

# PORSCHE PANORAMA

June 1980





*Sterling silver 356 occupies a place of honor in Hoffman's Palm Beach home. It was a gift from Ferry Porsche in honor of Hoffman's racing success in 1952.*

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# A Conversation with **MAX HOFFMAN**

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*Maximilian E. Hoffman pioneered the marketing of Porsches in America. He did the same for Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Volkswagen, Alfa Romeo, Lancia, Fiat, Jaguar, and a host of lesser European makes. From his Frank Lloyd Wright designed showroom on Park Avenue in New York, Hoffman introduced the United States to exotic foreign automobiles and at the same time persuaded European manufacturers to design special models and options for the American market. The going was not always easy on either side of the Atlantic, but with the patience and persistence of a skilled negotiator and single-minded determination, Hoffman prevailed. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that Max Hoffman is the father of the imported car in America.*

*As Karl Ludvigsen points out in his excellent 1972*

*biography of Hoffman for Automobile Quarterly, "About Max Edwin Hoffman there is no shortage of opinions, of points of view. But no one says that he is not interesting. So harsh and intense is the concentrated blue light that Hoffman focuses on his affairs that many cannot stand the glare. Such men are respected, but not loved, and so it is with Max Hoffman."*

*Hoffman was born near Vienna, Austria, on November 12, 1904, the son of a wealthy bicycle factory owner. From childhood on he was surrounded by motorcycles and automobiles, racing both with some success as a young man. As he says, he has seen the entire development of the automobile. There can be no doubt that he has been a major influence in the postwar phase of that development.*

*He immigrated to America in 1941 with the idea of selling European cars in the United States. But by December, America was at war and the prospects of selling imported cars here were bleak. Hoffman survived during the war years by manufacturing metalized plastic costume jewelry, samples of which he still keeps in a small velvet-lined box. By 1947, Hoffman had returned to his real love, automobiles. He opened his showroom on Park Avenue with only one car on the floor, a Delahaye. Soon he was importing a wide variety of foreign autos to meet the growing appetite of car-conscious Americans.*

*In the fall of 1950, Hoffman took delivery of the first two Porsches to arrive in the United States. With these 1100 cc coupes, he laid the foundation of Porsche's success in this country. In the years to come, he was to regularly absorb as much as seventy percent of Porsche's annual output.*

*It is difficult to overstate the influence that Max Hoffman had on the development of Porsche. He is responsible for the creation of the America roadster. Some of Porsche's earliest racing successes in the U.S. were scored by Hoffman himself. It was his initiative that gave birth to perhaps the best loved of all Porsche models, the Speedster. On his suggestion, the Porsche crest was designed. It was Max Hoffman's idea to give the name "Spyder" to Porsche's 550 series of sports racers. His association with the Porsche family was close and personal. When Professor Porsche died in 1951, Ferry Porsche gave to Hoffman the binoculars that the Professor used at every race. They remain a treasured keepsake.*

*In 1959, Porsche of America Corporation was formed and Hoffman ceased national representation of Porsche, although he continued as importer east of the Mississippi for five more years. By 1964 when the Hoffman era ended, the German firm was fully established and successful in the United States. Hoffman's pioneering efforts for Porsche not only paved the way for the great success that Porsche now enjoys, but it is possible that without the skilled and aggressive talents of Max Hoffman, the tiny Stuttgart manufacturer might have faced many more difficulties in becoming established in America.*

*In the mid-sixties, Hoffman relinquished representation of all other European manufacturers to concentrate his energies on BMW. He is now retired and divides his time among homes in Palm Beach, Florida, Los Angeles, California, and his villa at Tegernsee in Bavaria.*

*In February, PANORAMA had the rare opportunity to interview Max Hoffman at his home in Palm Beach. We found him courtly and soft-spoken, a man to whom the aura of power, past and present, clings. At 75, his enthusiasm for automobiles is undiminished. You'll find the following interview a fascinating look at some of the early history of Porsche through the eyes of the man who put Porsche on the United States map.—BJT*

BJT: Tell us how you came to know Porsche. You had some contact with Porsche before you heard about the car.

Hoffman: I had before the war with Anton Piëch, the son-in-law of Professor Porsche. He was a lawyer in Vienna. He did some work for me before the war. I knew the family Porsche by name, you know, but I didn't have any connection with Porsche. I met Mr. Porsche after the war.

A Swiss journalist, Max Troesch, came to America. He could travel as much as he wanted. Germans couldn't travel to America in those days; they couldn't get a visa. Mr. Troesch came to New York and he showed me pictures of the Porsche car. He asked me how I liked the car and if I would be interested in it. I told him I liked it very much, as much as I could see, and that I was very interested. He went back and talked to Mr. Porsche, Mr. Porsche wrote me a letter and so the whole thing started.

First he sent me two cars over. Of these two cars, I gave one to Briggs Cunningham and the other one I drove to Watkins Glen. Briggs Cunningham lent the car at Watkins Glen to Sam Collier's wife. So, Mrs. Collier was in one car and Bedford Davie and I were in the other. We drove around in the mountains near Watkins Glen until somebody came to us and told us that Sam Collier had had an accident. We went back immediately and found that he was dead. Karl Ludvigsen writes that Briggs Cunningham made a present of the car to Mrs. Collier, which is not true. He lent her the car for a day so that she could drive around.

There is something else which is not true. I told somebody that the Porsche firm was very nice and sent some spare parts with the first two cars. These spare parts were cylinder gaskets and a few little things valued perhaps between five and ten dollars. Ludvigsen wrote in the book that they sent all the spare parts for the cars and that I sold the spare parts. This is absolutely untrue. They sent for the first two cars between five and ten dollars worth of spare parts—a few little things, a few gaskets and such.

BJT: The first cars arrived in the fall of 1950. That same fall you went to the Paris Salon. Is that the first time you met Professor Porsche?

Hoffman: Yes, I met Professor Porsche, his secretary Ghislaine Kaes, and Professor Prinzing.

BJT: What was your impression of Professor Porsche?

Hoffman: A very good one. He was a very lovely nice person. A very kind person. A strong man.

