

By Ray Knight
Kentucky Region

As enigmatic as Porsche's small 1952 series of America Roadsters has been to those interested in Porsche history, an earlier roadster, now referred to as the Sauter car, has been even more mysterious. Always linked in some way to the evolution of early Porsche roadsters, its role has remained uncertain. What is the Sauter roadster? New information is beginning to unravel the story of the car with the rear-hinged, "suicide" doors. To sort this out, we can first look at what has already been written about it.

"German Auto Jewel," in Auto Sport Review in 1952 introduced Porsches and featured the Sauter roadster. Described as a "Porsche in competition trim," it had a 1500-cc engine listed at 52 horsepower, weighed 1325 pounds and could do 185 kph.

Christophorus #26 in 1960 described Heinrich Sauter as a young businessman who, because he felt the regular 356 coupe was too heavy for competition, had a special light steel body built on a normal 356 chassis. After briefly discussing the car's racing history, the author summarized, "we classify the 1948 open Porsche as the first roadster, the Sauter car the second and Johnny von Neumann's sawed-off version as the third, the . . . America Roadster (the first 'legitimate' roadster), was the fourth."

* from
magazine
page
picture

In 1961 Richard von Frankenberg again wrote of the car in his book, *Porsche, the Man and his Cars*. "The wish for an open two-seater was always present," he said and described how Sauter had his body built on a standard production chassis, fitted with a tuned 1500-cc engine and qualified well at the 1951 Eifelrennen at the Nurburgring. Frankenberg in a vague way implied an evolution to the America Roadster and, ultimately, the Speedster.

Karl Ludvigsen in *Porsche: Excellence Was Expected* related a more detailed version of the same story, indicating that the factory then took some interest in the car and continuing its history into 1952 when Francois Picard raced the car in France under the nickname *le petit tank*. Ludvigsen detailed some modifications for brake and engine cooling and pointed out that by 1952 "replicas of the little tank were being built and sold by Porsche KG . . . the America Roadsters."

When the factory was first contacted in recent years about the Sauter roadster by the previous owner, they disavowed any knowledge of a car with backwards doors. They later acknowledged its existence and in a letter in 1980, Jurgen Barth, in charge of customer sport at Weissach, described it as the "first American Roadster ever built."

Public awareness of the car developed in the early eighties. It was inspected by several Porsche enthusiasts and was variously described as a modified cabriolet, a bastard Speedster, or an interesting but insignificant special built one-off.

In the landmark 1981 *Panorama* article on America Roadsters, the Sauter car was discussed. It was felt at the time that the America Roadster design had originated from within the factory and had existed since October 25, 1950, in the form of a set of

*Mark H
to BJT
MS*

drawings #356-00-320. The article was uncertain about the role of the Sauter car, since it was built over the winter of 1950-1951.

When we initially contacted Sauter in 1981, he informed us that Hans Klenk assisted with the body work, and he was convinced this car became the prototype of the America Roadster. He pointed out close cooperation with the Porsche technical staff. He recalled his car as being made to his own general design, but said that "in the fifties Porsche and their enthusiastic clients had a special relationship."

It is difficult to mesh all of these potentially conflicting coherent descriptions in a consistent manner. What then is this car? Is it the prototype for the America Roadster? Where did the idea for a Porsche with this flowing belt ^{line} come from? Was it Sauter's idea? Did it come from the factory designers? Or did it come from Max Hoffman, the pioneering U.S. Porsche importer, as has been often suggested? Was this car part of an evolutionary link that led from elsewhere to the America Roadster, or was it merely an illegitimate one-off?

We were recently able to visit with and interview Heinrich Sauter in his current home in the Bahamas. In 1950 Sauter was a young Stuttgart businessman, an heir to HAHN KOEB WERKZEUGMASCHEN, a machine tool company. He served in

Sp → the Luftwaffe during World War II and was interred in several prisoner of war camps. He began racing shortly after the war, initially with a Veritas, and later with one of the first yearly steel-bodied 1950 Porsche coupes. He raced in close cooperation with the factory and often had the newest engines.

