



Volkswagen Beetle

A Brief History

In 1934, Ferdinand Porsche was commissioned to build a small, inexpensive car. His masterpiece, a beetle-shaped sedan, was called a Volkswagen (German for "people's car"). It is unfortunate that what years later would become the world's top selling car (21,529,464 units) would have its origins with one of the world's most evil men, Adolf Hitler.

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1933 - Dr. Ferdinand Porsche (1875-1951) draws first sketches of a simple little car that even the most common of citizens could own and enjoy on the autobahns.



1934 - Adolf Hitler commissions Porsche to develop the KdF-Wagen ("Kraft durch Freude" or "Strength through joy"), forerunner of what we know today as the Beetle.



1936 - At Berlin Auto Show, Hitler announces that Porsche will design "the People's Car;" Porsche promises Hitler he will produce three prototypes by year's end.



1937 - First road test on prototypes



1938 - Thirty prototypes (called Series 30) completed



1939 - May 28: Ceremony commemorates laying of cornerstone of VW factory at Wolfsburg (would later become largest auto factory under one roof)

1940 - KdF-Wagen appears at Berlin Auto Show. Germany goes to war.



1942 - German army vehicles Kubelwagens built; German amphibious army vehicles Schwimmwagens built



1944 - Allied bombs destroy more than 2/3 of Wolfsburg factory



1945 - May: World War II ends. British forces take control of Wolfsburg area. Porsche interrogated by Allied Forces for his alleged connections to Nazis. Porsche is cleared, but then imprisoned in France with son Ferry for two years.



1946 - 1,785 cars constructed, mostly by hand; used as army light transport



1947 - Wolfsburg produces 19,000 cars; exported to Holland. Two hand-made convertibles constructed.



1948 - 20,000th Beetle produced. Beetle modified into convertible. Henry Ford considers buying VW, but then declines; 24 years later, Beetle would out-sell Ford Model T.



1949 - January 17: First Beetle bought in USA by Ben Pon. Max Hoffman becomes first importer.

1950 - 100,000th Beetle produced. 1,000 convertibles produced. Porsche celebrates 75th birthday; finally visits Wolfsburg plant; cries when he sees Beetles on Autobahn... his dream becomes reality.

1951 - January 10: Ferdinand Porsche dies.

1952 - First official gathering of Beetle owners. Canada imports its first Beetle.

1955 - April: VW of America formed. 1,000,000th Beetle produced.

1953 - 500,000th Beetle produced. VW plant opens in Sao Paulo, Brasil.



1957 - 2,000,000th Beetle produced



1959 - 3,000,000th Beetle produced



1960 - 4,000,000th Beetle produced

1961 - 5,000,000th Beetle produced



1962 - VW of America headquarters at Englewood Cliffs, NJ, dedicated. 6,000,000th Beetle produced.



1963 - 7,000,000th Beetle produced



1964 - 8,000,000th and 9,000,000th Beetles produced



1965 - 10,000,000th Beetles produced

1966 - 11,000,000th and 12,000,000th Beetles produced

1970 - Last year convertible Beetle in standard format is available (only convertible Beetles in Super Beetle format are available). Super Beetle produced.



1972 - February 12: 15,007,034th Beetle rolls off assembly line, **breaks Ford Model T record for total production.**



1974 - June: 11,916,519th Beetle produced at Wolfsburg rolls off assembly line, signaling the end of Beetle production at Wolfsburg plant.

1975 - Last year for Super Beetle production

1977 - Last year for standard Beetle in USA; only Super Beetle convertibles remain.

1978 - At Emden VW plant in Germany, **last official German-built Beetle rolls off assembly line**

1981 - 20,000,000th Beetle produced (in Puebla, Mexico)



1998 - Production model of New Beetle unveiled at Detroit International Auto Show

1999 - New Beetle turbo available to US dealerships

2003 - July 30: **Last Beetle (21,529,464th!) rolls off assembly line** (in Puebla, Mexico)



JULY 30, 2003 - Today, the last original VW Beetle rolled off the line at the last remaining production facility in the world: Puebla, Mexico... some 65 years since its public launch in Nazi Germany, and an unprecedented 58-year production run since 1945.

The last car was immediately shipped off to the company's museum in Wolfsburg, Germany. In true Mexican fashion, a mariachi band serenaded the last car.

The last Beetle...