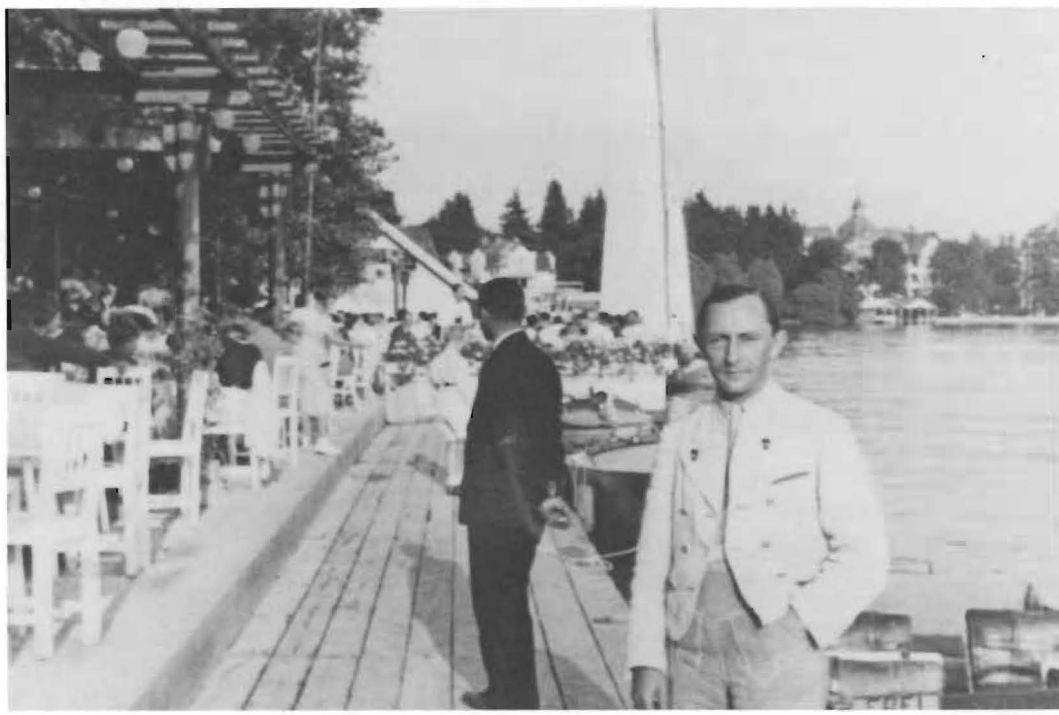
BJT: I've read that after he came home from France after the war, he was never very strong again.

Hoffman: I am sure that through his capture in France he suffered, but I had the impression of a very fine, kind and strong man who knew what he wanted.

BJT: Prinzing was his general manager?

Hoffman: Yes, he was a school friend of Ferry Porsche. He was general manager, a very good manager.

BJT: Was there anything about those first two cars



that you felt should be improved or changed?

Hoffman: No, only the carburetion was not in order. When I came to Paris, I told that to Professor Porsche. His car, in which Mr. Kaes had driven him from Stuttgart to Paris, had the same trouble. The carburetion was out of order exactly as in my car. When you adjusted it, it went out of order immediately. The main factory for Solex is in Paris and Mr. Kaes went with Professor Porsche's car to the Solex people. They fixed it and Professor offered me the car to drive. I drove it from the Hotel George V to the Arch of Triumph with Ghislaine Kaes and the carburetion was out of order again. I cannot tell you what the trouble was, but my mechanics here fooled around too and couldn't straighten it out.

BJT: This was with the 1100 cc car?

Hoffman: It was with the first two cars, but by additional deliveries, we had no more carburetion troubles.

BJT: When did the next cars come?

Hoffman: They came very fast, one after the other. I liked the car very much, but the car was expensive and unknown and in the beginning I had to work very hard to convince the buyers. The Porsche with a little four cylinder, air-cooled engine cost as much as the 3.5 liter, six cylinder double overhead cam Jaguar sports car and for a private buyer, the Jaguar was a better buy. But for me, or for anybody who knew these two sports cars, he would have to prefer the Porsche. I told all my friends how good the car was. I myself demonstrated the Porsches on Park Avenue.

The police allowed me to do that. I liked the car very, very much. I think the car, after the first year, was superior to any other car. It was a lovely automobile.

BJT: Compared to the Jaguar, for example, which you also sold, what did you like better about the Porsche?

Hoffman: The handling, the finish and the workmanship. The car's handling was excellent.

BJT: At this time, you were also racing cars. Did you race only Porsches or other cars as well?

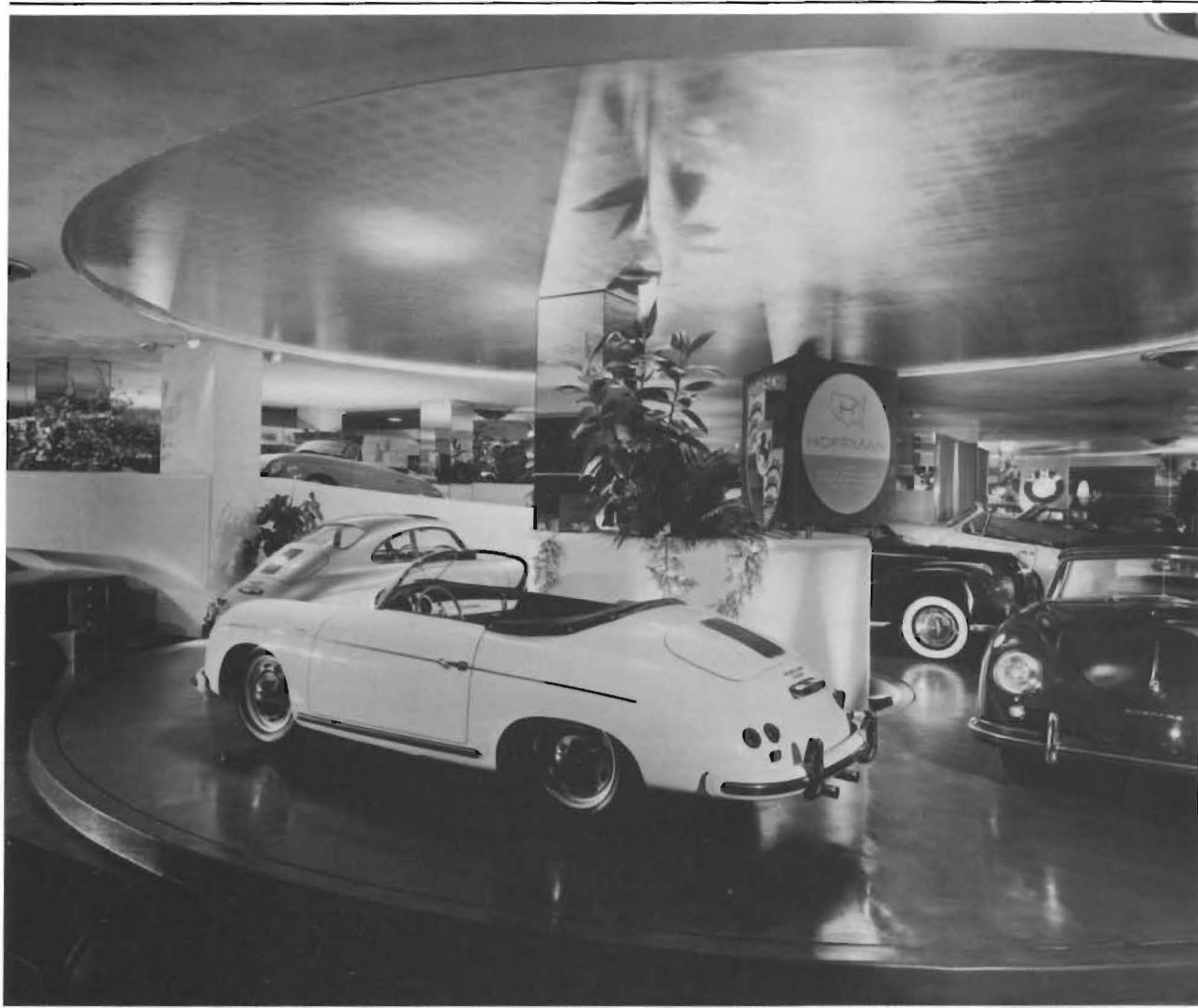
Hoffman: Before, I was racing other cars, but when I had the Porsches, I was racing only Porsches. I raced a Porsche at the Mount Equinox Hillclimb in 1951. On the last two miles or so of the course was a lot of snow. I was very fast. When Briggs Cunningham saw the time that I had driven, he said it was impossible, that there must have been a mistake. Cunningham was strong enough to talk the organizers into requiring me to drive again.

