

A new era for the four rings: 60 years since the first post-war Audi

- **World premiere of the first post-war Audi at the IAA in fall 1965**
- **The 72 PS Audi with the four-stroke engine led Auto Union GmbH out of 1960s crisis**
- **Audi historian Ralf Friesen to give lecture on July 23 at the Audi museum mobile**

Ingolstadt, July 4, 2025 – A new era began in Ingolstadt 60 years ago: the first post-Second World War Audi rolled off the assembly line on August 13, 1965. And on that occasion, after a quarter of a century, Auto Union GmbH once again adopted the traditional Audi brand name. The name itself was intended to demonstrate the model's status as a technical pioneer. It was, after all, Audi's first automobile with a four-cylinder, four-stroke engine. The Audi, known internally as the F 103, was a resounding success and spawned an entire model series that – with further developments in design and technology – remained in production until 1972.

In 1965, when the “new Audi” – as it was called in the press release for its world premiere at the IAA – was launched, Auto Union GmbH, the predecessor of today's AUDI AG, found itself in a difficult economic situation. The company was not a stranger to challenging times; launching again after the Second World War was anything but easy: Germany lay in ruins; the Saxon Auto Union AG had been dismantled and had no future. Amid the post-war turmoil, former employees of Auto Union moved west and initially established a central depot for spare parts in Ingolstadt. In 1949, they went on to found Auto Union GmbH. The young company started producing vehicles; its first models – motorcycles and vans under the DKW brand – sold well during the period of reconstruction and the economic boom of post-WWII Germany.

As the population became more affluent, people's expectations for cars soon rose. By the mid-1960s, the DKW models, based on pre-war technology, were considered outdated – the DKW brand was “out.” In particular, the long adherence to the two-stroke engine was causing sales figures to decline steadily: Auto Union's last two-stroke model, the DKW F 102, proved to be a shelf warmer despite its modern design. And so, the Ingolstadt-based Auto Union GmbH found itself in a crisis in the 1960s. At the same time, changes in the corporate structure were also taking place. Daimler-Benz AG, which owned Auto Union from 1958 to 1964, gradually sold its shares to Volkswagenwerk AG in Wolfsburg, which also led to better utilization of production capacity. The VW Beetle emerged as the first white knight in these difficult times. Almost 348,000 Volkswagen 1200/1300 units were assembled in Ingolstadt between 1965 and 1969

“New Audi” catalyzes technical and economic turnaround

Even more decisive for the company’s future was a decision made by its former owner, Daimler-Benz AG, in the early 1960s. It provided its subsidiary with a four-stroke engine at the beginning of that decade. The Stuttgart-based company also sent engineer Ludwig Kraus to Ingolstadt, where he later became chief developer. Kraus brought the new engine to series production at Auto Union, paving the way for the first car from Ingolstadt with a four-stroke engine. The “new Audi” hit the market in 1965 – 25 years after the last Audi 920 had rolled off the assembly line in Zwickau, Saxony, in 1940 as a result of the war-related production stoppage, and 55 years after the first Audi automobile ever had been delivered: the Audi Type A 10/22 PS.

In Ingolstadt, they wanted to make the technical change visible with the new model’s name as well. The “DKW” brand name, which had always been closely associated with the two-stroke engine, would therefore no longer be used for Auto Union GmbH vehicles. Instead, the new car was given the familiar pre-war name “Audi” – initially without any further additions or designations. The car was marketed as an Auto Union “Audi type.” Internally, the nomenclature was simply continued: the DKW F 102 became the F 103. This “new Audi” ultimately became the founder of an entire series.

From the historian’s perspective, there is another important detail: the name of the new car was purely a model designation – the company itself was still called Auto Union GmbH in 1965. It wasn’t until 20 years later, in 1985, that AUDI AG was founded. Since that time, the company and its products have borne the same short and distinctive name: Audi.

New addition to the family: original Audi evolves into whole family of vehicles

With the arrival of further models and performance levels, the new Audi was joined by the Audi 80, Audi Super 90, Audi 75, and Audi 60. Only the first Audi was denied the “72” designation during its entire production run. It was only unofficially known to customers and the press as the “Audi 72” or “Audi (72 PS).” The new Audi rolled off the production line starting in August 1965 and was available as a station wagon as of spring 1966, called the “Variant” at Volkswagen. The sedan models were available in two- and four-door versions, with the option of upscale equipment – with the suffix “L.” In 1966, the Audi 80 with an 80 PS engine was added to the model range, followed shortly afterwards by the top-of-the-line Audi Super 90 that featured extensive equipment. One of the things that set it apart visually from the other models was its chrome-plated trim strips on the wheel arches, which came as standard. With its larger displacement 90 PS engine, it reached a top speed of more than 160 km/h, a respectable figure at the time. In 1968, the mass-market Audi 60 model with 55 PS rounded off the range, and the Audi 75 replaced the 72 and 80 PS versions.