He relates a fascinating story of the Tour de France

Automobile in France in 1950 or 1951. As one of the first German drivers to compete in France after the war and considering the state of Franco-German relations, he felt awkward. He found himself fastest in practice, but was very uncomfortable with that and asked Ferry Porsche to allow him to give his better engine to the local hero, Francois Picard, who went on to win easily. ^{in his Porsche coupe} This act of good will received favorable press and led to a long friendship between Sauter and Picard. It also increased good will for the Porsche factory.

Convinced that coupes were too slow, Sauter ^{was} ¹ determined to have a lighter and faster Porsche. He bought chassis #10359, a number listed in the block of numbers designated to be 1300 Cabriolets. This rolling chassis was taken to the shop of Hans Klenk in Boblingen, just outside Stuttgart. A small body fabricating and repair shop with four to five employees, it was one of many small automotive industry support specialty shops clustered around Stuttgart. Klenk himself later gained fame as a Mercedes driver, co-driving with Karl Kling in the winning 300SL ^{Panamericana}. in the 1952 Carrera Panamerica. Klenk then went on to become director of sports for Continental Tire.

Sauter and Klenk wanted a roadster which would be lighter, lower, and therefore faster. They used standard stampings from the factory, whenever possible, to facilitate building it. The unusual aspects of the car were hand fabricated. These included doors, hinges, closing panels, and rear deck cover. The stiffening bracing for the hood was not used and a lightweight tubing cross brace was substituted. A similar hood bracing was later used on the 550 Spyders. Considerably lower than a standard car, the Sauter roadster's rocker panels were boxed in

in a manner to give extra strength to the longitudinals. A simple hood latch was used and leather straps were added on the front. The first windscreen was a small, fixed racing type. The seats were apparently hand-fabricated, thin, light, shell-type seats.

Sauter recalls drawing up a rough sketch of the car. He does not remember seeing any factory drawings. His recollections of his goal in this design was to make the car lower and lighter. He does, to this day, not seem particularly concerned about the dropped belt line. His previous cars all had rather straight sides and there is no background to suggest that he felt a need to make a car with that particular classic flowing line. He acknowledges that Hans Klenk was in touch with the factory several times a week during the construction and suspects that he may have seen some factory drawings. Sauter vividly recalls his personal decision to have the doors open from the front to allow quicker entrance and exit from the car at checkpoints during rallies. Doors opening in this manner are not at all unusual on many specially-bodied cars of that time.

Maximilian Hoffman pioneered the marketing of Porsches in America, along with a variety of other European cars including Mercedes, VW, BMW, Alfa, Lancia, Fiat and Jaguar. He introduced the United States to exotic foreign automobiles and at the same time persuaded European manufacturers to produce special models and options for the American market. It has often been said that Hoffman inspired the development of the America Roadster and subsequently the Speedster.

Hoffman did not like the design of the 356. Ludvigsen quotes him as saying about the 356, "That design is absolutely

impossible; you will never sell that car in America." In Porsche: Excellence Was Expected, Ludvigsen credits artist Coby Whitmore with drawing up designs of a car with classic flowing fenders. This meeting has been said to be the one in which the America Roadster design originated. The only problem is that this meeting was in New York in December 1951, during Ferry Porsche's trip to the United States, only four months before the completion of the first production America Roadster body and six or seven months after the Sauter car had first raced.

I tried to find Coby Whitmore without any luck. Later I noted his name in a Auto Sport Review ~~1951~~ April 1952 magazine in connection with John Fitch, who raced with Hoffman in the early fifties. I hoped this might be the same Coby Whitmore and upon contacting Fitch I was pleased to find out that it was. More amazingly John Fitch had been at that same meeting in December 1951, which included Ferry Porsche, Ghislaine Kaes, Max Hoffman, and Coby Whitmore. Fitch and Whitmore recall an awkward meeting in which a variety of designs were discussed. They felt that none of them were related to the America Roadster or Speedster styling, *but Whitmore suggested*

So where are we now? Did Hoffman not have anything to do with the America Roadster's styling? Was his recollection correct, but flawed in who and where? Did the design originate wholly at the Porsche factory? Was it actually completely Sauter's design?