BJT: Was this one of the Gmünd racing cars?

Hoffman: No, it was a production car, a cabriolet. I was very fast with the car. I had to drive a second time, and I drove the same time again.

BJT: Tell us how the early business developed into the fifties. Production gradually grew because the factory was able to supply cars. Is that correct?

Hoffman: Yes, and I'll tell you something. Porsche couldn't sell many cars immediately in Europe either. The car was expensive. It built up business slowly. Many Europeans aristocrats and gentlemen were racing the car in Europe. The normal Porsche car was



*Stunning architectural detail highlighted the Park Avenue Porsche BMW showroom, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.*

very nice for racing at this time. It was so much more sportive than any other automobile. I could go with a Porsche much faster than with the 3.5 liter, six cylinder Jaguar.

BJT: Then, during the winter of 1951-52, you brought over the three aluminum Le Mans racing cars, the 356 SL coupes.

Hoffman: Yes.

BJT: Did you drive one of those cars yourself?

Hoffman: No, I sold the three cars. I sold one to Karl Brocken, a second one to Commander Jack Rutherford, and the third to a man in Long Island whose name I forget. I myself had the Glöckler Porsche at this time. We were racing at Bridgehampton and that morning I had breakfast with Brocken and the other man. The Le Mans cars were very fast, you know, so I asked him to let me pass if I should be faster with the Glöckler. He said that certainly they would let me pass. When the race started, I was on the last row. In the first lap, I had already caught up with

the other Porsches, including Karl Brocken, who lives here in Palm Beach now, who is a good friend of mine, and who promised me in the morning that if I could pass him, he would let me pass. When I tried to pass him on the left side, he went to the left. He saw me in the mirror. When I went to the right side to pass him, he went to the right. I couldn't pass him. The School House corner is a big turn and there I passed him. Then there is a bridge which you must go up and then come down. When you come fast, you jump in the air for fifty yards or so. A long time you are in the air. I came across the bridge very fast and he did the same behind me, but his car rolled. Nothing happened to him, thank God, but this was the punishment for his not letting me pass.

BJT: During this time, your big seller was the Jaguar.

Hoffman: Yes, I had the Jaguar agency at the same time and Jaguar was a big money maker for me. When the XK-120 came out, I had the one prototype



and we took orders. Delivery time was one year. The car was inexpensive, \$3500, but I still made good money on this car, and I couldn't take retail orders fast enough. From morning til night people were standing in line to give me \$1000 deposits and were willing to wait a year to get the car. But when delivery started, I wasn't satisfied with the quality of the car and with its roadholding and riding qualities.

I spoke with Mr. Lyons, who was the owner of Jaguar, and I suggested that I should bring over the Porsche people and that they should make him a design. He wasn't very enthusiastic about it. The English were very anti-German at this time and he generally didn't like German people. Also I talked with Mr. Porsche. Porsche wasn't very enthusiastic either. But after I persuaded Mr. Lyons to agree to talk to the Porsche people, I talked again with Mr. Porsche. I had a big influence with Porsche at this time and he sent his chief engineer, Mr. Rabe, and the body designer, Mr. Komenda, with me to Lyons.

Mr. Lyons had a prototype car and he showed it to us. Mr. Lyons asked Mr. Komenda what he thought about the prototype and Mr. Komenda answered that he couldn't make anything better than this himself. So we didn't accomplish anything, but if

Lyons had taken a Porsche design at this time, he would have had a good Jaguar. I wasn't thinking of making a design anything like the present Porsche, but something else, with a six cylinder engine in front, but with some good design.

BJT: Porsche was already at that time looking for outside design work?

Hoffman: No, not too much. It was my idea. I took the engineers over with the agreement of Mr. Porsche, but it didn't accomplish anything. If Lyons would have done it, it would have been good and he needed a good design.

BJT: You were really trying to help Porsche at that time, weren't you? Porsche needed money to build a factory and that's when you negotiated the contract with Studebaker.

Hoffman: It's not a question of wanting to help Porsche. I was thinking that they are able people. I brought the Porsche people together with the Studebaker people. Mr. Hutchinson, vice president of Studebaker and president of Studebaker exports, was a friend of mine. I had the idea to make an American Volkswagen and I talked with Hutchinson about it. I told Hutchinson that the Studebaker business at the moment was very good because after the war there

*At the wheel of the Glöckler-Porsche at Bridgehampton in 1952.*





*At Palm Beach Shores in December, 1951, Hoffman and the Glöckler ran away from the field easily, but were halted by valve gear trouble.*

was a shortage of automobiles, but in the future Studebaker, as a small factory, would have a hard time competing with identical models against the Big Three factories, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. I told Hutchinson that he needed to produce something different from the Big Three, and I suggested an American Volkswagen. Hutchinson talked with the president of Studebaker about it. He came back to me and said that Studebaker was willing to talk with Porsche.