Advertising for the post-war Audi referred to a “medium-pressure engine,” because the 1.7-liter engine with its compression ratio of 11.2:1 was somewhere between a typical gasoline engine and a diesel engine in those days.

The new model was also longer than the DKW three-cylinder, which is why the DKW F 102 – which served as the basis for the new Audi – had to be lengthened by 100 millimeters and the radiator installed at an angle next to the engine on the left-hand side. Instead of the round headlights found in the chrome-plated grille of the F 102, the Audi was given rectangular headlights in a slightly wider black radiator grille. A four-speed manual transmission with column-mounted shifter came as standard; an automatic transmission was not offered in this series. Like its predecessor, the DKW F 102, the new Audi had disc brakes mounted inside the transmission. The move away from the two-stroke engine signaled a new era: 16,000 new Audis were built in the first three months alone.

During its seven-year production run, the F 103 underwent only minor changes. For the 1970 model year, all versions were fitted with a redesigned dashboard as well as parallel-action windshield wipers instead of counter-rotating ones. Customers could then also order a center-console gearshift at an extra cost in place of the standard column-mounted shifter. In the summer of 1970, the fuel filler on the sedans was relocated from the rear of the vehicle to the right rear side panel. The rear lights were styled to match those of the Audi 100, which had been in production since 1968 and established Audi's successful C series.

The Auto Union “Audi type” continued to be produced until summer 1972. It was replaced in mid-1972 by the completely newly developed [Audi 80](#). The smallest model in the F 103 family, the Audi 60, became the most successful; more than half of all first-generation Audi cars built (416,852 vehicles) were Audi 60 and Audi 60 L models, accounting for a total of 216,987 units. The sales figures alone demonstrate just how important this car was for the brand with the four rings. It marked a turning point both technically and economically. Between 1965 and 1972, the new Audi and its family members attracted such great interest that they not only laid the foundation for a forward-looking model range for the company but also put Auto Union back on the road to success, thus contributing to the long-term independence of the Audi brand within the Volkswagen Group.

Lecture on July 23 – the history and significance of the “F 103” for Audi

On Wednesday, July 23, Audi historian Ralf Frieese will share the story of how the first Audi after World War II came into being, and why this “original Audi” would go on to play such a pivotal role in shaping the future of the brand with the four rings. This event will take place at the Audi museum mobile in Ingolstadt. Admission is free. Registration is required by email to veranstaltungen.museum@audi.de or by telephone at 0841 89-34433. Please register by Monday, July 21. The lecture on Wednesday, July 23, begins at 6 p.m. Doors will open at 5:30 p.m.

Note to the media: You are also welcome to attend. Please register in advance (including your accreditation) by emailing daniela.henger@audi.de.

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The Audi logo consisting of four rings symbolizes the Audi, DKW, Horch, and Wanderer brands, which were merged into Auto Union in 1932. Auto Union and NSU merged in 1969 and played a major role in shaping the development of the automobile. Finally, in 1985, Audi NSU Auto Union AG became AUDI AG. Since 1998, Audi Tradition/Auto Union GmbH, together with NSU GmbH, has been maintaining and presenting Audi's extensive and wide-ranging history. The Audi museum mobile at the Audi Forum Ingolstadt is open Monday to Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays. The August Horch Museum Zwickau is open Tuesday through Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. AUDI AG and the city of Zwickau each hold a 50 percent stake in August Horch Museum Zwickau GmbH. www.audi.com/en/tradition

Audi Tradition supports the work of Audi Club International e. V. (ACI). The umbrella organization officially recognized by AUDI AG represents all of the Audi brand clubs as well as the clubs of the predecessor brands of today's AUDI AG. For more information, please visit: www.audi-club-international.de

The Audi Group is one of the most successful manufacturers of automobiles and motorcycles in the premium and luxury segments. The Audi, Bentley, Lamborghini, and Ducati brands operate manufacturing facilities at 21 locations in 12 countries. Audi and its partners maintain a presence in more than 100 markets worldwide.

In 2023, the Audi Group delivered 1.9 million cars from the Audi brand, 13,560 cars from the Bentley brand, 10,112 cars from the Lamborghini brand, and 58,224 motorcycles from the Ducati brand to customers. In fiscal 2022, the Audi Group generated earnings of 6.3 billion euros on revenues of 69.9 billion euros. The Audi Group currently has more than 87,000 employees worldwide, some 53,000 of whom work at AUDI AG in Germany. With its attractive brands and new models, innovative mobility offerings and pioneering services, the company is systematically continuing on its path to becoming a provider of sustainable, individual premium mobility.
