



The History of AUDI AG

The Audi “Four Rings” emblem represents one of Germany's oldest car manufacturers. It symbolizes the 1932 merger of four independent automobile manufacturers: Audi, DKW, Horch, and Wanderer, which form the roots of today's AUDI AG.

Horch

By the end of the 19th century, several companies in Germany were already building cars, one of which was August Horch & Cie., established in Cologne on November 14, 1899. August Horch, a pioneer in automotive engineering, had spent three years managing automobile production for Carl Benz in Mannheim before setting up shop on his own. In 1904, August Horch moved his business to the town of Zwickau and transformed it into a corporation.

Audi

After leaving Horchwerke AG, August Horch established another factory in 1909 that would also build cars. No longer allowed to use his own name for the company, Horch opted for the Latin translation of the German word “horch,” which is “audi.” And so, Audiwerke in Zwickau was born. August Horch delivered the first vehicle with the Audi brand name in May 1910. His company made a name for itself with its unparalleled winning streak in the world's most demanding endurance competition, the international Austrian Alpine Rally, which it completed three years in a row between 1912 and 1914. The first Audi with a six-cylinder engine was introduced in 1923 and featured an oil filter and air cleaner, which was not all that common then. In fact, an air cleaner did not become a standard feature of cars until some years later. The Audi six-cylinder model was also among the first cars in Germany equipped with hydraulic brakes on all four wheels, a design developed in-house at the Audi development department in Zwickau. Chief Designer Heinrich Schuh launched Audi's first eight-cylinder car, the imposing “Imperator” in 1927. But with sales of luxury cars declining, it reached the market too late. The company found itself in financial straits and was purchased in 1928 by Jörgen Skafte Rasmussen, the owner of the DKW business enterprise.

Wanderer

Mechanics Johann Baptist Winklhofer and Richard Adolf Jaenicke opened a bicycle repair workshop in Chemnitz in 1885 and, in response to very high demand, began making bicycles of their own a short time later, which they sold under the brand name Wanderer. They changed the company name to Wanderer Fahrradwerke AG in 1896. Wanderer built its first motorcycle in 1902 and expanded production to include motorcars in 1913. A small two-seater named “Puppchen” (loosely translated as “Baby Doll”) heralded Wanderer's tradition of motorcar production, which would continue for decades.



DKW

Originally established as Rasmussen & Ernst in 1902 in Chemnitz, the company moved to Zschopau in Germany's Erzgebirge mountains in 1907. It first manufactured and sold waste steam oil traps and other components for steam generation plants. It later added various centrifuges and painting equipment to its product range. It also supplied car parts such as mudwings and vehicle lighting. The company's founder, Jørgen Skafte Rasmussen, began experimenting with a steam-driven motor vehicle in 1916 and registered "DKW" as a trademark. By 1919, the company had changed its name to Zschopauer Motorenwerke and was manufacturing small two-stroke engines, which in 1922 led to the successful introduction of motorcycles bearing the DKW name. The first small DKW motorcar was launched in 1928.

Auto Union AG, Chemnitz

On June 29, 1932, Audiwerke, Horchwerke, and Zschopauer Motorenwerke/DKW merged to form Auto Union AG on the initiative of the State Bank of Saxony. A purchase and leasing agreement was concluded with Wanderer Werke at the same time for the acquisition of the Wanderer automobile department. The new group was based in Chemnitz. When Auto Union AG was established, it was Germany's second-largest motor vehicle manufacturer. The four interlocking rings were chosen as its emblem, symbolizing the indissoluble unity of the four founding companies. The Audi, DKW, Horch, and Wanderer brands retained their names and were each allocated a specific market segment within the new company: DKW: motorcycles and small cars; Wanderer: midsize cars; Audi: cars in the upper midsize market segment; and Horch: luxury cars.

Auto Union GmbH, Ingolstadt

In 1945, after the Second World War, Auto Union AG found itself in what was then Germany's Soviet occupation zone. The company was requisitioned, and the factory was dismantled. Company executives made their way to Bavaria, forming a new company in Ingolstadt on September 3, 1949. Auto Union GmbH, as it was called, continued the motor vehicle tradition as exemplified by the Four Rings and began building proven DKW vehicles with two-stroke engines (motorcycles, passenger cars, and small delivery vans). A new Auto Union model appeared on the market in 1965, the company's first post-war vehicle with a four-stroke engine. This was the start of a new era, which required a new product name, thus reviving the traditional Audi name. The last two-stroke DKWs rolled off the production line in Ingolstadt a short time later. From then on, the company produced new models with four-stroke engines under the brand name "Audi." But a new era also began in a different sense, as the Ingolstadt-based company joined the Volkswagen Group in 1965.



NSU

The NSU company was founded by mechanics Christian Schmidt and Heinrich Stoll in 1873 in Riedlingen on the banks of the Danube in Germany's Swabian region, relocating to Neckarsulm seven years later. For the first 20 years, the company manufactured knitting machines. In 1886, the proprietors of the knitting machine factory based in Neckarsulm opened a department devoted to building bicycles. From then on, two-wheelers would govern the company's fortunes. NSU began manufacturing motorcycles in 1901 and cars five years later. However, the production of passenger cars ceased in 1929 when the company decided to focus entirely on bicycles and motorcycles. Car production resumed in Neckarsulm almost three decades later, in 1958. On March 10, 1969, Auto Union GmbH in Ingolstadt joined forces with NSU Motorenwerke AG in Neckarsulm. Based in Neckarsulm, the new company known as Audi NSU Auto Union AG was established retroactively from January 1.

AUDI AG

The last NSU car rolled off the production line in March 1977, after which the entire car output bore the Audi brand name. The company then considered revamping its "clumsy" name, Audi NSU Auto Union AG, with the understanding that the company and its products should share the same name. Audi NSU Auto Union AG was shortened to AUDI AG in 1985, and the company's head offices moved from Neckarsulm to Ingolstadt. The Audi brand's market position began to improve steadily in the 1980s. The "Vorsprung durch Technik" claim to technical leadership was borne out by such developments as quattro, TDI, aerodynamic body design, fully galvanized bodyshells for corrosion protection, hybrid technology in the Audi duo, aluminum bodywork for the Audi A8 Audi Space Frame, and systematic lightweight construction with increased use of composite materials. For more than a quarter of a century, Audi models and dynamic, inspiring design have paved the way for the Audi company's position as a premium brand in the international automotive industry.