max Hoffman at the Paris Motor Show. Porsche knew of the huge sales potential that existed on the other side of the Atlantic, but wondered how he would be able to gain a foothold in the land of unlimited possibilities. As it turned out, the meeting with Hoffman was to provide the ideal solution. Born in Vienna in 1904 to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, Maximilian Edwin Hoffmann was forced to flee to France to escape the Nazis before emigrating to the USA in 1941. Once in New York, he enjoyed success as a trader of fashion jewellery. Hoffmann quickly Americanised his name and in 1947 founded the 'Hoffman Motor Company' in order to import European cars. In the elegant surroundings of Park Avenue in Manhattan, he acquired a showroom designed by star architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

In his conversation with the aspiring car importer Max Hoffman, Ferry Porsche expressed his desire to sell five Porsche 356 models a year in the USA. 'If I can't sell five cars a week, I'm not interested,' was Hoffman's answer. People in America were thinking bigger than their counterparts in post-war Germany. The first three Porsche 356 models were shipped to the USA that same year, with the total rising to 32 in 1951.

Hoffman used the vibrant American motorsport scene and its numerous club races to raise the profile of Porsche. By 1954, he was comfortably beating his self-imposed target and selling 11 Porsche 356 models a week. Porsche's American dream was becoming a reality, with around 30 per cent of annual production being sent across the pond at this stage. In later years, this figure would reach as high as 70 per cent.

Besides helping the Porsche brand make its breakthrough in the USA, Max Hoffman also provided valuable suggestions in relation to the model policy. Talking to Ferry Porsche later on in the 1950s, he explained that a smaller and more affordable sports car was needed for the American market. A Porsche 356 cost over 4,000 dollars in the USA at the time, the same as a large Cadillac convertible. Porsche responded in autumn 1954 with the 356 Speedster, which was priced at just below 3,000 dollars. It has since become the ultimate cult 356 model.