

# A PORSCHE HISTORY

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Most vehicle manufacturers are planning to launch a hybrid car, or have already done so, but if you think something is new, think again... The first Porsche was a hybrid, and that was more than a century ago.

In 1900, Dr. Ferdinand Porsche introduced his first car, an “electric carriage” Lohner-Porsche which made its debut at the World’s Fair in Paris. This hybrid effort was capable of doing 56km/h by harnessing a petrol engine to power wheel-mounted electric motors. Sound familiar?

Did Porsche know something that few could possibly have imagined? More than a century later, Porsche and its competitors are seriously embracing hybrid technology.

After the outbreak of World War II, Porsche’s engineers spent most of their time developing military vehicles. The Type 82 VW Kübelwagen was a jeep type vehicle and the Type 166 VW-Schwimmwagen, a dual-purpose amphibian.

Post-war Europe was a difficult place to be for car companies. With a real stubbornness and visionary mentality that later personified the man, Ferdinand Porsche was quoted as saying: “At the beginning I looked around, but I could not find the car I was dreaming of. So I decided to build it myself.”

So it came to pass that the first Porsche 356 was launched on June 8, 1948. It came packing a rear-mounted 1.1 litre Volkswagen engine, with 30kW and weighing just 650kg. A Swiss car distributor promptly ordered five, all hand-built at the Porsche workshop in Austria.

A month after the first car left the factory, a 356 won its first race and also the hearts of sporty drivers and Hollywood stars. Buoyed by this success, the 356 went into regular production in 1950, followed by the Speedster in 1954. In 1956, the 10 000th 356 rolled off the assembly line.

Unlike many other car companies of the era, Porsche managed some steady growth through the 1950s and 60s, even though Ferdinand Porsche passed away in 1951. An important factor crucial to the success of the young company was the early focus on exports, with Ferry Porsche shipping the first cars to America as early as 1950. Ultimately though, the 356 still remained too close a relative to the VW Beetle – Porsche needed another car to capitalize on its success.

Then came the unveiling of the Porsche 911

Porsche’s independent design firm was even responsible for the creation of the Volkswagen Beetle in 1931.



to an adoring public in 1963. It has become one of the most successful sports cars in the world and – along with the 356 – is the foundation of Porsche’s success.

Within the decade, Porsche followed up the 911 with the Targa, a semi-automatic, as well as high-performance and entry-level versions.

A far cry from the Porsches of today, the Targa had a two-litre, six-cylinder engine, delivering about the same power as the 2008 Volkswagen Polo Diesel. Successive engineering upgrades powered the car onto an impressive one million sales by June 15, 1996.

These “sports cars for the masses” poured out of the Porsche factory at the same time its racing cars were winning on tracks around the world. In 1951, the 356 SL took a class victory at Le Mans, and in 1956 the 550 Spyder took its first overall victory at the Targa Florio. In the early 1960s, the Porsche F1 cars raced at the Cape Grand Prix at Killarney racetrack in Cape Town, piloted by Jo Bonnier and Stirling Moss.

The 1970s saw a run of wins at the Nurburgring 1000km race, the 24 Hours of Daytona, the Can-Am series, and the World Championship of Makes. The 1980s saw wins for the 911 Carrera 4x4 and the 959 in the Paris-Dakar rally,

In 1984, Porsche went public. The company introduced its Tiptronic clutch-less manual

**Opposite** Porsche Boxter 2010

**Above** Porsche 356 A Convertible of 1959

**PORSCHE – THE EARLY YEARS**



1900

Lohner-Porsche made its debut at the World’s Fair in Paris



1940

The Type 82 VW Kübelwagen was a jeep type vehicle developed after the outbreak of World War II.



1948

The first Porsche 356 was launched on June 8, 1948.



1954

Speedster



1963

Porsche 911



Porsche Cayenne S Hybrid and 911 GT3 R Hybrid



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gearbox in 1990, an innovation that held its own for nearly two decades before being replaced by the dual-clutch PDK system Porsches models line up today.

The early 1990s were almost as treacherous for sports car manufacturers as the 1970s fuel crisis. Porsche was in a real danger of being taken over by bigger competitors. Dr Wendelin Wiedekin, the former head of production, stepped in as CEO and refocused development on the 911. The mid-engined Boxster was introduced not long after.

Though it builds in large numbers, Porsche has five basic models on the market: The 911, Boxster, Cayman, Cayenne sports SUV, which debuted in 2007 and the latest, the Panamera. After decades of 9-series model names, the current model range does roll off the tongue somewhat more easily.

And that leads us neatly to Porsche's modern offerings.

During a recent launch, I was able to drive all of the new generation Cayennes, including the S Hybrid. Whilst Porsche's first effort back in 1900 was an engineering "tour de force", the Cayenne Hybrid S is a revelation.

With an average fuel consumption of just 8.2 litres per 100 kilometres and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of just 193 g/km, it would seem to combine the best of both worlds. The power and performance of a V8 with the fuel economy of a V6.

That's the theory, but the Cayenne S Hybrid is so complex it's amazing that it works at all. For me, the various bits of electronics and mechanics are not all working to a common purpose. Let's say you are sitting behind a bus at 90km/h. The Cayenne's hybrid system will probably have chosen to "sail" (where the engine

is automatically declutched and shuts down for economy). But when it's safe to overtake and you accelerate, you wait while the petrol engine starts up, comes to life and tries to match the engine revs to the speed you are going. When it's clutched in, it goes "clunk". This is because the gearbox is still in top gear and is in the wrong gear ratio to accelerate properly. This lack of real-world responsiveness mars what is otherwise a truly great effort. On the upside, when you're stuck in traffic it creeps along silently on e-power alone. Whilst the hybrid reaches 0-100km/h in 6.5 seconds, the diesel Cayenne gets there in 7.6 seconds. Because the diesel works much more simply, it's more economical and frankly, it feels faster than the hybrid.

In return for all this gadgetry, the Cayenne S Hybrid is R148000 more than the diesel. So is the hybrid the way to go? If you bought the diesel Cayenne and used the difference in price to buy 14800 litres of diesel, you'd enjoy 200000km worth of driving pleasure for nothing. That's Cape Town to Knysna and back 235 times.

Overall, of course, the whole Cayenne range is much better than the outgoing models. The body and chassis are 110kg and 60kg lighter respectively, and the 4WD hardware also weighs less, all contributing to good performance, handling, economy and ride. The new cabin is roomier than before and has a dash quite a bit like the Panamera, which is a good thing.

Porsche may have been at the forefront of hybrid cars at the turn of the twentieth century, but the pick of the bunch would have to be the diesel. And there is some irony in that. Porsche for a very long time said they would never, never put a diesel engine in any Porsche. Now they have. And it's very good. ■