I got in touch with Mr. Porsche and he came over with his five or six top engineers. We went to Studebaker. He brought a four seater Porsche prototype along, which I had no idea of before. I was very surprised when I saw the car. Mr. Porsche thought it was the right thing for the Studebaker people perhaps, a four seater Porsche. I demonstrated this car to Studebaker. The suspension wasn't properly adjusted. The body was hitting on the rear axle and when I drove it on a good road, with the president and vice president of Studebaker in the rear seats, it thumped like a machine gun. I was sure the deal was off. But the Studebaker people had not much of an idea about a European car and they didn't recognize the problem. We went back and had lunch, and in the afternoon we made a contract.

I don't want to say that I understand so much about automobiles, but I am from childhood on in this

business. My father was in this business. My father had a bicycle factory and dealt with motorcycles and automobiles and I didn't see anything else but bicycles, motorcycles and automobiles from childhood on. I grew up with it. I saw the whole development of the automobile.

My father was one of the first automobile owners in Austria. He had many different automobiles, including a De Dion Bouton Avant-Train. In English, that translates to mean a front carriage. The De Dion Bouton was a French car that had a one cylinder engine on the rear axle. This engine had one automatic intake valve and one normal exhaust valve and had no ignition. It had a ball that you had to heat up first, in Germany it was called a gluekopfzuehdung, a heated ball which made the ignition.

That was one of the first automobiles and it was unusual looking. It had four wheels, a tubular frame, and between the rear axle and the front axle was a driver's seat like a motorcycle, with a saddle like a motorcycle. In front of the driver was a two passenger seat made out of wicker or rattan so that it was very light.

Or, for instance, my first motorcycle. The exhaust valve was driven, but the intake valve was automatic through suction and a very soft spring. The carburetion was regulated by a level on the gas tank. This was perhaps 1919, immediately after the first war. They

made this motorcycle for me in our shop. They took a Swiss pre-war one cylinder motorcycle engine and made me the frame with the gas tank and the handlebar and so forth. And I had pedals. When I came to a hill, I had to help. There was no gearbox; the drive was through a belt direct from the engine to the rear wheel.

BJT: It is generally accepted that it was your initiative that gave birth to the Porsche Speedster, because you felt that in the United States there was a need for a stripped, lower cost Porsche to compete with the Austin Healey 100, TR-2 and MG.

Hoffman: Sales for all cars had slowed down at this time. Today, the European car business is so good that nobody can understand what we went through at times.

BJT: So, at that point, your idea was to build a Porsche at a price under \$3000 to get more people involved.

Hoffman: Yes. We didn't want to let this Porsche business drop. We wanted to sell. Porsche didn't make money on this car, neither did I. We were so tight on money that we had to charge for the heater separately. Porsche needed business. They couldn't exist without business. I needed business, but we didn't make money on that car. Don't forget one thing: Porsche was a very small factory and they couldn't produce cheaply.

BJT: The Speedster was a very big success. Once it was established, why did it go out?

Hoffman: Why was the Speedster no longer produced? There was no necessity.

BJT: It just didn't sell well?

Hoffman: No, there was just no necessity. Look here, if you don't make money on something, you don't continue. And the other models were selling very well.

BJT: You are saying that Speedster production wound down because eventually other Porsche sales went up and it was no longer necessary to produce this car that was not earning any money.

Hoffman: Yes.

BJT: There is a story that the Porsche crest that is so familiar to us today was designed by Ferry Porsche on the back of a napkin during a lunch conversation with you. Did that actually happen?

Hoffman: Yes. I knew that every automobile firm had a crest. Porsche didn't have one. They had only the name Porsche. One day I said to Mr. Porsche that we should have a crest. He asked why. I said that everybody has a crest, we should have a crest too. He said, "You think so?" I said, "Yes." And so, we made a crest.

BJT: I have also read that you are responsible for the name "Spyder" being attached to the Type 550 sports racers from Porsche.

Hoffman: Yes, it's true. Let me tell you something. I cannot tell you all that I did, but I did a lot for Porsche. I was very enthusiastic. I was very friendly with Mr. Porsche and his family, and in those days I



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had some influence. I know tens of thousands of people, but I don't know anyone nicer than Dr. Porsche and Mrs. Porsche.

BJT: Were you aware in those days of Porsche Club, which was just getting started in 1955?

Hoffman: I never took care of the Porsche Club. I didn't have time. I wasn't in the Mercedes Club or the BMW Club either. I didn't have time, but I like sports car clubs very much and raced with many of them.

BJT: Today you can look at this club, which now has more than 15,000 members and know that you had everything to do with the fact that it exists.

Hoffman: Look here, I had four big loves. This is honest, what I tell you. My first big love was Amilcar. When I was young, eighteen or twenty years old, I bought my first Amilcar. I bought it myself. My father was well off and I could do what I wanted, so I bought an Amilcar. It was a two seater sports car. It was not fast by today's standards, having a top speed of only 100 kph, but at that time 100 kph was like 200 kph is today. It was very fast in its time. I had many Amilcars. I raced it. Grofri built this car under license in Austria and I also raced for the factory with super-charged models. It was one of the finest cars of its time, a lovely automobile.

My second big love was the Porsche. My third big love was the Mercedes, and my fourth big love was the BMW. These four cars I like from all cars best. All four are really extremely fine cars and without competition.

BJT: May I ask you about some of the mementos on your desk? This is an etched glass representation of

the BMW 507. Is there a story behind it?

Hoffman: Yes, you see the BMW 507 was my idea. It was absolutely my idea and we made the drawings in New York. I cannot draw, so I asked Count Goertz, a friend of mine, to make the drawings for me. He made the drawings for me, but the idea was mine. He made the drawings for an open two seater, a stripped open two seater for sports car racing, a two seater coupe and for a four seater coupe.

The little Guilletta roadster from Alfa Romeo was also made on my account. They previously made a coupe, the Sprint Veloce. At the time, I had Mercedes and didn't want anything else. But an Alfa Romeo director came three times to my hotel in Stuttgart asking me to take over the Alfa Romeo agency again. I wasn't interested, but he wouldn't give up and he talked me into visiting the factory in Milan. Finally I had an appointment with the Caracciolas in Lugano, which is near Milan, and I agreed to go. They showed me the Sprint Veloce coupe and I told them it was not the right model for the American market. I wanted an open two seater and only under these circumstances would I be interested again in the agency. The Alfa people were of the opinion that they couldn't sell an open car in Italy because of the heat. Then they came to America and said that if I would take the agency, they would build an open two seater.