- Length: 13.32 ft (4 m)
- Width: 5.08 ft (1.6 m)
- Height: 4.92 ft (1.5 m)
- Length between axles: 7.87 ft (2.4 m)
- Weight: 1,786 pounds (810 kg)
- Engine: 4 cylinders, 1.6 L
- Transmission: Manual
- Brakes: front disc, back drum
- Passengers: Five
- Tank: 10.57 gallons (40 L)
- Color: Aquarius blue



Barényi, Ganz, and Porsche

Depending on whose account you read, the idea behind the Volkswagen Beetle can be attributed to three different people... Béla Barényi, Josef Ganz, or Ferdinand Porsche. Regardless of who actually came up with it, there is no doubting the role Nazi leader Adolf Hitler played in moving the little car from prototype to production.

Béla Barényi is credited by some as having conceived the basic design for the Volkswagen Beetle in 1925. Barényi was a Hungarian-Austrian engineer, regarded as the "father of passive safety in automobiles." He was born near Vienna, Austria in 1907. After mechanical and electrical engineering studies at the Vienna college, he was employed by Austria-Fiat, Steyr, and Adler (predecessor of Audi) automobile companies before joining Daimler-Benz in 1939. He is credited with developing the concept of the "crumple zone," the non-deformable passenger cell, the collapsible steering column, safer detachable hardtops, and more. After he died in 1997, Mercedes stated, "No one in the world has given more thought to car safety than this man."

Dutch journalist Paul Schilperoord reports in his book "The True Story of the Beetle" (in Dutch) that the Volkswagen Beetle was actually the brainchild of Jewish engineer **Josef Ganz**. According to Schilperoord, "In 1929, Josef Ganz started contacting German motorcycle manufacturers for collaboration to build a

Volkswagen prototype. This resulted in a first prototype built at Ardie in 1930 and a second one completed at Adler [predecessor of Audi] in May 1931, which was nicknamed the Maikäfer ('May-Beetle')." Schilperoord says Ganz was a student and wanted to design an inexpensive car. "He often crashed with his motorbike... What he really wanted was a car which was a lot safer, but just as affordable as a motorbike." Schilperoord says Ganz' first production model was called the Standard Superior. It appeared in Spring 1933 ("in May when the May beetles fly") at the Berlin Motor Show. Adolf Hitler, appointed German Chancellor in January 1933, opened the show and saw the Standard Superior. Hitler showed interest in the prototype. Such a car fit his plans to "motorize" Germany. Instead of ordering the Standard car factory to develop and produce the Jewish-designed car, Hitler looked for another German developer to take over. A sketch from the 1930s, allegedly made by Hitler himself, shows the outlines of a car resembling what we know today as the VW Beetle. The drawing is said to have been given to carmaker Daimler-Benz which apparently turned down the opportunity before it was given to Ferdinand Porsche. According to Schilperoord, Ganz later left Germany for Switzerland where he tried in vain to reclaim intellectual ownership of the Beetle. His name carefully erased from the history books by Hitler, Ganz moved to Australia in 1951 where he died in 1967.

It is also said that long before he seized power in 1933, Adolf Hitler envisioned an inexpensive car that the typical German family could own and enjoy. The car could be driven along the sweeping highways that he wanted to build throughout Germany. Once in power, Hitler assigned the task of designing the car to famed automaker **Ferdinand Porsche** who shared a similar vision for such a car. By 1938, designs were completed, and a factory site was selected in the town later to be known as Wolfsburg. Hitler announced the car's name: The KdF-Wagen ("Kraft durch Freude" or "Strength through joy"). The name never became widely used by the German public. It was more commonly called the "Volkswagen," or "people's car." As it turned out, no common German citizen ever owned a Volkswagen while the Nazis were in power. By the outbreak of war in 1939, only about 630 cars had been built, and nearly all those went to Hitler and his military officers. So much for "the people's car."

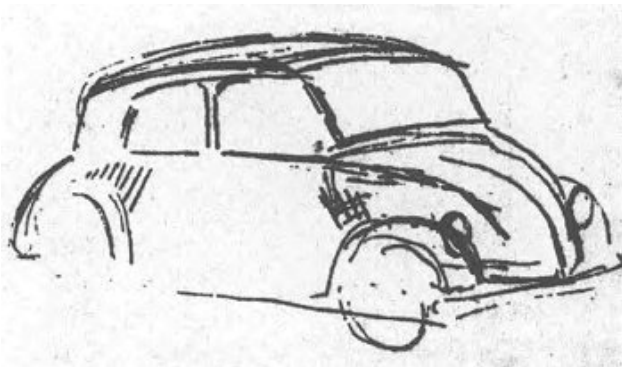
In 1945, the factory at Wolfsburg was located in the British occupation zone. It was placed under the control of British Army Major Ivan Hirst. There was no longer a need for military vehicles, so Hirst resuscitated the Volkswagen project and started filling an order from the British Army for 20,000 cars. The factory was later offered to major US car manufacturers but no interest was shown. Even Henry Ford turned it down. In 1949, Heinrich Nordhoff, a former senior manager with Opel, took over the project from Major Hirst. The little car would eventually become the largest selling automobile of all time, surpassing 21,000,000 units.



