Chapter 1:

Genesis in Gmünd
1900–1946

The Allies expected no surprises in the rustic village of Gmünd, in Austria’s mountainous southern province of Carinthia. The year was 1945, the month May, and Germany had just capitulated. Scarcely a month had passed since Allied detachments had swarmed over the Bavarian Alps west of Salzburg. There they’d expected to overwhelm the high command of the Third Reich, which—according to the Josef Goebbels propaganda machine—was sealing itself into rock caverns and planning to wage a glorious last battle.

But the feared “National Redoubt” did not exist after all—at least not in the form imagined. Instead of a rocky high country honeycombed with tunnels and bristling with pillboxes, the Allied troops saw grazing cows and placid settlements of non-belligerents who were only too happy to be Bavarians again.

British forces commanded the mountainous southerly sector of Austria, near Bavaria and bordering on both Italy and Yugoslavia. The troops patrolling the narrow roads and quiet villages of Carinthia had no reason to think that they would find anything out of the ordinary in a village as remote as Gmünd.

About 25 miles north of the Italian border, on a gravelly delta at the confluence of the Malta and Lieser rivers, Gmünd was little more than a layby along Route 331, the twisting road that linked Klagenfurt, Carinthia’s capital, with Salzburg, some 70 miles to the north. With its steep-roofed houses and split-rail fences, Gmünd looked like just another bucolic Austrian village. Several citizens, however, suggested to the British officers that they pay a visit to the sawmill that stood on the edge of town in the Malta valley. There they found, clustered around the one-story sawmill and a small outbuilding, a strange assortment of vehicles: various models of the Volkswagen, the “people’s car” ordered built by Hitler.

After years of working as an engineer for major German automakers, in 1930 Professor Ferdinand Porsche established his own firm to consult to the industry. Although the resulting automobiles wore the nameplates of others, Porsche was the man behind cars built by Wanderer, Volkswagen and the mighty Auto Union racing cars. Immediately before and during World War II, Porsche designed vehicles for the German Military.

Above left: Three Type 60K10 coupes were made. (see page 15)

Above right: The Porsche Gmünd shop. (see page 18)

Left: Prof. Ferdinand Porsche confers with engine designer Franz Xaver Reimspiess (left) at the Kronengasse office in 1938.
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But this was more than a boneyard for Adolf's dream car. The collection included a rare convertible, military models and a claustrophobically streamlined coupe. Inside the wooden buildings, the British found the biggest surprise of all: the chief designer, the core of the engineering staff and much of the records and equipment of one of Germany's most respected engineering firms—the Porsche KG. This was the brilliant team that had designed the versatile military Volkswagen in both conventional and amphibian versions, not to mention such armored vehicles as the awesome Elefant anti-tank weapon and, in the last months of the war, two prototypes of the largest tank ever conceived—a machine ironically dubbed the Maus (Mouse).

In the Allied occupation zones established in Austria after the war, Gmünd was in the British zone, south of Salzburg and north of Trieste.

No one had known the Porsche staff was there: not Britain's MIS, the American OSS or the Soviet GRU—shrewd investigators who had every reason to want to know the team's whereabouts. Since the autumn of 1944 these men—fully half of Porsche's 888-man engineering cadre—had been undisturbed at their work in the peaceful haven of Gmünd. Their removal to Carinthia from bomb-shattered Stuttgart had, as intended, allowed them to work undisturbed on new tanks, engines, personnel carriers and even farm tractors for the peace-time that had now so suddenly arrived. And their evacuation to Austria had gone undiscovered by the Allies—until now.

This half of the Porsche company was destined to spend almost six years in Gmünd, not a long time for a firm that had been founded in 1930. Yet six years were enough to conceive and rear a child to school age. In this instance they were also enough to bring a new kind of automobile out of the cradle and onto its first steady footing. Gmünd was the birthplace of the car we know today as the Porsche.

Porsche Beginnings

The Porsche name had been part of automobile history from as early as 1900. That year, the Lohner-Porsche was being built in Vienna to the designs of the brilliant Ferdinand Porsche, a mere 25 years of age. Then, as throughout his career, the founder of the Porsche dynasty made his living by designing automobiles. After Lohner-Porsche tank weapons, Porsche turned his attention to a wandering band of engineers and administrators. By that time, the prosperity of the Porsche enterprise—booming to meet the demands of the Volkswagen project—was such that the company was able to build offices of its own in the Stuttgart suburb of Zuffenhausen. The new headquarters offered complete facilities for designing, building, and testing motor vehicles. Moving overnight to avoid the loss of a single working day, the Porsche men were installed in Zuffenhausen in June 1938. Here, in the same year, they completed the design of the car that would become known as the Volkswagen—the car that was to make Porsche's name world-famous.