They made three prototypes from three different body factories and sent them to New York. All three were unacceptable. I told them exactly what I wanted and they then made one prototype by Farina and it was not right either. The radiator grill was as high as

*Four versions of the BMW 507 drawn for Hoffman by Albrecht Goertz.*



on the coupe. The dashboard was flat like an Austin Healey. I changed the prototype with the technical general manager at Alfa, Mr. Hruschka. I asked for larger instruments. We lowered the front. I insisted on winding windows, which no other sports car at this time had. Every roadster had celluloid side curtains before then. With Mr. Hruschka's help, everything was changed like I wanted, so the Giulietta was a good looking sports car.

BJT: So the Giulietta, the BMW 507 and the Porsche Speedster are all basically ideas of yours.

Hoffman: Yes. I was also responsible for the creation and production of the Mercedes 190 and 300 SL.

BJT: Tell us about the silver Porsche on your desk. The inscription reads, "M. E. Hoffman, in appreciation of his big successes in the racing season 1952," followed by the signature of Ferry Porsche.

Hoffman: After the 1952 racing season, Mr. Porsche gave a party outside of Stuttgart for myself and for Count Giovanni Lurani. Mr. and Mrs. Porsche were there and a few other people. Lurani and I were given these two handmade silver Porsches, made by a jeweler in Stuttgart. I was very successful that year with Porsche, winning perhaps ten races. Because I was so successful, Mr. Porsche gave me this car and the second car was given to Lurani for his winning the Mille Miglia in 1952. ☺



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*In February, PANORAMA had the rare opportunity to interview Max Hoffman at his home in Palm Beach. We found him courtly and soft-spoken, a man to whom the aura of power, past and present, clings. At 75, his enthusiasm for automobiles is undiminished. You'll find the following interview a fascinating look at some of the early history of Porsche through the eyes of the man who put Porsche on the United States map.—BJT*

BJT: Tell us how you came to know Porsche. You had some contact with Porsche before you heard about the car.

Hoffman: I had before the war with Anton Piëch, the son-in-law of Professor Porsche. He was a lawyer in Vienna. He did some work for me before the war. I knew the family Porsche by name, you know, but I didn't have any connection with Porsche. I met Mr. Porsche after the war.

A Swiss journalist, Max Troesch, came to America. He could travel as much as he wanted. Germans couldn't travel to America in those days; they couldn't get a visa. Mr. Troesch came to New York and he showed me pictures of the Porsche car. He asked me how I liked the car and if I would be interested in it. I told him I liked it very much, as much as I could see, and that I was very interested. He went back and talked to Mr. Porsche, Mr. Porsche wrote me a letter and so the whole thing started.

First he sent me two cars over. Of these two cars, I gave one to Briggs Cunningham and the other one I drove to Watkins Glen. Briggs Cunningham lent the car at Watkins Glen to Sam Collier's wife. So, Mrs. Collier was in one car and Bedford Davie and I were in the other. We drove around in the mountains near Watkins Glen until somebody came to us and told us that Sam Collier had had an accident. We went back immediately and found that he was dead. Karl Ludvigsen writes that Briggs Cunningham made a present of the car to Mrs. Collier, which is not true. He lent her the car for a day so that she could drive around.

There is something else which is not true. I told somebody that the Porsche firm was very nice and sent some spare parts with the first two cars. These spare parts were cylinder gaskets and a few little things valued perhaps between five and ten dollars. Ludvigsen wrote in the book that they sent all the spare parts for the cars and that I sold the spare parts. This is absolutely untrue. They sent for the first two cars between five and ten dollars worth of spare parts—a few little things, a few gaskets and such.

BJT: The first cars arrived in the fall of 1950. That same fall you went to the Paris Salon. Is that the first time you met Professor Porsche?

Hoffman: Yes, I met Professor Porsche, his secretary Ghislaine Kaes, and Professor Prinzing.

BJT: What was your impression of Professor Porsche?

Hoffman: A very good one. He was a very lovely nice person. A very kind person. A strong man.

BJT: I've read that after he came home from France after the war, he was never very strong again.

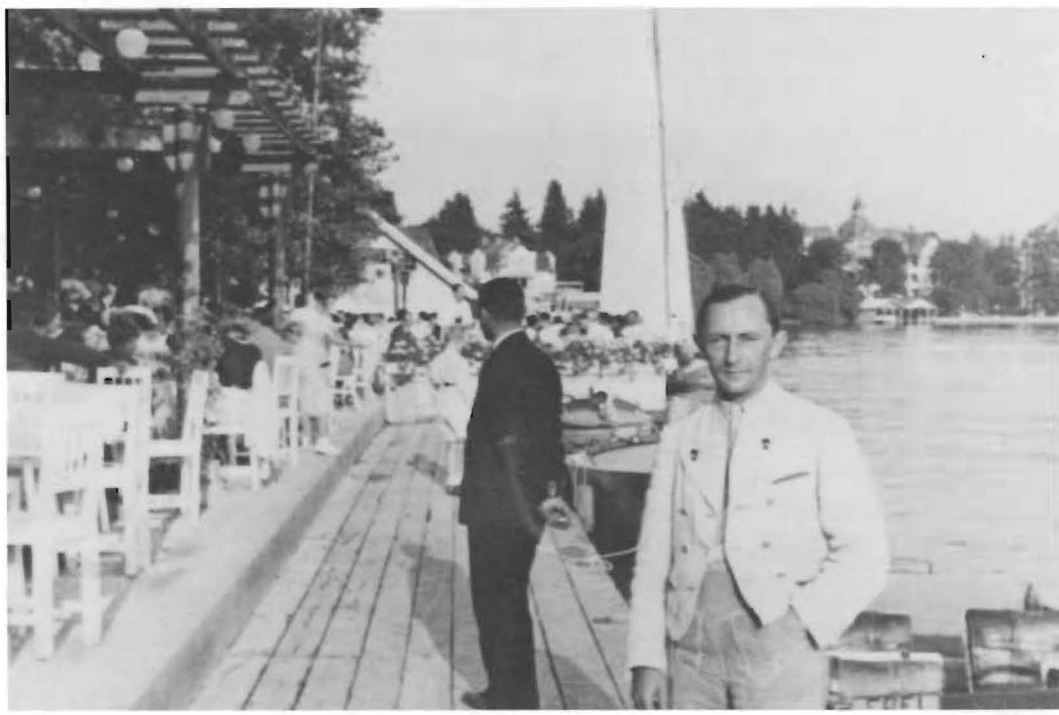
Hoffman: I am sure that through his capture in France he suffered, but I had the impression of a very fine, kind and strong man who knew what he wanted.