If Hoffman is correct, the seeds would have to have been planted much before December 1951. The first known meeting of the Porsche people and Hoffman was at the Paris Show in early October 1950. By then Hoffman had already imported three 1100-cc coupes. At this meeting final arrangements for an exclusive

import license were made. Ludvigsen describes in some detail how much more affluent Hoffman seemed than the factory at that time and notes that Hoffman helped arrange hotel accommodations. When Ferry Porsche projected five Porsches a year for America, Hoffman was said to have responded, "If I can't sell five a week, I'm not interested." What was discussed about styling at that meeting is not recorded. It is difficult to think that with Hoffman's strong feeling about the body, it would not have been discussed only to be raised a year later. I can only assume that if Hoffman did make recommendations to have a car made with a dropping, classic belt line, he would have done so at that time.

It then seems more than a coincidence to find that the oft-mentioned factory drawings #356-00-320 are dated October 25, 1950. This was two to three weeks after the Paris meeting and would seem likely to represent a response to Hoffman's probable request for a styling change. These drawings would be expected to show a car with the dropped belt line, flowing fenders and an exaggerated rear fender delineation. These drawings were referred to in Ludvigsen's book and the Panorama article, but were elusive. Over the years, as this story unfolded and they ^{to be} continued unavailable, they developed an almost mythical quality. Everybody had heard of them, but no one had seen them. I began to wonder if they existed. Finally, thanks to BJT and Porsche's very cooperative press department, they arrived.

The drawings #356-00-320, dated October 25, 1950, clearly show a car which all would recognize as an early design drawing for what would evolve to the America Roadster although this set of drawings differs from the production America Roadster in several features. These drawings have the early style bumpers, the rear

fender delineation is much more exaggerated, and the cockpit opening is full size, remaining open over the vestigial back seat area.

On plan or overhead view, the drawings show an unusual widening at the rear fender line, a feature apparently used to help accentuate the Jaguar-like styling demands. This feature had been dropped by the time the production cars were made. It is difficult to imagine that Erwin Komenda, Porsche's legendary body designer, enjoyed making this awkward widening. Komenda's original 356 design was almost religiously functional, virtually teardrop shaped from plan view, allowing smooth air flow down all surfaces. No ornamentation was added. No other Komenda-designed cars had this wider rear bodywork. ~~A few Beutler-bodied 6mund cabriolets had a much more discrete rear fender line.~~

At this point we are again faced with no recorded facts. What was Porsche going to do with these drawings? Did they want to make this car? Could they afford to? With Hoffman's promise of sales, did they feel they could afford not to? It was certainly not Hoffman's idea to create a series of 15 or 16 cars. His intent was to sell a large quantity of these roadsters. Was Porsche prepared to make the commitment to make a prototype and then go into production? I personally think not. They had at that time only made 200-300 cars. They had not been able to return to their Stuttgart location until December and were leasing assembly space from Reutter. By July 1950, they had already begun plans for their new 1500-cc engine, clearly a big commitment. It is difficult to imagine they would have been enthusiastic about the notion of redesigning their body for a single import market.

So how does Sauter fit in? We understand him to be one of a few local gentlemen racers. He raced in close cooperation with the factory and was also ~~not~~ a supplier of some tooling to the factory. But probably as importantly, he was able to pay his own way. His need for a lighter, lower and faster car was strikingly similar to Hoffman's need for a restyled roadster. Working as closely as ^{to finish} they did in making their car, it is unreasonable to think they could have arrived at a car so similar to the drawings without some cross fertilization from the factory drawings. The cooperative project clearly stood to benefit both the factory and Sauter. The factory would get a facsimile (working prototype?) of Hoffman's styling demands to show him. Sauter would get the car he wanted to race, likely with increased factory cooperation.

Just how closely does Sauter's car fit the drawings? It differs primarily by being lower, having the suicide doors, and having the rear cockpit area closed by a bolt-in rear deck. The most striking similarity to the drawing is the wide back end of the body at the fender lines. This feature seems unique to those drawings and the Sauter car. The lower body was not accomplished easily. It required sectioning and reshaping some of the standard factory panels. This was accomplished with extremely well done hammer welds. The closing panels that connect body panels to the chassis were shortened. Additional modifications were made to allow steering column angle change, gas tank clearance and engine lid clearance. Some of the modifications were done in a functional but less than elegant manner, appropriate to a race car, but not for a production vehicle.