Béla Barényi is credited by some as having conceived the basic design for the Volkswagen Beetle in 1925.

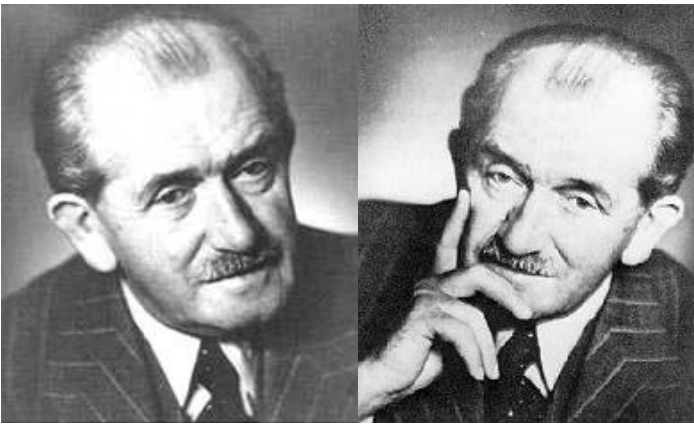


Josef Ganz riding atop an early Beetle in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1933.



A sketch reportedly drawn by Adolf Hitler and given to Ferdinand Porsche in 1934.

In 1934, Ferdinand Porsche (left) was commissioned to build a small, inexpensive car at the request of Adolph Hitler. His masterpiece, a beetle-shaped sedan that was called a Volkswagen (German for "people's car") debuted two years



later. The war delayed production of the vehicle until 1949 however. During the 1950s, the car became known as the VW Beetle, later earning the distinction of the best-selling car of all time. Wolfsburg-based Volkswagen has since gone on to manufacture more contemporary cars, though the world's fondness for the Beetle, or "Bug," still runs strong, strong enough to justify a 1998 "New Beetle" debut that was initially a huge hit in North America. Though New Beetle sales have leveled off, consumer interest in the company's more practical (but still fun-to-drive) cars, specifically the Jetta and Passat, has steadily increased.



A 1936 Nazi prototype of the KdF-Wagen ("Kraft durch Freude" or "Strength through joy").





Other Major Manufacturers...

Aston Martin - Founders Lionel Martin and Robert Bamford started Aston Martin in 1914 in a small West London workshop. Originally the marque was known chiefly in racing circles, eventually extending itself to gran touring vehicles, mostly under the DB nomenclature. Aston Martin has never been about quantity as much as quality; in its 88 years of existence, it has built little over 16,000 vehicles, each hand-crafted of the finest materials. Not as widely known in popular culture as Ferraris, Aston Martins are mostly associated with British entities such as royal families and James Bond; the DB5 starred in the 1964 Bond film *Goldfinger*. For 2002, the flagship Vanquish rounds out the lineup with its breath-taking looks and plentiful horsepower. After a series of bankruptcies and exchanges of ownership throughout its history, Aston Martin was acquired in 1987 by Ford Motor Company and is now a part of Ford's Premier Auto Group.

Audi - Audi Automobile Works entered the German car-manufacturing business in 1910 and remained independent until the Great Depression. Because Audi's founder, August Horch, had left a 10-year-old company bearing his own name, he chose a Latin form of his name, Audi, for his new company. Early vehicles included the 1921 14/50 model, which sported an aluminum cylinder block and four-wheel brakes, and the 1923 Type M, a six-cylinder vehicle that stayed in production until 1928. Audi joined with three other auto manufacturers in 1932 to form Auto Union. Audi, the only surviving nameplate from that union, is now a luxury division of Volkswagen that specializes in all-wheel-drive automobiles. The company's popularity in the U.S. has steadily increased since the release of the 1996 A4, and since then, Audi has expanded the breadth of its American lineup, adding more performance-oriented models and the allroad quattro, an all-terrain wagon.

BMW - Munich-based Bavarian Motor Works established itself in the early 1910s as an aircraft and motorcycle-engine manufacturer, but it wasn't until 1928 that production began on the first BMW car, the Dixi. BMW's best-known pre-World War II vehicle was the two-seat Type 328 roadster with its cutaway doors, while postwar BMWs, such as the 507, went on to win several racing, rallying and hillclimb victories. In 1974, BMW of North America was established and the yuppies of the 1970s and 1980s, who coveted both sports and luxury cars, became loyal Bimmer owners. As of the early 21st century, BMW has become the standard for performance and luxury in most of the "over \$30,000" segments. Wild popularity among

moneyed American buyers has prompted the company to expand the lineup to include several roadsters and the X5 SUV (with an X3 and X7 to follow).