BJT: Prinzing was his general manager?

Hoffman: Yes, he was a school friend of Ferry Porsche. He was general manager, a very good manager.

BJT: Was there anything about those first two cars





that you felt should be improved or changed?

Hoffman: No, only the carburetion was not in order. When I came to Paris, I told that to Professor Porsche. His car, in which Mr. Kaes had driven him from Stuttgart to Paris, had the same trouble. The carburetion was out of order exactly as in my car. When you adjusted it, it went out of order immediately. The main factory for Solex is in Paris and Mr. Kaes went with Professor Porsche's car to the Solex people. They fixed it and Professor offered me the car to drive. I drove it from the Hotel George V to the Arch of Triumph with Ghislaine Kaes and the carburetion was out of order again. I cannot tell you what the trouble was, but my mechanics here fooled around too and couldn't straighten it out.

BJT: This was with the 1100 cc car?

Hoffman: It was with the first two cars, but by additional deliveries, we had no more carburetion troubles.

BJT: When did the next cars come?

Hoffman: They came very fast, one after the other. I liked the car very much, but the car was expensive and unknown and in the beginning I had to work very hard to convince the buyers. The Porsche with a little four cylinder, air-cooled engine cost as much as the 3.5 liter, six cylinder double overhead cam Jaguar sports car and for a private buyer, the Jaguar was a better buy. But for me, or for anybody who knew these two sports cars, he would have to prefer the Porsche. I told all my friends how good the car was. I myself demonstrated the Porsches on Park Avenue.

The police allowed me to do that. I liked the car very, very much. I think the car, after the first year, was superior to any other car. It was a lovely automobile.

BJT: Compared to the Jaguar, for example, which you also sold, what did you like better about the Porsche?

Hoffman: The handling, the finish and the workmanship. The car's handling was excellent.

BJT: At this time, you were also racing cars. Did you race only Porsches or other cars as well?

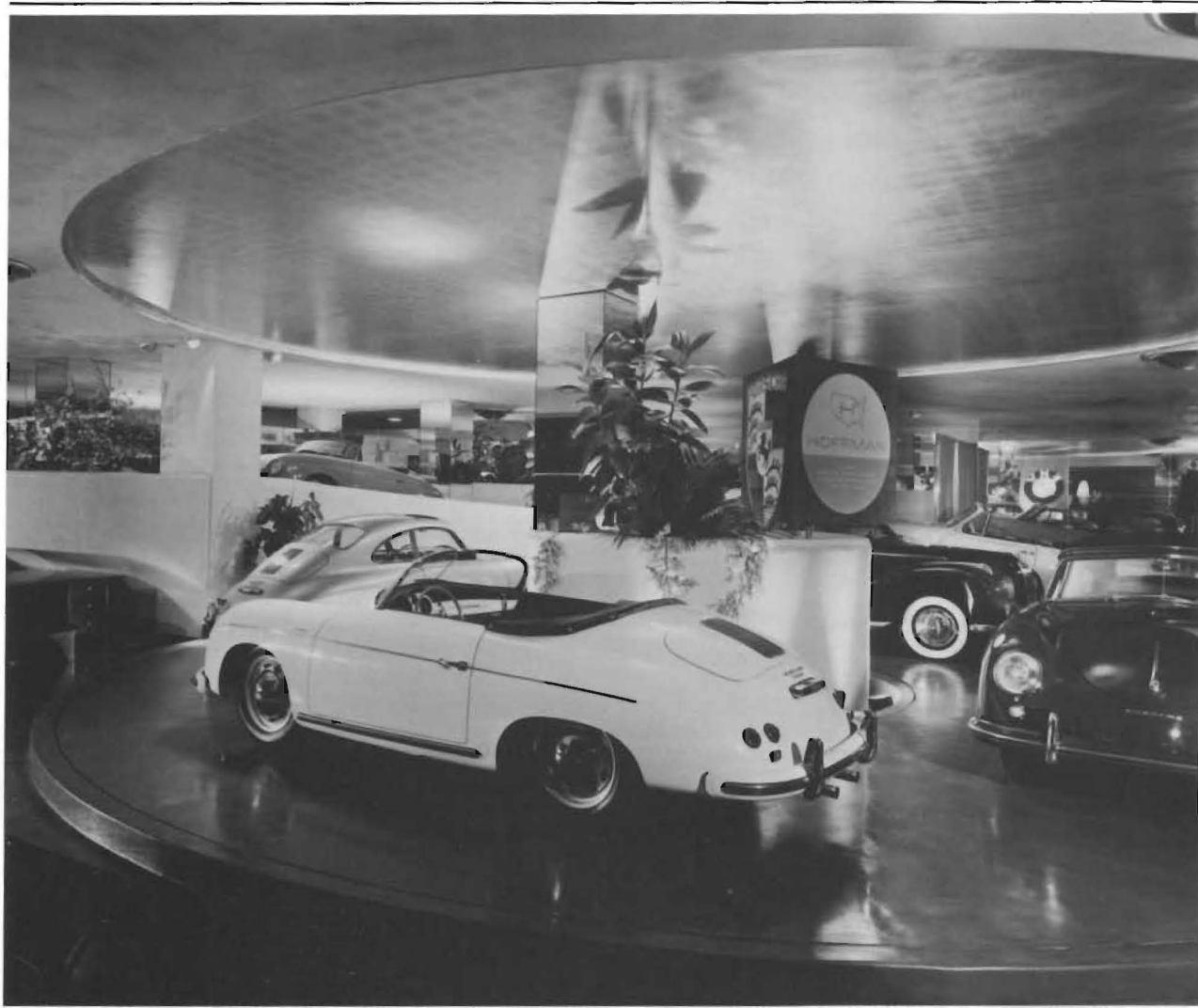
Hoffman: Before, I was racing other cars, but when I had the Porsches, I was racing only Porsches. I raced a Porsche at the Mount Equinox Hillclimb in 1951. On the last two miles or so of the course was a lot of snow. I was very fast. When Briggs Cunningham saw the time that I had driven, he said it was impossible, that there must have been a mistake. Cunningham was strong enough to talk the organizers into requiring me to drive again.