Meanwhile, the company's success enabled Porsche to be restructured as a limited partnership, called in German a Kommanditgesellschaft (KG). Two large investors were the children of Porsche's marriage to Aloisia Kaes: his son Ferry and his daughter Louise, along with Louise's husband, Dr. Anton Piech. Louise, the first-born (1904), was an exceptional, determined woman whom many regarded as the perfect embodiment of her father's spirit. Anton Piech, whom she married in 1927, was from a Viennese family of French origin. Having followed in his father's footsteps by training as a lawyer, the energetic Piech was a founding partner of the Porsche design office and a vital negotiator of its major contracts. During World War II, he served as Ferdinand Porsche's deputy at the Volkswagen factory near Fuldehausen, west of Berlin.

Ferdinand Porsche developed the supercharged 1934 Mercedes (top) and 1937 Mercedes-Benz Type S.
the Stuttgart office in 1931. There he completed his first drawing—that of a Wanderer connecting rod. With a Wan- derer, a car he had test-driven as well as helped design, Ferry competed in the Baden-Baden trial in 1934: a 2000-kilometer run over the open roads of Germany. In 1939 he took over the management of the Zuffenhausen office after his father was made one of the directors of the new Volkswagen factory. Adolf Hitler laid the cornerstones of the new Volkswagen plant on May 26, 1938. Frustrated by the refusal of the exist- ing German auto companies to cooperate with him and with Porsche in building a “peoples car,” Hitler decided that the nation would build it instead. The money was to come from the German Labor Front, a pseudo-union organization headed by Dr. Robert Ley. One of its branches, known as Kraft durch Freude (Strength through Joy) or KdF, was to interested in the aerodynamic problems of automobiles. Like Rabe, Franz Xavier Reimspiess (born in 1901) was also among those whom Porsche and Rabe first hired to help them. As was his custom, Porsche proposed many more versions of the VW-to-be than just the sim- ple sedan. In its final form, the basic chassis was known as the Type 60 (marking its place in the succession of Porsche projects since the Type 7). Designed for the Type 60 sedan were chassis, con- vertible sedan, and cabriolet bodies. These versions include Ferdinand Porsche and was also a designer, was Karl Rabe (born in 1895), who for so many years was Porsche’s link between inspira- tion and realization. The modest and respecta- ded Rabe had been one of the first men Porsche called upon when he opened his own office. Despite his self-effacing manner, Rabe was no stranger to responsibility and would show his best in the worst of times.

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The People of Porsche

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In spite of this rejection, Porsche’s people believed enough in the potential of a car like the Type 64 to try a new approach to getting it into production. They decided to explore the possibility of building it themselves. This would mark a full turn of the wheel for the Porsche family, from working for other car makers to becoming an auto producer in their own right. Looking beyond the design work Porsche was then doing on the VW project, which seemed certain to be one of the biggest the firm could ever hope to get, the idea of actually producing a car offered financial security for the future. Porsche could start out in a small way, in its new own works in Zuffenhausen, expanding later in response to demand.

It had occurred to Ferdinand Porsche as early as 1922 that he might go into the automobile business on his own. This was, said Ferry Porsche in an interview with Panorama, “an old idea of my father’s. When he left Austro-Daimler to go to Mercedes, he had the idea to do something a little like what Bugatti had done, and it was a question of having enough money to start a factory or to go to Mercedes as technical manager. At that time he didn’t have enough money, so he went to Mercedes.” Now, when Professor Porsche was beginning to have money, he felt the urge again.

Because the Type 64 used many components from the Type 60, the Porsche company approached Labor Front officials to make arrangements for buying Type 60 parts in quantity for use in its sports car. This request was also turned down, but for a different reason. Probes of the relevant laws by both parties had concluded that there was no legal way a government-owned company, namely the VW factory, could sell goods to a private firm like Porsche. That decision ended for the time being any and all thoughts of a Porsche sports car based on VW parts.

