

Association of German Museums for Auto, Motor and Technology (e.V.)

Initiative: "German Museum's route"

Press information

### **The invention of the automobile – and of its halls of fame**

#### **If passion for automobiles leads to the idea to open up a museum**

(Aschaffenburg, September 2011)

Ever since Carl Benz has invented the automobile 125 years ago, he additionally has paved the way for these sites, which should document the rapid and enormous technical progress of this new "motorized mobility" to future generations. It didn't take long before the first exhibition opened up its doors. Only 13 years after Carl Benz invention, in 1899, the French presented an automobile exhibition with a historical section at the "Jardin de Tuileries". Besides other automobiles also a motor vehicle from 1888 was exhibited which- 11 years young- was regarded as being dauntingly obsolete. It supposed to be the world's first automobile.

In Germany Oskar von Miller's German Museum in Munich became the most well-known place, summarizing collections and exhibitions about technology history; it attracted everything being worth to be preserved for the future. No wonder that the origin of motorized locomotion- Carl Benz three-wheeler- the world's first automobile- also resides at the same address.

During the ensuing period more and more of such cult sites have been created, initiated by cities, associations and in most cases by private persons, who are all passionate collectors and are therefore predestined to become a museum's founder.

The Association of German Museums for Auto, Motor and Technology is engaged in these museums. It has been founded in 1989 by a dozen of museum's owners, who wanted to put their sites and collections into the limelight to a greater extent.

Researches proved that in Germany, apart from the well-known works museums, a multitude of small museums with private collections are existing, but that scarcely anybody knows about them.

The association wanted to render it more precisely: Based on the idea to be a organization for registered member museums as well as a kind of central register for all German auto- motor and street- linked technology museums and therefore be initiator and founder of the "German Museum's route", they also extensively researched for a nationwide directory/index. The outcome was amazing: There are now approximately 220 museums of this category, although 30 new foundations had been registered in the last 10 years.

These figures call for attention in every respect: At first, Germany is herewith identified as a kind of "museum's world champion", based on criteria like a certain size and above all a regular museum's service with reliable opening hours.

Significantly less museums ( approx. 160), but maybe more collections, can only be found in the United States, but entrance is depending on quite a few factors, as e.g. recommendations etc..

At second a new "foundation wave" is visible, it transforms closed private collections into publicly available museums, a step, which, due to its considerable hurdles at the beginning, should be well considered. At third the fact that especially the newly-formed German States after the reunification looked back on their glorious automobile history, which as well led to several museum's new foundations.

In figures, we are dealing nationwide with at least 13.000 museal presented automobiles, two-wheelers and utility vehicles; if you add further technical original exhibits, you can totally achieve a number of 20.000.

Association's researches found out what has been collected: About half of them are special museums for fire services (28), tractors(13) and two-wheelers, namely motorcycles, -scooters and mopeds (64). The rest are automobile- or often mixed collections, mostly a mixture of four- and two-wheel vehicles.

A couple of collectors or museums are specialized in particular German marks. There were plenty of them, since the inventions of Benz and Daimler quickly attracted the attention of imitators/copyists. Apart from our inventive genius, our pursuit of perfection and our impulse to work meticulously, Germans proper incitement was to share financial gains in the rapidly developing motorization, at best with an own mark. The vintage car archive of the expert organization GTÜ, "Gesellschaft für technische Überwachung (society for technical supervision)", [www.gtue-oldtimerservice.de](http://www.gtue-oldtimerservice.de), cooperating closely with the association, shows about 500 German automobile marks, half a thousand individual histories and destinies. Except for a few actual fabricats, all others meanwhile vanished- foundation stone for selective mark-museums like the Maybach-Museum in Neumarkt/Opf or Stoewer in Wald-Michelbach. Others now reside in former factory sites, like Röhr in Ober-Ramstadt, Horch in Zwickau, Auwärter in Stuttgart/Landau or the automobile museum Dr. Carl Benz at the historical Benz-factory in Ladenburg.

### **Difficult undertaking – new foundation of a museum**

The motivation to found a museum, to create a showroom for everybody, out of the constantly enlarged collection of rare mobiles and raise awareness about history of mobility is a strenuous effort. Though the beauty times of collectors in finding and getting new objects of desire, found on a mess, auction or classical magazine, ends up some day – you have it all. At this point you ask yourself if your pride of ownership, your admiring circle of friends, your participation at vintage car rides or races was all you like to achieve.

That is the pleasure to share these rare beauties with others, with persons who also enjoy them. Although this next step is much more important, than most of the new founders guess. The transformation of the private into a publicly available collection. Therefore we have to applaud for everybody who decided to do so. Because you have to have considerable sums of money, which no longer will be invested in cultivated vehicles but in other channels: Investments in new buildings and restorations, unimagined construction and safety instructions, a decorative ambiente and finally museums service per se.

Publicly available buildings attract the attention of many authorities, who are concerned about the safety of further visitors. Comprehensive regulations concerning fire-fighting, fire safety and emergency exits as well as a couple of insurance restrictions cause always new troubles for the future museum's operator, not to mention the conservation of the presented exhibits. Even the lovely decorated hay round about a "barn discovery" catches the fire commissioner's eye and falls victim to his decision. New museum's owner will only be compensated a little bit at the opening ceremony when local prominents in their speech recognize his/her great efforts and when the own family understand that it was worth it.

Daily business bears further desillusions. Apart from some leisure-park like museum concepts, private-driven museums were no places to make a lot of money – many fight for the "plus-minus-zero status", others are just able to afford their museums. Apart from visitors revenues you can't neither count on public grants, nor find sufficient volunteer sponsors for your cultural site. You are well-off if you open up your museum in a very touristic region, because the city's marketing department is

pleased about every contribution which enriches the city's cultural offerings or you dispose of facilities, which allow certain kind of events, mostly the only possible additional takings of museums, which naturally have to be well-organized.

#### **An unshiftable problem: The museum's site**

The museum's site seems to be one of the multiple problems many of our museums in Germany face. The fact that the sites are often located in the provincial areas, where collectors or collectors associations have their home, business or halls, could even prevent to be operationally successful in a long term.

The museum's association accepted this special challenge and have therefore created the "German Museum's route. All which can be discovered by the visitors are not only the museum's treasures but rather find out the museums and the mostly far-flung locations, from Altlußheim (museum autovision) up to Zeven (fire engine museum). No wonder that the statement for mess and media is deliberately ambiguous "Germany discovers its auto museums"! All the rest is really easy for the visitors: Click on the museum's map, define region or route and enter one of 220 locations into the navigation system.

This considerable number of cult sites about his invention is bigger than Carl Benz could have ever imagined!

#### **Facts**

The "Association of German Museums for Auto, Motor and Technology" was established in 1989 by 12 museums. In its 22<sup>nd</sup> year of existence it has 50 member organizations. Germany currently has approximately 220 auto-, motorcycle- and (street-based) technology museums, whereat 30 new foundations came along in the past 10 years, quite a few of them in the newly-formed German States. A few years after the association's foundation the title "route of 1.000 vintage cars" had been renamed to "German Museum's route" due to the increasing number of emerging museums. Reaching the number of 220 museum sites, a special map has been fit out with the terms "regions" and "areas", which can be traversed along a planned route or be piloted directly to a special target. The exhibited vehicles reach a number of approximately 13.000, if you add technical objects like engines and others the number rises up to 20.000 exhibits.

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