Hans Klenk ~~was contacted~~ and recalls building the car for

Sauter, but the years and other concerns have dimmed memory of further details. Though he doesn't remember the factory drawings, Sauter does say, "My car was designed and completed in close cooperation and with all the help of Porsche's technical staff, with Porsche's running gear, engine and parts, and was assembled by the factory mechanics . . ." Sauter recalls that Hoffman later inspected the car and expressed approval. At this time, I am convinced that if the Hoffman-inspired drawings had not existed, the Sauter roadster would have been finished. It would, however, have looked more like Porsche #1 or the Glockler specials. The Sauter car almost certainly was the first car built as an interpretation of the #356-00-320 drawings.

Sauter recalls the car taking about six months to complete. It was first raced at the Eifelrennen at the Nurburgring in the spring of 1951. It was painted white and had a small racing aero screen. Earlier it had been used for testing of some spring rubber damped wheels designed by Engineer Mantzell. Helmuth Bott, today chief of technical development at Weissach, remembers this joint project for which the Sauter roadster was used as a test car. It is unknown if these wheels were ever used on any other car since they were felt to be of limited success. It is also unknown whether some money from that project helped finance this car. There is a frequently published photo from one of these test sessions that includes Sauter, Mantzell, Von Frankenberg and Mlle. Renaud who was Miss France. The wheels were used when the car ran the Liege-Rome-Liege rally in 1951. The car was doing well in the rally, but retired with a broken brake line after a tire blow out.

show photo

The 1500 engine story surrounding this car has been

confusing. Christophorus #26 reports Sauter ran the Eifelrennen with a "1500 engine souped up (at that time the 1500 Porsche didn't exist at all, officially)," parentheses by Von Erckenberg. Ludvigsen related that the engine had been enlarged to 1500 outside the factory by Sauter. This seems unlikely since at that time the only way to get clearance for the increased stroke was with the Hirth roller bearing rank. The bevel big end connecting rod #502-03105 had not been invented by Rabe until mid-1952. These rods then allowed for a plain bearing 1500 in a two-piece case in 1952. Back in the spring of 1951 it seems more likely that the car was being used for a very early, if not the first, competition pre-production test of the factory 1500 engine. It is well known that the 1500 project had begun in July 1950 and was developed to near readiness by this time. The previously published first use of the 1500 in competition had been the Liege-Rome-Liege rally in August 1951 in a coupe driven by Guilleaume and Muhle. It would appear the first use was actually a few months earlier in the Eifelrennen and that two Porsche cars entered the Liege-Rome-Liege rally with factory 1500 engines. This practice of secretly testing new engines before publically acknowledging their existence is a practice continued to present days. Sauter confirms that his car had a factory 1500 from the beginning.

That first race at the Nurburgring produced a fascinating story which continues to add to the mystery of this car. The Christophorus article described the engine as a "souped up 1500." Sauter relates that he used a much hotter cam than the factory would have preferred. Porsche instructed him to enter the car as a Volkswagen special. This may have been because of uncertainty

about the new engine, uncertainty about the hotter cam, or secrecy about the new body style. The car had a Porsche nameplate on all known photographs, including this race. When he had the second fastest qualifying lap, Porsche instructed Sauter to announce the car as a Porsche. He then proceeded to complete the first lap well in the lead, only to retire a few laps later with engine failure. Porsche didn't speak to him for a few weeks after that, according to Sauter.

— capitalize ?

Sauter then entered the car in the Freiburg-Schauinsland hillclimb and then Sauter/Rath entered the Liege-Rome-Liege rally. The car did not complete either race. Later in 1951 the factory insisted on buying the car back from Sauter who went on to race other cars with more success. His career was highlighted by his GT class win in the 1954 Mille Miglia, co-driving with Von Frankenberg. Sauter relates that he always felt Von Frankenberg was prone to crashing and for that reason he drove the bulk of the Mille Miglia. He then tested with the Mercedes 300SLR in 1955, but chose to retire from racing when his first son was born.

