

By
Thomas Schulz

Photos by
Markus Leser

Everyone approaches the Porsche mythos in his or her own way. The new Porsche Museum accommodates many different angles of approach. The visitors come from all over the world, and somewhere along the museum tour, the moment of amazement captures every one of them.

Chandan Viraktamath intently studies three rust-red bricks in an illuminated display case of the new Porsche Museum. These bricks illustrate the architectural metamorphosis of the Porsche plant in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen—built in 1938, destroyed in 1944, rebuilt after World War II. “Porsches are the best sports cars in the world,” says the young man from Bangalore, India, reverently as he views the bricks. “And so this is how it all began.” That’s one way of looking at it. He is accompanied by his compatriot, Prasanna Venkatesh. Both are studying automotive technology at a German technical university. Bricks aren’t part of their curriculum, but “Porsche is legendary,” says Venkatesh, “and we just wanted to know where and how the legend began.”

They came to the right place.

Arto Lehtinen, from Helsinki, Finland, is having the same experience. He is standing close to the 1948 silver Porsche 356 Roadster, license plate K 45-286. The K stands for the region Kärnten (Carinthia) in Austria. It was there, with a special state government permit, that Porsche conducted initial road trials of this first of all 356s, before the organization returned to Stuttgart. This story is now being translated into Finnish.

Guiding the visitor to a different level of awareness is what most museums do. But in the Porsche Museum, this transformation is especially striking as the visitor ascends an escalator facing the silvery glow of a very special bodyshell. Shiny and enchantingly attractive, the lean yet perfect silhouette of the Type 64 serves as the first contact between Porsche fan and Porsche history. And it occasionally happens that other visitors ascending the escalator have to shout energetically, “Keep moving!” A traffic jam of a most positive kind.

In the polyglot babble of voices, a tapestry of sounds with many enthusiastic echoes from around the world, one can nevertheless frequently identify comments in the Swabian dialect. And those are usually knowledgeable. “Well, with this building the architect created a monument for himself,” asserts Bernd Maier from ▶

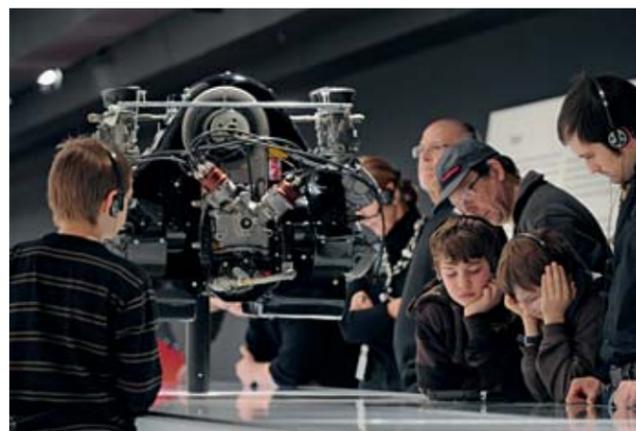
History

“Oh, these Cars!”



The Porsche Museum can be a place of quiet encounter, but just around the corner also the place where a grown man raises his arms toward the ceiling and shouts, “Brilliant, simply brilliant!” The outburst does not appear to bother the other visitors, but rather to inspire them. They’re obviously enjoying themselves.

Lost in the world of technology: There is more interest and attention here than in many classroom sessions



a place called Kirchheim unter Teck, “though this hall certainly could have been somewhat smaller.” Moments later he discovers the reason for the dimensions as he kneels in front of the deep-blue, cut-away model of a 911 that reveals the immense and highly detailed development work on the body, chassis, and electronics. Maier takes an experienced look at the electronics and pronounces, “The devil is in the details. I should know: I used to build airplanes at Bölkow.” He kneels in front of the model a while longer and, when he finally arises, nods appreciatively. In Swabian that’s considered the highest form of praise. But there are times when men actually lose self-control. Like the Porsche fan who simply lost it when he got his first look at a Carrera RS 2.7 Coupé: a grown man raised his arms toward the ceiling and shouted, “Brilliant, simply brilliant!”

No one can escape the magnetism of this museum’s educational exhibits, including and above all nonexperts. Like the young woman in the red coat, staring at one of the original 911s as though hypnotized. Ivana Sodková, a student of literature from Ostrava in the Czech Republic, is here on a discovery tour: “I just happened to drop in here by chance, though I actually came to Stuttgart to visit an art exhibit. But this incredible Porsche design fascinates me.”

The moment of amazement comes for every visitor. Including Martin Rannenber from Schwieberdingen, only thirteen and wheelchair-bound due to a muscular ailment. His escort, Florian Greif, rolls him into position in front of a Porsche 911 GT1, and both gaze at the racing car, engrossed. What brings you two here

today? “Our school is observing Sports Day,” says Martin. “There’s nothing for me to do.” But he smiles. A field trip to this sports-car mecca is a nice alternative.

Yaeko Heinisch and Megumi Kato from Nagoya, Japan, are somewhat more detached as they view the silver 718 RS Spyder built in 1960. “We’re mainly interested in the history of Porsche sports cars,” says Yaeko. However, their detachment quickly gives way to curiosity. They wonder why the Spyder has a windshield wiper even on the inside. Curiosity is welcome here: the information tablet in front of the Porsche provides additional facts. The ladies have made an excellent choice in selecting this special car, in which Joakim Bonnier and Hans Herrmann won the Targa Florio in Sicily in 1960. The two Japanese ladies study this information reverently for quite a while.

Tom and Sweder Mantel from Hilversum, the Netherlands, on the other hand, are openly enthusiastic. The two boys are looking over a phalanx of six Porsche 917s from the 1969–1973 period. What an era! Endurance race cars were making motorsport history. Like the 917/30 Spyder from 1973, which still ranks as the most powerful road race car ever, with 1,200 hp from twelve cylinders and a top speed of 385 km/h (240 mph). Tom and Sweder are all smiles. This visit was their idea. Their family—their parents, Lucienne and Arno, and their sister Jul—had planned to simply drive through Stuttgart on their way to Austria, their actual vacation destination. But they couldn’t pass up a stopover in Zuffenhausen. Just switch on the blinker and take the off-ramp to sports-car history.

Every person is unique—just like every sports car from Porsche. So it’s not surprising that personal stories sometimes emerge when people come in personal contact with the Porsche mythos. Like the story of Dora Niederer, who is taking a rest, seated on a cushioned spot overlooking the exhibit, and letting her eyes wander over the sports cars. “I worked from 1950 till 1956 as secretary to the former Porsche sales chief Walter Schmidt,” she relates, as she opens her private mental archive. “Back then all we had were the 356s. But I dealt with the visiting movie stars and other celebrities. I knew them all, and I know all the Porsches.” Dora Niederer is gazing at the cars, but her mind takes her back to her years with Porsche. She is 91, and has been living in Zuffenhausen forever and a day. Her judgment about the new museum is as simple as it is incontrovertible: “Oh, these cars!”

There’s no retirement age for fascination: Bernd Maier (foreground), studying a cut-away model