BJT: Was this one of the Gmünd racing cars?

Hoffman: No, it was a production car, a cabriolet. I was very fast with the car. I had to drive a second time, and I drove the same time again.

BJT: Tell us how the early business developed into the fifties. Production gradually grew because the factory was able to supply cars. Is that correct?

Hoffman: Yes, and I'll tell you something. Porsche couldn't sell many cars immediately in Europe either. The car was expensive. It built up business slowly. Many Europeans aristocrats and gentlemen were racing the car in Europe. The normal Porsche car was



*Stunning architectural detail highlighted the Park Avenue Porsche BMW showroom, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.*

very nice for racing at this time. It was so much more sportive than any other automobile. I could go with a Porsche much faster than with the 3.5 liter, six cylinder Jaguar.

BJT: Then, during the winter of 1951-52, you brought over the three aluminum Le Mans racing cars, the 356 SL coupes.

Hoffman: Yes.

BJT: Did you drive one of those cars yourself?

Hoffman: No, I sold the three cars. I sold one to Karl Brocken, a second one to Commander Jack Rutherford, and the third to a man in Long Island whose name I forget. I myself had the Glöckler Porsche at this time. We were racing at Bridgehampton and that morning I had breakfast with Brocken and the other man. The Le Mans cars were very fast, you know, so I asked him to let me pass if I should be faster with the Glöckler. He said that certainly they would let me pass. When the race started, I was on the last row. In the first lap, I had already caught up with

the other Porsches, including Karl Brocken, who lives here in Palm Beach now, who is a good friend of mine, and who promised me in the morning that if I could pass him, he would let me pass. When I tried to pass him on the left side, he went to the left. He saw me in the mirror. When I went to the right side to pass him, he went to the right. I couldn't pass him. The School House corner is a big turn and there I passed him. Then there is a bridge which you must go up and then come down. When you come fast, you jump in the air for fifty yards or so. A long time you are in the air. I came across the bridge very fast and he did the same behind me, but his car rolled. Nothing happened to him, thank God, but this was the punishment for his not letting me pass.

BJT: During this time, your big seller was the Jaguar.

Hoffman: Yes, I had the Jaguar agency at the same time and Jaguar was a big money maker for me. When the XK-120 came out, I had the one prototype

and we took orders. Delivery time was one year. The car was inexpensive, \$3500, but I still made good money on this car, and I couldn't take retail orders fast enough. From morning til night people were standing in line to give me \$1000 deposits and were willing to wait a year to get the car. But when delivery started, I wasn't satisfied with the quality of the car and with its roadholding and riding qualities.

I spoke with Mr. Lyons, who was the owner of Jaguar, and I suggested that I should bring over the Porsche people and that they should make him a design. He wasn't very enthusiastic about it. The English were very anti-German at this time and he generally didn't like German people. Also I talked with Mr. Porsche. Porsche wasn't very enthusiastic either. But after I persuaded Mr. Lyons to agree to talk to the Porsche people, I talked again with Mr. Porsche. I had a big influence with Porsche at this time and he sent his chief engineer, Mr. Rabe, and the body designer, Mr. Komenda, with me to Lyons.

Mr. Lyons had a prototype car and he showed it to us. Mr. Lyons asked Mr. Komenda what he thought about the prototype and Mr. Komenda answered that he couldn't make anything better than this himself. So we didn't accomplish anything, but if

Lyons had taken a Porsche design at this time, he would have had a good Jaguar. I wasn't thinking of making a design anything like the present Porsche, but something else, with a six cylinder engine in front, but with some good design.

BJT: Porsche was already at that time looking for outside design work?

Hoffman: No, not too much. It was my idea. I took the engineers over with the agreement of Mr. Porsche, but it didn't accomplish anything. If Lyons would have done it, it would have been good and he needed a good design.

BJT: You were really trying to help Porsche at that time, weren't you? Porsche needed money to build a factory and that's when you negotiated the contract with Studebaker.

Hoffman: It's not a question of wanting to help Porsche. I was thinking that they are able people. I brought the Porsche people together with the Studebaker people. Mr. Hutchinson, vice president of Studebaker and president of Studebaker exports, was a friend of mine. I had the idea to make an American Volkswagen and I talked with Hutchinson about it. I told Hutchinson that the Studebaker business at the moment was very good because after the war there

*At the wheel of the Glöckler-Porsche at Bridgehampton in 1952.*





*At Palm Beach Shores in December, 1951, Hoffman and the Glöckler ran away from the field easily, but were halted by valve gear trouble.*

was a shortage of automobiles, but in the future Studebaker, as a small factory, would have a hard time competing with identical models against the Big Three factories, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. I told Hutchinson that he needed to produce something different from the Big Three, and I suggested an American Volkswagen. Hutchinson talked with the president of Studebaker about it. He came back to me and said that Studebaker was willing to talk with Porsche.

I got in touch with Mr. Porsche and he came over with his five or six top engineers. We went to Studebaker. He brought a four seater Porsche prototype along, which I had no idea of before. I was very surprised when I saw the car. Mr. Porsche thought it was the right thing for the Studebaker people perhaps, a four seater Porsche. I demonstrated this car to Studebaker. The suspension wasn't properly adjusted. The body was hitting on the rear axle and when I drove it on a good road, with the president and vice president of Studebaker in the rear seats, it thumped like a machine gun. I was sure the deal was off. But the Studebaker people had not much of an idea about a European car and they didn't recognize the problem. We went back and had lunch, and in the afternoon we made a contract.

I don't want to say that I understand so much about automobiles, but I am from childhood on in this

business. My father was in this business. My father had a bicycle factory and dealt with motorcycles and automobiles and I didn't see anything else but bicycles, motorcycles and automobiles from childhood on. I grew up with it. I saw the whole development of the automobile.

My father was one of the first automobile owners in Austria. He had many different automobiles, including a De Dion Bouton Avant-Train. In English, that translates to mean a front carriage. The De Dion Bouton was a French car that had a one cylinder engine on the rear axle. This engine had one automatic intake valve and one normal exhaust valve and had no ignition. It had a ball that you had to heat up first, in Germany it was called a gluekopfzueendung, a heated ball which made the ignition.

That was one of the first automobiles and it was unusual looking. It had four wheels, a tubular frame, and between the rear axle and the front axle was a driver's seat like a motorcycle, with a saddle like a motorcycle. In front of the driver was a two passenger seat made out of wicker or rattan so that it was very light.