In 1952 the roadster was raced extensively by Francois Picard of Nice, France. Picard was a friend of Sauter and it is not known if he bought the car from the factory or if he raced it for them. He raced with German plates W23-3237, which are identified as factory plates. Before selling the car back to the factory, Sauter had always used his own plates W21-3888. Picard had previously raced a Porsche coupe with some success, including the win in the Tour de France with the donated engine.

Picard repainted the roadster a medium metallic blue and competed in a number of road races, hillclimbs and rallies with

considerable success. A 1952 Porsche poster lists at least four victories. The car appears to have won a class victory in most of the races in which its class was limited to 1500 cc's.

Picard's last known race with the car was at Monte Carlo in 1952. It did not win in a field which included two-liter pure racing sports cars. We have not been able to locate Francois Picard. He was rumored to have been killed racing a Ferrari some years later.

Several modifications appeared on the car during this second year. A taller, touring style windshield and an attractive set of folding racing screens show up in photos ~~from~~ of this year. The car apparently had some brake cooling problems and during 1952 front brake cooling vents appeared. It is unknown whether Picard or the factory originated these vents. Similarly placed vents were not incorporated in the America Roadster but did show up in production Porsches in 1954. The car also had some engine overheating problems and a scoop in front of the engine and a set of vents at the back of the car were added. This arrangement would not appear to work well and was not used on any subsequent cars. The early production America Roadsters apparently had similar engine overheating problems, ~~partially~~ ^{partially} ultimately solved by the use of twin grill engine lids.

At the end of the 1952 season the Sauter roadster, now known as le petit tank, was returned to the factory. The car sat around the back corner of Werks I for some time. It is recalled by many at the factory and shows up in several published pictures. It is usually seen sitting in front of a set of ~~shelves~~ ^{November 1953} shelves full of engines. In late 1952 Jack Armstrong, a test pilot for Douglas, an Allard driver, and a good friend of Stan

Mullin, saw the car at the factory. He was told by PR and Race Boss Huschke von Hanstein the car was "last year's race car, a car now obsolete because of the Glockler," and that the factory was moving on to build a spyder. The Sauter car, no longer competitive, was of no further use.

Stan Mullin, an attorney from Los Angeles, was a prominent figure in early California sports car racing. A founding member of Cal Club, he had raced his MG-TC in the first Pebble Beach race. His friend Jack Armstrong had campaigned his Allard. Mullin wanted a somewhat faster car than his MG and had instructed Armstrong to find a car for him on one of his frequent European trips. He had in mind one of the small Italian etceterini type cars. At that time production racing cars were hard to come by and one-off specials were easier to find. Armstrong completed the purchase of the Sauter car on his visit to the factory. The car sold for \$2800, mechanically rebuilt, repainted and reupholstered. Armstrong chose the color of bluish-silver paint with a red leather interior. Ludvigsen stated that a Type 528 1500S engine had been installed, but the cardex shows #30244, a late 1951 production Type 527 1500 engine. It was probably installed after the pre-production test engines, likely before Picard took over the car. This engine (30244) remained throughout the rest of the car's active life. A 528 engine seems never to have been installed.

Shipped to California, the Sauter Roadster raced a full season in 1954, Mullin and Armstrong alternating behind the wheel. Stan recalls driving the car to the races. The carburetors iced when he drove over the mountains to the Reno races. They had a full set of carb jets, but nobody knew how to

use them. They used the twin, folding aero screens most of the time, although a fourth type windshield had been supplied. It was a touring style: full aluminum frame, with the same side posts as used on the America Roadster. Armstrong made an extractor style open exhaust system for the car. The factory had supplied a dual exit muffler, with no internal baffles. Armstrong also fabricated brake cooling scoops in the front backing plates to combat a continuing problem with brake overheating.

The car was clearly faster than its brakes and had some handling problems. Great on the straights, it oversteered badly on corners. The back end would hike up on braking and they tried using Firestone Indy race tires. There were no major victories, the car no longer competitive against production America Roadsters, OSCAs and the new 550 Spyders.

A loosened rear axle nut led to a rear wheel coming off on the cool down lap after the race at Riverside. No damage was done except for the bottom of the backing plate being ground down. This backing plate remains on the car. The errant wheel was retrieved by a young architect spectator, Jim Moore. He stayed on as a crew member and became a life-long friend of Mullin and Armstrong.

