



What the Beutler saw...

Beutler was responsible for creating some of the most beautiful VW- and Porsche based sports cars of the 1950s...

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Ernst Beutler's association with the Porsche family began back in 1946, when he, along with his brother Fritz, founded a karosserie at Thun-Dürrenmat, near Bern, in Switzerland, and one of the first projects in which the brothers became involved was to build a number of pick-ups based on early, postwar VW Beetles.

But it wasn't until the summer of 1948 that Porsche began the development of its own VW-derived sports car, Type 356. However, the company's main problem was that conditions at the Gmünd workshops precluded the construction of anything other than the basic coupé.

One of Porsche's biggest headaches was that the major part of the coachbuilding operation was carried out by the rather unreliable Friedrich Weber, a skilled artisan who took delight in having long, somewhat alcoholic, lunch breaks. While Weber's skills were second to none, his unreliability led to frequent hold-ups in production, rendering any thought of the company having the ability to construct a cabriolet at Gmünd extremely unlikely.

At this time, Porsche enjoyed the financial support of R von Senger, the Swiss owner of an advertising agency, who was keen to see both the coupé and the cabriolet go into production as soon as possible. Von Senger, along with business associate Bernhard Blank, an automobile dealer from Zürich, were among the first to place orders with Porsche and, when it became obvious that production was going to be a problem, von Senger stepped in and offered his financial assistance.

However, no amount of money was likely to change Friedrich Weber's working practices so, in 1949, von Senger acquired two 356 chassis and arranged for them to be delivered to the Beutler karosserie.



Ernst and Fritz Beutler studied the Porsche chassis and penned a design for a 356 cabriolet which differed from the coupé in several details. The most notable departure in style was the adoption of a squarer rear end and, as the body narrowed slightly behind the doors, bulbous rear wings. The effect was not unlike the Dannenhauer und Stauss VW-based sports car built a year later in Stuttgart.

The fruits of the Beutlers' labours were first shown to the public at the Geneva Motor Show in March 1949, where their stylish cabriolet was displayed alongside a Gmünd-built coupé. The interior of the Beutler cabriolet featured a symmetrical dashboard with a speedometer to the left and a clock on the right, with a bank of switches in the centre. Altogether, Beutler built a total of six cabriolets and, of these, only 003 is known to exist, the others having been destroyed or scrapped.

In the meantime, Porsche moved its operation back to Zuffenhausen, late in 1949, and the task of building bodysHELLS was given to Reutter, in Stuttgart, a portion of whose workshops were rented by Porsche. Coupé production took up most of Reutter's time and, as a consequence, cabriolet production took something of a back seat. So, to speed things along, Porsche appointed Heuer (formerly Gläser) of Dresden to build open versions of the 356, a task later shared with Drauz.