Or, for instance, my first motorcycle. The exhaust valve was driven, but the intake valve was automatic through suction and a very soft spring. The carburetion was regulated by a level on the gas tank. This was perhaps 1919, immediately after the first war. They

made this motorcycle for me in our shop. They took a Swiss pre-war one cylinder motorcycle engine and made me the frame with the gas tank and the handlebar and so forth. And I had pedals. When I came to a hill, I had to help. There was no gearbox; the drive was through a belt direct from the engine to the rear wheel.

BJT: It is generally accepted that it was your initiative that gave birth to the Porsche Speedster, because you felt that in the United States there was a need for a stripped, lower cost Porsche to compete with the Austin Healey 100, TR-2 and MG.

Hoffman: Sales for all cars had slowed down at this time. Today, the European car business is so good that nobody can understand what we went through at times.

BJT: So, at that point, your idea was to build a Porsche at a price under \$3000 to get more people involved.

Hoffman: Yes. We didn't want to let this Porsche business drop. We wanted to sell. Porsche didn't make money on this car, neither did I. We were so tight on money that we had to charge for the heater separately. Porsche needed business. They couldn't exist without business. I needed business, but we didn't make money on that car. Don't forget one thing: Porsche was a very small factory and they couldn't produce cheaply.

BJT: The Speedster was a very big success. Once it was established, why did it go out?

Hoffman: Why was the Speedster no longer produced? There was no necessity.

BJT: It just didn't sell well?

Hoffman: No, there was just no necessity. Look here, if you don't make money on something, you don't continue. And the other models were selling very well.

BJT: You are saying that Speedster production wound down because eventually other Porsche sales went up and it was no longer necessary to produce this car that was not earning any money.

Hoffman: Yes.

BJT: There is a story that the Porsche crest that is so familiar to us today was designed by Ferry Porsche on the back of a napkin during a lunch conversation with you. Did that actually happen?

Hoffman: Yes. I knew that every automobile firm had a crest. Porsche didn't have one. They had only the name Porsche. One day I said to Mr. Porsche that we should have a crest. He asked why. I said that everybody has a crest, we should have a crest too. He said, "You think so?" I said, "Yes." And so, we made a crest.

BJT: I have also read that you are responsible for the name "Spyder" being attached to the Type 550 sports racers from Porsche.

Hoffman: Yes, it's true. Let me tell you something. I cannot tell you all that I did, but I did a lot for Porsche. I was very enthusiastic. I was very friendly with Mr. Porsche and his family, and in those days I



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had some influence. I know tens of thousands of people, but I don't know anyone nicer than Dr. Porsche and Mrs. Porsche.

BJT: Were you aware in those days of Porsche Club, which was just getting started in 1955?

Hoffman: I never took care of the Porsche Club. I didn't have time. I wasn't in the Mercedes Club or the BMW Club either. I didn't have time, but I like sports car clubs very much and raced with many of them.

BJT: Today you can look at this club, which now has more than 15,000 members and know that you had everything to do with the fact that it exists.

Hoffman: Look here, I had four big loves. This is honest, what I tell you. My first big love was Amilcar. When I was young, eighteen or twenty years old, I bought my first Amilcar. I bought it myself. My father was well off and I could do what I wanted, so I bought an Amilcar. It was a two seater sports car. It was not fast by today's standards, having a top speed of only 100 kph, but at that time 100 kph was like 200 kph is today. It was very fast in its time. I had many Amilcars. I raced it. Grofri built this car under license in Austria and I also raced for the factory with super-charged models. It was one of the finest cars of its time, a lovely automobile.

My second big love was the Porsche. My third big love was the Mercedes, and my fourth big love was the BMW. These four cars I like from all cars best. All four are really extremely fine cars and without competition.

BJT: May I ask you about some of the mementos on your desk? This is an etched glass representation of

the BMW 507. Is there a story behind it?

Hoffman: Yes, you see the BMW 507 was my idea. It was absolutely my idea and we made the drawings in New York. I cannot draw, so I asked Count Goertz, a friend of mine, to make the drawings for me. He made the drawings for me, but the idea was mine. He made the drawings for an open two seater, a stripped open two seater for sports car racing, a two seater coupe and for a four seater coupe.

The little Guilletta roadster from Alfa Romeo was also made on my account. They previously made a coupe, the Sprint Veloce. At the time, I had Mercedes and didn't want anything else. But an Alfa Romeo director came three times to my hotel in Stuttgart asking me to take over the Alfa Romeo agency again. I wasn't interested, but he wouldn't give up and he talked me into visiting the factory in Milan. Finally I had an appointment with the Caracciolas in Lugano, which is near Milan, and I agreed to go. They showed me the Sprint Veloce coupe and I told them it was not the right model for the American market. I wanted an open two seater and only under these circumstances would I be interested again in the agency. The Alfa people were of the opinion that they couldn't sell an open car in Italy because of the heat. Then they came to America and said that if I would take the agency, they would build an open two seater.

They made three prototypes from three different body factories and sent them to New York. All three were unacceptable. I told them exactly what I wanted and they then made one prototype by Farina and it was not right either. The radiator grill was as high as

*Four versions of the BMW 507 drawn for Hoffman by Albrecht Goertz.*



on the coupe. The dashboard was flat like an Austin Healey. I changed the prototype with the technical general manager at Alfa, Mr. Hruschka. I asked for larger instruments. We lowered the front. I insisted on winding windows, which no other sports car at this time had. Every roadster had celluloid side curtains before then. With Mr. Hruschka's help, everything was changed like I wanted, so the Giulietta was a good looking sports car.

BJT: So the Giulietta, the BMW 507 and the Porsche Speedster are all basically ideas of yours.

Hoffman: Yes. I was also responsible for the creation and production of the Mercedes 190 and 300 SL.

BJT: Tell us about the silver Porsche on your desk. The inscription reads, "M. E. Hoffman, in appreciation of his big successes in the racing season 1952," followed by the signature of Ferry Porsche.

Hoffman: After the 1952 racing season, Mr. Porsche gave a party outside of Stuttgart for myself and for Count Giovanni Lurani. Mr. and Mrs. Porsche were there and a few other people. Lurani and I were given these two handmade silver Porsches, made by a jeweler in Stuttgart. I was very successful that year with Porsche, winning perhaps ten races. Because I was so successful, Mr. Porsche gave me this car and the second car was given to Lurani for his winning the Mille Miglia in 1952. ☺



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