

Porsches

The history of Porsche road cars in the era of Volume One is dominated by the history of the Porsche 356. The flat-4 engine, the rear engine position (behind the rear axle) and air-cooling are all Porsche 356 trade-marks.

The first 356 was put together by a team led by Ferdinand "Ferry" Porsche (who died on 27 March 1998 at the age of 88) in West Germany. The car was called the 356 because it was the 356th project off the Porsche design desk. In 1950 production started in Stuttgart and by 1965 78,000 units of variations on the 356 had been produced. Originally based on the VW powerplant, the 356 engine went through many enhancements. By 1952, when Porsches started to make their appearance in this continent, they were offered in 1300 and 1500cc models. The cars at that time were not all that popular in the U.S. but Dean Johnson was importing them into Seattle and a few were showing up at races, in the hands of drivers like George Keck, Ralph Ormsbee and John Hudson.

Also in 1954 the first true Porsche track car, the 550 mid-engined Spyder was made available to the public, with the Fuhrmann engine: 1.5-liter four-cylinder, four camshafts. In 1954 Porsche Speedsters were introduced, the first real sales success thanks in a large part to American influence. The car was really a stripped-down roadster version of the earlier coupe, both of which were also known as the "Continental", which greatly lowered the weight and price and increased performance at the same time. However, it certainly was not an attractive car in the classical sense. The 356A came out in 1956 in three styles: 1600 (1582 cc, 90 hp), 1600 S (1582 cc, 105) and 1500 GS —the first Carrera, with four dohc (1498 cc, 179 hp). The Carrera could get from 0-60 over two seconds faster than the Speedster (11.5 to 13.9). In 1956 the 1100-cc engines were dropped from the range, but that still left the 1300, 1300S, 1600, 1600S, 1500CGS (Carrera) and 1500RS (Spyder). The 1600 was available in Coupe, convertible, or Speedster configuration. The more powerful engines located way in the back combined with the light weight of the cars, about 1700 lbs., accentuated one of the line's famous

characteristics: the ease with which the rear end came around. If you enjoyed driving this way, you were in heaven—if you did not, a Porsche was not the racecar for you!

George Keck and Milt Davis were in special heaven with 550 models.

1957: The 1500 GS Carrera is produced, upping the production car performance ante. At the same time the track car ante was raised with the introduction of the RSK, a 1500cc Carrera-based model with a more streamlined body. In 1958 the performance of the Porsche 356 A 1500 GS Carrera GT is boosted to 165. The Speedster was ubiquitous by this time in the hands of such capable drivers as Wade Carter, Jim Clelland and is replaced by the Convertible D with a larger windscreen and winding windows at the side, giving the car less of an “upside down bathtub” look. The 1300-cc engines are dropped.

1959: The Carrera receives extra power and is now called the 1600 GS-GT, offering more output (1588 cc, 175 hp) The 356 B series is introduced in autumn, the Convertible D being renamed the Roadster. By 1960 Mike Eyerly, John Nilsson, John Hall, and John Antons were leading Porsche drivers, but Dave Tatom and Bob Yeakel in Carreras outstripped them all, albeit in a higher classification. Yeakel and Tatom teamed up in an RSK to win the Northwest Grand Prix in 1961. In 1961 the Porsche Super 90 joined the range (1582 cc, 135). The RSK was soon sold to Don Wester who raced it in California.