

MOTORING MATTERS *by Sandie Goodwin*

AUDI – LEADER OF THE LEFT-HAND-DRIVE REVOLUTION

Centenary celebrations start for Audi in July, having been a car manufacturer since 16th July 1909. The ‘Vorsprung durch Technik’ brand began life producing right-hand-drive cars; every Audi car was right-hand-drive until 1921, when the brand first publicly demonstrated its now famous flair for ‘Vorsprung durch Technik’ by pioneering left-hand-drive 16 years before Germany officially legislated for it in 1938. In 1922 that left-hand-drive began to take hold in Germany, and even then the new configuration was a feature of just ten per cent of the country’s cars. Proliferation quickly followed – just one year later this total had risen to 25 per cent.

Within the first ten years as a manufacturer, Audi quickly established a principal range of six models with engines offering four, six and eight cylinders. The Audi Type K, built between 1921 and 1926 took the Berlin Motor Show by storm when it made its world debut with left-hand-

drive. The Type K was the first car in Germany to go on sale with a left-mounted steering wheel, and also featured a conventional floor mounted gear shift which was centrally located alongside the car’s handbrake.

DRIVING ON THE LEFT

Today, 74 countries around the World drive on the left in right-hand-drive cars. Globally almost all nations began by driving on the left, and there was a gradual transition to driving on the right in left-hand-drive vehicles. Curiously one of the first nations to move from the left to the right hand side of the road was the United States, which, as early as 1792, first passed new laws in Pennsylvania. New York followed in 1804 and New Jersey in 1813.

In Europe, Italy first began its switch in 1912 but it took until 1926 for the entire country to conform. Spain was also using both sides of the

road, depending on region, until 1924, as was Austria, until she eventually conformed along with Hungary and the then Czechoslovakia as late as 1939. Europe’s very last nation to officially adopt left hand drive cars or right hand driving was Sweden as recently as 1967.

THEN AND NOW

Audi began its life without the universally known four rings emblem and with a range of open cars which all featured cabriolet roofs. Its first major model, the Type A, featured a right-mounted steering wheel, as did its entire range at the time. In 2000, just over 43,000 Audi models found homes in the UK. Since then, up until 2008, the brand has continually broken annual sales records, successfully passing the milestone 100,000 sales mark in 2007 and 2008. Globally, more than 1 million deliveries of Audis were made for the first time in its history.



The Audi Type A (1910)



The Audi Type C (1912)



The Audi Type K (1925) - Pioneer of left-hand-drive in Germany

ELECTRIC SHOCK FOR GOVERNMENT OVER GREEN CAR PLAN

As many as a fifth of Britain’s 34 million motorists are planning to buy an electric car within the next five years, or would consider doing so. A GfK NOP survey for the RAC Foundation suggests 6.75 million drivers are thinking about buying a vehicle powered solely by batteries. The poll results should be welcome news for the Department for Transport which last month announced an incentive scheme that would see grants of up to £5,000 being offered to purchasers of electric powered cars from 2011.

But the plans could be set to backfire. The RAC Foundation has discovered that by the Government’s own reckoning electric vehicles won’t be available on the mass market until at least 2017, leaving millions of potential buyers frustrated. Director of the RAC Foundation Professor Stephen Glaister said: “What the Government is in danger of doing is putting the

cart before the horse. It is actively promoting the purchase of electric vehicles long before there is any chance of manufacturers making them widely available. It has gone out of its way to encourage people to make green choices, yet these choices are not yet realistic.”

“Even by the Government’s own analysis, this form of environmentally-friendly transport will not be on the mass market for another eight years - and even that assumes a major breakthrough in battery technology in the meantime. Ministers’ thinking on green technology is all over the place. They talk of incentives of up to £5,000 for prospective buyers of electric cars from 2011. Yet at that stage there will be almost nothing in the showroom for people to purchase.”

“What’s more, the same announcement talked of a mere £20 million being spent on a national charging infrastructure, but only last week the

Mayor of London acknowledged that at least £60 million would be needed to provide such a network in the capital alone. And all this comes even before you ask how the electricity to power these phantom vehicles will be produced - for the next decade (before new nuclear power stations are built for example) the answer will almost certainly be by burning fossil fuels.”

“The RAC Foundation fully supports the introduction of green vehicles. But electric cars are not the short-term solution. What the Government should be doing is improving the road network and encouraging manufacturers to refine existing technology. That means increasing road capacity to cut congestion and CO2 emissions; focussing on producing leaner petrol and diesel engines; and making smaller and lighter cars.”