Cadillac - Henry Martyn Leland, a former gunmaker and engineer for Ford and Oldsmobile, founded Cadillac in 1902. Specializing in precise craftsmanship and using standardized parts, Leland built a four-cylinder Cadillac 30 in 1909 and made his company successful enough that it was purchased by General Motors soon after. In 1915, Cadillac's powerful, smooth and reliable straight-eight engines set the standard for large ultra-luxury cars. A few decades later, pricey V12 and V16 engines were introduced, but fared poorly during the Depression years. The V8s, however, remained popular. Despite some periods of uncertainty, revisions and technical innovations over the years have ensured Cadillac's popularity and reputation as a luxury marque to this day.

Chevrolet - In 1911, after William C. Durant had been ousted from General Motors, he joined forces with Swiss-born racecar driver Louis Chevrolet to found the Chevrolet Motor Car Company. After the introduction of the first and only vehicle designed by Chevrolet, the Six Type C Classic, Durant gained complete control of the company. Early Chevs touted spacious interiors and reasonable prices. By 1915, Durant had made Chevrolet extremely profitable and had bought enough shares in GM that he was once again in control of it. Chevrolet quickly became another division of GM, earning honors as GM's largest volume division by the mid-1920s, and has kept that rank ever since.

Ferrari - Enzo Ferrari worked at Alfa Romeo through most of the 1920s before deciding to build his own racing and road cars. After years of modifying and building racing cars using Fiat and Alfa Romeo components, Ferrari set up shop in Maranello, Italy, and produced his own car in 1948, the Tipo ("Type") 166. As would be the Ferrari tradition for many years, its name was derived from the displacement of a single cylinder in cubic centimeters. As it was a V12, total displacement equaled just 2 liters. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, such greats as the 250 GT, 250 GTO and 275 GTB were produced, clothed in beautiful bodies that were penned by Pininfarina, the design house that Ferrari still uses to this day. Other memorable models followed throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, such as the 246 Dino, 365 GTB Daytona, 512BB, 308 GTS (the Magnum P.I. TV show car), Testarossa, 355 and 550 Maranello. Various roof styles were available on some of the models, including Berlinetta (coupe) and Spider (convertible). Other models of note include the F40, produced in 1988 to celebrate Ferrari's 40 years of building automobiles. Coincidentally, that was also the year Enzo died. Presently, Fiat owns Ferrari, and incredible sports cars, such as the 360 Modena, still roll out of Maranello.

Ford - Back in 1903, Henry Ford dreamed of building a car for the great multitude, and that's precisely what he did. Perhaps the best-known Ford to date is the immortal Model T of 1908-1927, which was bought by 16.5 million Americans during its 19-year life and was affordable enough for Ford's own factory workers to purchase. Based in Dearborn, Mich., the Ford Motor Company went international in 1911 and was known as one of the Big Three American automakers, along with GM and Chrysler. After buying Lincoln in 1920, offering a low-priced V8 engine in 1932, introducing Mercury in 1939 and having a brief disaster with the medium-priced Edsel in the late 1950s, Ford's expansion leveled out. Today, Ford sells both cars and trucks and is made up of three divisions: Ford, Lincoln-Mercury and the Premier Auto Group.

Honda - Honda Motor Company had its beginnings in 1947 as a Japanese motorcycle manufacturer established by Soichiro Honda. It wasn't until 1962 that the first Honda car, a two-seat convertible, was built, but the company's major automotive breakthrough came in 1972 with the introduction of the 1973 Civic. Four years later, the Civic had already sold a million units, and the company rolled out a slightly larger car that would become wildly popular, the Accord. Known for its reliability and with most being built in North America, Honda currently offers seven models, including a gas/electric hybrid called the Insight.