But the Porsches father and son had given so much consideration to producing a sports car of their own that they could not shake off the idea. In 1938 they decided to pursue it further in spite of all the obstacles they had encountered. Since VW components weren’t to be made available, they put a small group of designers to work on a completely special sports car that was called the F-Wagen, for both Ferry and Ferdinand, carrying the designation of Type 114. The engineer most responsible for its creation was Karl Fröhlich. He kept design work moving ahead as quickly as he could, although as a non-paying project the Type 114 drawings often had to be pushed aside to complete a job for a Porsche customer.

The Type 114 was never built; indeed, the detailed engineering drawings that would have been needed to build it were never completed. But by January 3, 1939, when Karl Fröhlich signed the drawing of its overall chassis layout, it was completely planned in every important detail: a magnificent Porsche sports car primed and ready to launch the family’s own automobile business.

The F-Wagen was an extraordinary conception. Not for another quarters-century would Porsche build a car of its own of comparable complexity. In its broadest outline, the layout of the F-Wagen showed a familial resemblance to the Porsche design that had been known at first as the P-Wagen, the famous Auto Union Grand Prix car. Its engine was located between the passengers and the rear axle, and its transmission was overhung to the rear of the axle. These elements alone made the Type 114 a radical automobile for its time. But its most surprising attribute was surely its ten-cylinder vee-type engine of 1.5 liters (1,493 cc, 58 x 56.5 mm).

SEEDS OF A SPORTS CAR: TYPES 64 AND 114
required two 15-liter air-cooled V-10s, and the Type 114 sports car.

With a 72-degree angle between its banks—the correct value to give evenly spaced firing impulses—the engine designed for the Type 114 would have been the most ambitious 1.5-liter engine of its time, as sublimely intricate as a Swiss watch. In both this angle and its use of ten cylinders, Porsche's planned production car, the Type 114, had its V-10 engine placed above the rear torsion-bar tube (bottom right).

Top left: The Type 114 was to have an oval-tube ladder frame, kicked up over its rear swing axles. Front-radiator layout is at left. Top right: Wind-tunnel test model, showing grille for front radiator. Bottom left and right: Sketches show final design with radiator at the engine. Sketch at lower left: planned production car, the Type 114, had its V-10 engine placed above the rear torsion-bar tube (bottom right).
during the 1930s, while big national competitions were staged under ONS direction. These included a winter trial in February, a three-day mountain trial in June and late in the decade, a German Alpine Rally in July. Not since 1934, however, when they had staged the 2,000-kilometer event in which Ferry Porsche had driven a Wanderer, had the NSKK and ONS organized a big open-road race on the lines of the Mille Miglia. In 1938 they decided to get back in that business in an even more spectacular way.

Berlin to Rome: Type 60K10
In cooperation with his counterparts in Italy, Korpsführer Hühnlein planned one of the most audacious races ever conceived. They scheduled it for September 1939. The starting point was to be Berlin, the cars racing south from there over the newly completed Autobahn to Munich. They’d continue south through the Austrian panhandle over the Brenner Pass to Italy, then race over local roads, closed to other traffic, all the way to the finish line in Rome. This Berlin-Rome Race was to traverse three nations from capital to capital over 800 highway miles, an epic event with unlimited propaganda potential.

For the Porsche and KdF-Wagen staff in Zuffenhausen, this race promised a publicity bonanza. Although construction of the Fallersleben plant was lagging, the first manufacture of Volkswagen cars was still projected for September 1939 and the first deliveries for early 1940. The Berlin-Rome Race was a made-to-order opportunity to demonstrate to the world the guts and character of this new German automobile. Of course the stock KdF-Wagen would be out of its element, with only 24 hp from 985 cc and a top speed of about 65 mph. Still,
argued Ferdinand Porsche, special cars could be built on the Type 60 chassis that would perform extremely well.

Thus persuaded, Hitler's ONS placed an order with Porsche for the design and construction of three special sports cars based on the Type 60. Financial backing came from the Labor Front of the Lower and Upper Rhine. Although they had just turned down Porsche's plans for putting the Type 64 sports car into production, they too saw the publicity advantages to be gained by entering a Kfz-Wagen in the Berlin-Rome competition.

Designed in the fall of 1938 and completed in the early summer of 1939, three cars were built specially for that contest and were designated Type 60K10, indicating that each consisted of a Type 60 chassis fitted with a special body (K for Karosserie). The K series, which included early studies for the Volkswagen body design and some other styles besides the Type 60K10, ran up to the K12 level.