The last race was at Pebble Beach in 1954, where Mullin was unfortunate to spin in Turn 3, an incident attributed to changed tires. The car was not damaged, but unfortunately a photograph has survived to Mullin's chagrin. Late in 1954 Stan Mullin retired from active competition and advertised the car in Road & Track. He stayed involved in sports car racing, serving as general counsel with Lance Reventlow and Warren Olsen in the

Reventlow operation. They made and campaigned the famous Scarabs of 1958-1962. Both Mullin and Armstrong remain interested in sports car and vintage racing to this day.

The Sauter roadster was then purchased by Shell Namour of Helena, Arkansas. Namour was a Mississippi river nightclub owner and manufacturer of the famous Habies fruitcakes. He maintained the car for a few years for recreational driving until the engine quit in 1958. Traded among a few owners in Mississippi, it was stored outside and began to rust away. In 1971 it came into the possession of William Crabtree, a foreign and sports car dismantler in central Indiana. It sat in his junkyard and later in his backyard for years.

Cap 1/1

Rumors circulated throughout the midwest for years about some strange, bastard Speedster-like car in a junkyard. No one knew what it was. When Ludvigsen's book appeared, Mike Robbins made the connection and told Crabtree, who had been tracing the car's ownership, what the car was. With this new information, the pieces started coming together. He was able to complete the owner lineage of the car and this fascinating story was published under the title "The Saga of the Odd-Door Porsche" in All About Porsches in 1982. Crabtree's efforts gave us a really good headstart in putting this information together. The only substantial error in that article was the suggestion that the car had been delivered to a dealer in Kiel, West Germany. This was information taken from the wrong cardex.

In the fall of 1982, I saw an ad in Road & Track offering the Sauter car for sale. I went to see it for historical purposes, not expecting to be able to buy it. After some lengthy and interesting negotiations I bought the car. We were only halfway

convinced the car could be restored, but it sure seemed worth the try.

To return to the America Roadster connection, little is recorded as to how, when and who made the decision to proceed with the production car. Sauter recalls Hoffman seeing his car and expressing approval. It is unknown why Heuer-Glaser was chosen to do the bodies. Glaser had been a pre-war associate of Ferdinand Porsche and had been given a contract to produce cabriolet bodies. Problems of location and timing of orders led to financial problems. The eventual bankruptcy of Heuer-Glaser is covered in the Panorama article of 1981. Were these problems partly a result of trying to get the America Roadster into production? Alternatively, did the financial problems already exist? Was it hoped that this new version of the car would be able to supply a steadier flow of orders? Hoffman's plans were not likely to have been modest ones. It seems likely that the America Roadster was hoped to be the saviour of the already struggling coachbuilder.

It remains uncertain how many production America Roadsters were made. Porsche factory sources have suggested anywhere from 15 to 123. Erich Heuer had suggested 20. The bankruptcy records indicated 16 special roadsters. It now appears that a number of 15 or 16 is accepted.

The first production America Roadsters were from the series of 1952 1500 cabriolet series chassis numbers assigned to Heuer-Glaser. These chassis were assigned in a block and randomly selected to be an America Roadster at the coachworks. There is no official Porsche factory listing of which cars are America Roadsters. They occurred in the 10433-10469 series, or in the

sequence from 12301-12384. These are blocks of numbers known to have been sent to Heuer. The list of known cars published in the 1981 Pano article was compiled by Chuck Stoddard reviewing a portion of the cardex files, searching for Type 528 1500S engines identified by 40000 series engine numbers. It appears there were 1500S Cabriolets made by Heuer. All such engines appeared to show up in America Roadsters. These numbers were matched to the known cars.

