Futuristic, aerodynamic, stylish: the NSU Ro 80

- **The first German automobile to be voted "Car of the Year"**
- **150 years of the traditional NSU brand: NSU's model history, episode 2 –
  a series of classic and one-of-a-kind cars**

Neckarsulm/Ingolstadt, April 26, 2023 – Even the name is special: Ro 80 – Ro stands for rotary piston, and 80 is the type designation. When first unveiled at the IAA International Motor Show in September 1967, the NSU Ro 80 astonished the automotive world. NSU connoisseur Klaus Arth described it this way: "Many visitors don't know what to admire first. The futuristic shape, the extravagant drive, or both". The car inspired the public but did not result in a sales hit, so the last NSU Ro 80 rolled off the production line in April 1977. In this second episode of the series on the history of NSU, Audi Tradition presents this model.

A factory that produces a new car is almost always inclined to believe it is the "most beautiful, the fastest, the most economical, the most modern – in short, the ideal car." With these words, the NSU Motorenwerke AG announced its new model in the run-up to the 1967 IAA, only to continue more modestly: "We at NSU are also quite proud of our youngest child, but we make a point of avoiding superlatives in any form – instead, we limit ourselves to expressing an assumption: This is a good and, most certainly, an interesting car."

The Neckarsulm-based car manufacturer backed up these claims with over 80 pages of information, including plenty of technical data and drawings and a detailed description of the operating principle of the NSU/Wankel rotary-piston engine. NSU knew that even experts would need extensive material to explain the new vehicle concept, particularly on the NSU/Wankel engine. The documentation comprehensively acknowledged its advantages – such as lighter weight, smaller space requirement, low-vibration operation, and fewer components compared to a conventional piston engine. In September 1967, after five years of development, the Neckarsulm-based company presented the NSU Ro 80 to the public in the Frankfurt exhibition halls – as the world's first production car with a twin-disc Wankel engine. The trade show audience was astonished – and inspired.

New standards in technology and aesthetics

The sporty touring sedan set new standards in road-holding, safety, comfort, and performance. The Ro 80 adhered to the adage, "Form follows function". NSU developed the car in a wind tunnel: Its wedge-shaped body line with a flat front end, a low, slightly rising beltline, and a raised rear end enabled a drag coefficient of 0.35 – and created an overall appearance perceived as futuristic by contemporaries. Reflecting this, advertising posters for the Ro 80 confidently proclaimed: "There are 'Yesterday' cars, and there are 'Today' cars, and then there are NSU cars." In 1971, this claim was formulated more universally: "Vorsprung durch Technik" – an advertising slogan that has become the brand essence of Audi since Ingolstadt-based Auto Union GmbH and NSU Motorenwerke AG have been on the road together since their merger in 1969.

The courage of the Neckarsulm-based company to launch the Ro 80, a revolutionary car in many respects, was ultimately rewarded. One year after its launch, international trade journalists voted the NSU Ro "Car of the Year", as the first German vehicle to earn this distinction. However, the car failed to achieve lasting commercial success: In 1973, the oil crisis drove gasoline prices up, causing customers to turn to more economical vehicles. This spelled the end of the rotary-piston engine and hence the end of the NSU Ro 80. The car was produced at the Neckarsulm plant from 1967 to 1977. By the time the model was discontinued in 1977, production of the Audi 100 was already taking up most of the plant's capacity. During the models' lifetime, a total of 37,374 NSU Ro 80 units were made.

Even today, the NSU Ro 80 still has a loyal fan base – as does the NSU brand in general: Numerous clubs are reviving the history of the traditional brand at regular meetings, rides, and events. One highlight this anniversary year will be the fan day on September 16 in Neckarsulm, which Audi Tradition is organizing with the Audi Forum Neckarsulm, the Audi Club International, and the Deutsches Zweirad- und NSU-Museum Neckarsulm – a museum of historic motorcycles and bicycles.

Each month until December, Audi Tradition is presenting a different NSU model, including brand classics on both two and four-wheels, prototypes, and one-of-a-kind models. If you want to delve deeper into the history of the NSU Ro 80, we recommend the Audi Tradition Edition book "NSU-Automobile. Typen – Technik – Modelle", written by Klaus Arth and published by Delius Klasing Verlag.

Audi Tradition Communications
Daniela Henger
Spokesperson Audi Tradition
Tel.: +49 841 89-44491
E-mail: daniela.henger@audi.de
www.audi-mediacenter.com