Planning already done at Porsche on the Type 64 sports car gave it a head start on engineering work on the 60K10. Retained intact was the normal Volkswagen platform frame and its suspension system. Thus wheelbase and track remained standard at 83.5 and 50.6 inches respectively. Larger valves, twin carburetors and a higher compression ratio boosted engine power boost to over 50 bhp, more than twice its normal output. It was also developed to be reliable and its suspension system. Thus wheelbase and track remained standard at 83.5 and 50.6 inches respectively. Larger valves, twin carburetors and a higher compression ratio boosted engine power boost to over 50 bhp, more than twice its normal output. It was also developed to be reliable and gave it a head start on engineering work on the 60K10.

Profile sketches were so narrow that it looked like a single-seater, but the car actually managed to accommodate the standard KdF-Wagen. This wasn’t a new discipline for Porsche, for he had worked on weaponry, including an amazingly advanced eight-wheeled personnel carrier, at Daimler-Benz in the 1920s. In 1941 the Porsche office followed up its Type 109 tank prototypes with its 57-ton Type 101, also known as the Tiger (P). Type 101 was a variation, with hydraulics driven instead of the electric drive that Porsche preferred.

Along the Autobahns that radiated out of Stuttgart it scuttled at high speeds, narrow beams of light from its blackout-masked headlights penetrating the foggy Swabian gloom. There wasn’t much traffic on German roads during the early 1940s, so excellent averages could be maintained. Porsche and Goldinger once arrived at the Hotel Bristol in the center of Berlin just one and a half hours after leaving Frankfurt. That amounted to a door-to-door average speed of about 5 mph achieved over ordinary local roads!

Honsors and Armaments

Ferdinand Porsche was kept very much on the move by both the honors and the responsibilities that came his way in increasing numbers. He had already received two honorary engineering doctorates from technical academies, the first in Vienna in 1917 and the second in Stuttgart in 1924. He was awarded a German National Prize in 1938, was named the official Reich Auto Designer, and in 1940 he was presented with an honorary professorship by the Stuttgart Technical Academy.

Of more than academic interest was Professor Porsche’s 1940 appointment to the presidency of the Armor Commission of the Ministry of Arms and Munitions. During the next five years, his time was spent amid the mud of military proving grounds and the tattoo of rivet guns in huge tank assembly halls rather than on the racing circuits he loved so much. Porsche changed his organization into the design of armored military vehicles with the same enthusiasm that had already made his firm famous in other fields.
them on a daily basis. After sharp differences with Albert Speer, the Reich armaments minister, Porsche was moved out of his Armor Commission job to a more elevated and mainly ornamental post, that of Reich armaments councilor. His continued advocacy of exotic drives, engines and suspensions for tanks at a time when Germany needed mass production rather than the ultimate in sophistication had earned Porsche a “mad scientist” reputation in some circles.

Ideas for advanced armor kept rolling out of the design office at Zuffenhausen and the plant at St. Valentin. The mountainous Mass was shorter to work on with the two tracks of the two completed examples. Drawings and models were prepared of a relative dwarf, the 18-ton multi-purpose Type 245. A similar stage was reached with the design of the 250-ton, lesser-tank with a 105mm gun. One of Porsche’s last military projects was the Type 293, laid down in the summer of 1944 by order of the SS. A personnel carrier rolling on either wheels or tracks, it had to be developed with parts made in Italy because Stuttgart was under increasingly heavy bombardment.

Versatility as well as volumes marked the wartime Porsche contribution. It produced many variations on the Volkswagen theme. Almost as ambitious was another Reich-supported Porsche endeavor, the Volkskraft or “people’s claw,” designed to motorize the German farmer. This was a small yet versatile tractor designed to do all the tugging and tilling that men normally performed on small farms in Germany. Conceived late in 1937, the first Volkskraft design was the Type 110, followed by successive type numbers through 113 as development continued into 1940. Plans were made for a vast factory at Waldbröl, near Cologne, to make as many as 300,000 tractors a year. In 1944 this dream was allowed to die along with so many other aspirations of the Third Reich.

Nor was this all the work being done by the Porsche staff. It designed the Type 175 Ostradschlepper (“wheeled Eastern-Front tractor”) of 1942, a heavy truck with huge steel-tracked wheels. A throwback to some of Porsche’s World War I creations, it was built to tow artillery pieces through the gumbos of the Russian front, but military conditions changed before the Skoda-built vehicle could be properly tested. Porsche also built a VW engine fitted with a special Roots-type supercharger, which was to power Pendant tractor units in the rarefied Alpine atmosphere. One such engine, delivering 45 horsepower, propelled the bright-green Volkswagen cabriolet that Ferry Porsche used throughout the war.

