

OBITUARY: FERDINAND K. PIËCH



Bugatti mourns the automotive history's great patron and ingenious developer.

Without him Bugatti would not exist in its current form. In 1998 Ferdinand K. Piëch in his role as CEO of Volkswagen AG bought the trademark rights to Bugatti, and not long after the Château and site in Molsheim, Alsace. He has died at the age of 82. A great, if not the greatest, automotive engineer and visionary in automotive history.

"With Ferdinand K. Piëch Bugatti loses the biggest patron and a very good friend of the brand, a real Bugattisti. Without Ferdinand K. Piëch, Bugatti would not be where the company is today. His vision of a modern French luxury brand with stunning hypersports sprang from his creativity

over 20 years ago. The entire workforce is deeply shaken and grieving for him," says Stephan Winkelmann, President of Bugatti. Throughout his life Ferdinand K. Piëch was interested in technical, complex matters. He died surrounded by his family, after a long and eventful and fruitful life.

Born in Vienna on April 17, 1937, Piëch was fascinated by technology since childhood, especially by kinetic technology. At the age of nine he was already able to drive a car. After graduating from school, he studied mechanical engineering in Zurich. As the grandson of Ferdinand Porsche and nephew of Ferry Porsche, Ferdinand K. Piëch joined the family business in 1963, working in various positions as an engineer at Porsche throughout his years. There he developed the legendary racing car 917. Later at Audi he was responsible for the first five-cylinder engine, the turbo diesel TDI and the quattro all-wheel drive. He developed individual engines as well as complete cars. In 1988 Piëch became CEO of Audi AG, and five years later the CEO of Volkswagen AG. While in this role, he in 1998 conducted the purchase of the naming rights of Bugatti; a brand that fascinated him from early on.

ELEGANCE AND TECHNOLOGY INSPIRED FERDINAND K. PIËCH

The advanced technology of race cars like the Type 35, the elegance of a Type 41 Royal and the iconic beauty of a Type 57 SC Atlantic especially inspired Ferdinand K. Piëch. His idea for the reorientation of the legendary French brand came to him while on holiday, as he later explained. It was a sign of fate: In a small toy shop, Ferdinand K. Piëch wanted to buy his son Gregor a Rolls-Royce toy car. But the little one pointed to another model - a Bugatti Type 57 SC Atlantic. "For me it was a pointer to interest me for Bugatti and not only for Rolls-Royce and Bentley," he wrote. Both companies were for sale at the time.

Ferdinand K. Piëch became more involved in the company and spent months talking to the then-owner Romano Artioli. Piëch had a vision, as so often: "A concept like Bugatti must simply not be devalued by mass producing and tabloid methods," he wrote in his biography. "Bugatti has to always offer the extraordinary; the unsurpassed, the optimum. Only that is Bugatti. On top of the entire automotive world." The brand had to be unique in the automotive world, each vehicle a solitaire.

FERDINAND K. PIËCH LED BUGATTI BACK TO THE FOREFRONT OF AUTOMOTIVE ENGINEERING

His approach was to lead Bugatti back to where it was in the twenties and thirties, at its height and to the position of the world's automotive leader. Ferdinand K. Piëch wanted to raise the known historical values; design, creativity, elite consciousness. This included performance and power to weight ratio. With the fourth design study Piëch and Bugatti were almost where they wanted: to transport the classic elegance of an Atalante into the modern age and to optimally equip the model's technical feature. For him that meant: At least 1000 hp, at least 400 km/h top speed and the ability to drive directly from the racetrack to the opera, without being shame.

The first production-ready model, which was to meet the extraordinary requirements, needed a few years in advance. Bugatti embarked on new technical territory. The first prototype of the

new hypersport Bugatti was showed in the autumn of 1998 at the Paris Motor Show, a year later, at the IAA in Frankfurt, a mid-engined coupe followed. Only half a year later, the French luxury brand presented the study 18/4 Veyron, named after the racing driver Pierre Veyron, who won in 1939 behind a Bugatti wheel in Le Mans. "I have never seen a car that is so excitingly sensual and so uncompromisingly sporty and therefore ideally suited to the renaissance of Bugatti," he writes in his biography. He was not wrong, as he seldom was. With the first Chiron 16/4, Bugatti smashed on the barriers of physics, perfectly implementing Piëch's requirements.

"Ferdinand K. Piëch is directly linked to the success of Bugatti. Our modern hypersports cars not only stand in the long tradition of Ettore Bugatti, but are also a legacy Piëch's outstanding achievement. We bow down to his creativity and genius. Our sympathy goes to his family," expresses Stephan Winkelmann.

In silent mourning

Employees of Bugatti Automobile S.A.S.

Stephan Winkelmann, President Bugatti