

European Classics A-Z: Austro-Daimler: Ferdinand Porsche's Early Designs



By John Ossenfort

Austro-Daimlers are rare classic cars, especially in this country. All Austro-Daimlers from the classic period are considered Full Classics®, but to me some of the most interesting things about the make are in the pre-classic period.

The first landmark in the Austro-Daimler story was before there was such a car. In 1899 the Austrian retailer for Germany's Daimler Motor Works began assembling Daimler's cars at a factory in Wiener-Neustadt, Austria, thus making Daimler the first multinational automobile company in history.



Above: the Austro-Daimler 1906 AFV2 armored car (n/c)

Paul Daimler, Gottlieb Daimler's son, became technical director of the new works in 1902. One of his more interesting designs was an early four-wheel-drive armored car, the AFV (n/c), first built in 1905. This vehicle was offered to the Austrian army but was turned down by Emperor Franz Josef on the grounds that "it would frighten the horses". A glance at an old photo of the AFV (below left) suggests that the Emperor may have been right!

Paul Daimler returned to Stuttgart in 1905 to take over the R&D directorship there and was replaced by the inimitable Ferdinand Porsche. Porsche developed several noteworthy early cars, including streamlining the Mixte and Maya race cars. (The Mixte, originally developed by Porsche in 1899, had a gasoline engine operating a dynamo which powered electric motors to drive the wheels – the first hybrid vehicle). He helped in the reorganization of the company when it was renamed Austro-Daimler in 1906, and led the drive for independence from Daimler in 1909. He was named managing director in 1916.

Porsche's most notable development at Austro-Daimler was the 1910 27/80 Prinz Heinrich (n/c), perhaps the world's first internationally known sports car, with an overhead cam 5.7 liter 4-cylinder engine making up to 95 horsepower. The car was named after the Prince Henry Trials, a noted Austrian long-distance sports car competition. Several lower horsepower models of the Prinz Heinrich style were also developed.



1912 Austro-Daimler 27/80 Prinz Heinrich (n/c)

After World War I, poor company management and a number of ill-considered mergers resulted in the near-bankruptcy of the firm. In 1920 Porsche designed a new 6-cylinder 4.5-liter engine to replace the pre-war 4-cylinder models; this was designated the AD617 and was produced until 1926. Porsche's last success before moving on to Daimler in 1923 was the 1.3-liter Sascha racing car (n/c), which won its class in the Targa Florio road race, and a 2.2-liter road car based upon it.

After Porsche's departure, the Full Classic® Austro-Daimler automobiles appeared under the new technical director Karl Rabe (later a Porsche designer). A smaller 6-cylinder engine with chain-driven overhead cam became the top of the line. These cars were designated ADM-I, II, and III, with, respectively, 2.5-liter, 2.6-liter, and 3.0 liter engines, the ADM-III developing 110 horsepower. Three ADM-III's won the team prize at the 1928 Tourist Trophy race on the Isle of Man.



Above: 1923 Austro-Daimler AD617 Dual-Cowl Tourer
Below: Ferdinand Porsche's 1922 "Sascha" race car (n/c)



Above: 1923 ADM-II 2.6-Liter Tourer
Below: 1927 ADM-III 3.0-Liter 4-Seater Sport



The Austrian Royal double-headed eagle ("doppeladler") became the official company logo in 1910 with independence from the German Daimler organization.

A more advanced but slightly less powerful 3.0-liter model appeared in 1927 and was designated the ADR. In 1931 a 4.6-liter eight-cylinder ADR Alpine luxury model was produced. Austro-Daimler's last great automobile, the ADR6 "Bergmeister", appeared in the early 1930's – a 3.6 liter 120-horsepower car that was the equal of the better known Mercedes SS. In 1934 Austro-Daimler merged with Steyr, and the name Austro-Daimler ceased to exist.



1928 ADR6 Tourer



1929 ADR 11/70 Cabriolet Victoria

There are no Austro-Daimlers listed in the Arizona Region, and only one in the entire CCCA 2010 handbook: a 1932 ADR8 Alpine sedan in the Nethercutt Collection.



1932 ADR8 Sedan from the Nethercutt Collection at the Palm Beach Concours d'Elegance



1930 ADR6 "Bergmeister" Sport



1932 ADR6 "Bergmeister" Spezial-Cabriolet