Then there was the Porsche-designed Volkswindkraftwerk or “people’s wind power plant.” Inspired by the irreplaceable Bodo Lafrentz for the huge steel rims of the huge works at Fellheadleben, this new electricity-generating plant was a modern three-bladed version of the windmill. Designated Types 135, 137 and 137 (signifying three levels of generating power), such units, when mounted on high towers, were to power the farm settlements that were to be established in Germany’s new-own Lebensraum in Russia—“living space” which, of course, never became permanently available.

Preserving the Legacy

Through 1943 and the early months of 1944, when Allied bombers roamed more and more freely above Germany’s industrial areas, the few tracts of the Porsche team remained at Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen—even though many other firms had been dispersed to more sparsely settled regions. In April of 1944, however, after the first bombs fell on the KdF plant at Fallersleben, Ferdinand Porsche became highly agitated. The company’s archives, he complained to his son, were stored in the attics of the office buildings, where they were very vulnerable to air attack. He insisted that they should be moved at once to the cellar, where they would be better protected.

The precaution had already been taken of triplicating the original drawings. One of the additional sets was stored in the Porsche villa and the other was at the Stuttgart residence of Ghislaine Kaes, Professor Porsche’s nephew and personal sec-
divided all the important machine tools into three groups, 

In the end Porsche used both Austrian locales. The flying 
ing in Salzburg about possible Austrian locations. He found 

A large wooden hall, in a valley in the Rießseck mountains in Austria, housed the Porsche workshops.

The Porsche’s world changed sharply in mid-1945, as it had for everyone in Europe. “We had some money,” recalled Ferry, “but it was blocked from us because we were German.” New barriers were thrown across the Austrian and German landscapes by the occupation authorities. Zell am See was in the American-ruled zone of Austria and cordoned off from Gmünd, which was in the British zone. There Karl Rabe had been placed in charge of the sawmill engineering by the British. In Zell am See, the Porsche offices were commandeered by the Americans, whose occupation zone included Stuttgart. Karl Klem, a mass born in that part of Germany in 1909, was designated trustee of the Porsche property there.

For these men of extraordinary engineering skills and experience the outlook was bleak. “If your father was a shoemaker,” one of the British authorities told Louise Pich, “he would surely make shoes, but he will never design automobiles again.” As yet, no new plan for postwar Germany had been put forward to replace the one formulated by the Allies at their joint conference in September 1944. Known as the Morgenthau Plan, after the then-U.S. Secretary of the Treasury who had helped in its formulation, it proposed the virtual elimination of German industry and anticipated “converting Germany into a country primarily agricultural and pastoral in character.” Agriculture, at least, was a key word to the designers at Gmünd, who had never stopped thinking about tractors.

Meanwhile, in July 1945 Professor Porsche had been formally invited to join the many officials and technicians who were being interviewed by the Allies at a castle (code-named “Dust- bin”) on the outskirts of Frankfurt. Freed from Düsseldorf after three months, he returned to Zell. In November 1945, however, a chain of events began that was eventually to shorten the life of Ferdinand Porsche. He and his son were invited to Baden-Baden in the French zone of Germany to discuss the exciting prospect of a rebirth in France of the apparently moribund Volkswagen. While conferring there in December, Porsche was arrested by a rival French political faction. Also arrested were his son and son-in-law, who had been helping him in the negotiations.

On trumped-up charges of misconduct with respect to pris- oners of war and workers at the Peugeot plant, Ferdinand Porsche and Anton Pich were imprisoned first in Baden- Baden and then in Paris and Dijon, where conditions were deplorable. Others in his family and staff were cleared after interrogations of various durations. Among them was Ferry Porsche, who was released from his detainment in a Black Forest hotel in late July 1946.

During this difficult time the family’s interests were looked after by one of his strongest members, Ferdinand Porsche’s daughter Louise Pich. As one of the family members noted it, “She was the one out of prison.” Her persistence and deter- mination led to the establishment, with her brother, of the Porsche Konstruktionen GmbH, or Porsche Design Corpora- tion, in Austria in 1946. Under this new umbrella the family began to plan for their future.

To Louise Pich turned one of the slender threads they were to follow toward that future. It was a letter from a young motorcycle racer who had just won the Italian Dirty race in Monza in Italy’s South Tyrol. He had fabricated his given name to make it more mellifluous to Italian ears. Carlo Abart.