Lamborghini - Italian Ferruccio Lamborghini made his fortune building farm tractors and air conditioning units in the 1950s and early 1960s. As a car enthusiast, he drove the best sports cars of the day, including Ferraris. Somewhat disappointed with the Ferraris, he vowed to build a better car and introduced the first Lamborghini, the 350GT, in 1964. The car's name came from its engine size, a 3.5-liter four-cam V12. Then came the 400GT, which was produced until 1968. But it was the stunning mid-engined Miura, produced from 1966 to 1972, that catapulted Lamborghini into worldwide acclaim. Though Lamborghini made a number of other models, such as the four-seat Espada and various V8 sports cars, such as the Urraco, it was the mid-engined supercars that identified the marque. Cars like the wild Countach of the 1970s and 1980s and the Diablo of the 1990s were instantly recognizable as Lamborghinis, with their sinister styling by Marcello Gandini promising equally outlandish performance. Through the years, ownership of Lamborghini changed hands, with Chrysler taking the reins in 1987 and Volkswagen/Audi taking over in 1998. Though some may question the current German/Italian marriage, the product of this merger, the 200-mph Murcielago (the Diablo's successor), leaves no doubt as to its benefit.

Lincoln - The Lincoln Motor Car company was named after its founder's boyhood hero: the 16th U.S. president, Abraham Lincoln. Established in 1920 by Henry Martyn Leland, the company quickly fell into financial distress and was bought by Ford in 1922. Its rapid acceleration made the Lincoln car a favorite with both gangsters and police; even President Calvin Coolidge purchased one in 1924. Lincolns are still viewed as prestigious luxury cars known for their powerful engines, smooth rides and spacious interiors.

Mercedes-Benz - Two automotive manufacturers, Daimler and Benz (who both claimed to have invented the first automobile), joined forces in 1926, with each company bringing with it 40 years of motorcar building experience. Mercedes (named after a diplomat's daughter) had been the passenger vehicle line of the Daimler Motor Company from Bad Cannstatt, Germany. After the Daimler-Benz merger, the company renamed all of its products Mercedes-Benz. The marque has been a symbol of high-quality German engineering since its inception and has produced a number of classics such as the 500K of the 1930s and the 300SL Gullwing of the 1950s. In 1998, Daimler-Benz merged again, this time with America's Chrysler Corporation. The new company was renamed DaimlerChrysler, but the vehicle brands have remained separate.

Porsche - Dr. Ferdinand Porsche founded his automotive company in Austria in 1948, introducing two-seat sports cars based on the Volkswagen Beetle, before moving the company to Stuttgart, Germany, two years later. In the early 1950s,

Porsche began sending cars to the United States — the most popular import was the Type 356. The years that followed brought the famous 911, the unloved 914 and 924, the finely balanced 944/968 and the V8-powered 928. The Boxster, a mid-engined roadster, was introduced in 1997 and is currently offered alongside the legendary 911 series. With a celebrated reputation for quality and performance, the company has no problem getting top dollar for its distinctive sports cars.

Rolls-Royce - A partnership between Charles Stewart Rolls and Frederick Henry Royce, Rolls-Royce Ltd was officially formed in 1906 — the first car had a 10-horsepower two-cylinder engine and a sharply angled Grecian-style radiator that Rolls cars have worn proudly ever since. Larger, more powerful engines soon followed, as this was to be a luxury brand. The cars were sold in chassis form, with various coach-builders supplying bodies to satisfy customers' desires. The company had a short-lived, small-scale manufacturing operation in Springfield, Mass., from 1921 to 1931; otherwise, all Rolls vehicles have been hand-built in England since the beginning (the current Crewe facility opened in 1938). The cars developed a following with nobility the world over, and the various iterations of the Phantom (1925-1992) were the most prestigious Rolls offerings. Roll-Royce Ltd officially went bankrupt in 1970 due to problems with an engine contract, but a new public company, Rolls-Royce Motors Ltd, was created in 1971. The company was then purchased by the engineering group Vickers Ltd in 1980. Vickers decided to sell in 1998 and arranged for Rolls-Royce to be acquired by BMW; however, in a surprise move, Volkswagen outbid BMW. The two German automakers arranged for VW to relinquish control of the Rolls-Royce name on January 1, 2003, with VW keeping Bentley and the Crewe plant. As a result, BMW is building a new facility in Goodwood, England, to accommodate the distinguished British manufacturer.

Toyota - Toyota, a variation of Toyoda (the name of the founding family), evolved from a small textile company into Japan's largest automaker. Becoming interested in the auto industry in 1933, the Toyoda Automatic Loom Works Company launched both trucks and cars a few years later. In 1937, the auto-manufacturing division separated from the rest of the company and was named the Toyota Motor Company. Though Japanese-production vehicles were built during World War II, it wasn't until the late 1950s that Toyota cars came to U.S. shores. Today, Toyota sells an impressively broad range of trucks, cars and SUVs.

Summary adapted from an article on CNN.com, 7/30/03

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My thanks to those whose photos appear here, and to all whose writings helped build this summary of the Volkswagen Beetle.