The earlier block of numbers 10433-10469 has now been reviewed. The earliest known America Roadster is #10465. This car was imported through Hoffman to Briggs Cunningham. Later acquired by John Bentley, it was the subject of an extensive test in Auto Age in 1953. This article pointed out the major weight reductions from the coupe. Stripped, the car was reduced to a racing weight of 1412 pounds. All America Roadsters were apparently fitted with the 528 1500S engine, two-piece case, roller crankshft, hot cam, Solex 40 PIBC carbs, and produced 70 DIN horsepower. Early cars had the crash box transmission, the synchro transmission being fitted to the later cars. The earliest apparently had composite brake drums with VW cast iron hubs, later cars being fitted with full aluminum drums. All had 16-inch wheels and many were fitted with the aluminum turbo rings. The windshield was removable; some had a smaller racing screen. The Cunningham-Bentley car #10465, now owned by Ron Roland, fits this description except that it now has unique fully machined aluminum brake drums. They are similar to the standard later drum except they have no casting marks, and appear to have been made by machining from a billet. According to Auto Age, ~~the car~~ ^{QWV} that car originally had the older composite drums. The aluminum

drums presently on the car appear to be an extremely early set of aluminum drum brakes.

The early cars had single grills and the Bentley car is the only single grill car known to remain. It has not been clear if any others existed at all, and likewise suggested that there were three. The cardex review revealed only one other car, #10469, with engine #40022, red with a beige interior, fitted with cooling rings, vent wheels, tachometer, fahrenheit oil temperature gauge, light pushrods and larger brakes. This is likely to have been very nearly identical in specification and body to the Bentley car. ~~Paterek's Bentley~~ ~~Paterek's~~

The next known car, #12312, is shown to have twin grills. Initially this second grill was placed in an engine lid of about the same size, in a car with substantially the same body as the earliest cars. John Paterek's car (#12317) is the most frequently seen of this middle series. A later, more extensive, change involved a lowering of the rear body line, lengthening of the cockpit opening, placing the twin grills in a substantially larger engine opening. Chuck Stoddard's America Roadster (#12345) is likely the first of this configuration. This change is referred to in some factory detail drawings as newe form.

Therefore, the production aluminum America Roadsters existed in at least three configurations: (1) early series - short cockpit, single grill, (2) middle series - short cockpit, dual grills, and (3) late series - lower rear body, longer cockpit, dual grills. *Other changes included wheel opening shape #4* It is not yet clear if other more subtle changes occurred. With this number of changes over such a small series of cars, the Heuer-Glaser financial situation was certainly not helped.

A totally distinct car was discussed and shown in the Panorama article. It is a steel-bodied car, with a standard cabriolet front end, including windshield frame. It has cockpit, doors and rear fender crowns matching the America Roadster. The rear wheel openings appear identical to production coupes and cabriolets. This car is pictured at the Heuer works, in a scrapbook of a former Heuer employee. This car has been reasonably interpreted to be a car made in an attempt to salvage Heuer's financially hopeless attempt to build the aluminum roadsters.

picture
drawn

A mysterious car was known to exist in the Atlanta area some years ago. It apparently had a striking similarity to the steel-bodied car at the Heuer works. The only obvious difference is the substitution of a Speedster windshield. Could this car be the same one? If so, who fitted the Speedster windshield? It was reported that several Heuer cars were returned to Stuttgart to be finished later. Recognizing the prompt subsequent development of the Speedster, could the windshield have been substituted at the factory? This car was not delivered until some time in 1954 and has not been heard of since the 1960s.

A set of factory drawings #540-00-202 were printed in Panorama that appear to represent this same car, with lowered belt line, cabriolet windshield frame and production style rear wheel opening. It has been suggested that if Heuer had survived, this car might have continued, rather than the bathtub Speedster we have learned to love. Presumably on the continuing insistence of Hoffman, the roadster concept was quickly resurrected back in Stuttgart in the form of the Speedster. With the Speedster, Hoffman seems to have finally gotten what he wanted from a

marketing point of view. Paradoxically, it did not fit his original styling demands.

America Roadsters continued to race with much success for several years, remaining competitive until they were superceded by the 550 Spyders. Amazingly, most have survived. Fortunately, obsolete race cars are often retired to storage and seem not to have the same mortality rate as daily driven street cars. A few have continued to surface. America #12322 recently appeared when Evelyn Launderville sold this car to Bill Perrone. Her husband had owned it since 1954. It is virtually identical in configuration to John Paterek's #12317; they were finished within five days of each other. Fascinatingly, they are mirror images of each other in color and upholstery. Paterek's car is gray with a blue interior, while Perrone's is blue with a gray interior. *We are NOT aware of any known ~~accident~~ ~~accident~~ car being destroyed.*

In summary, it appears that Porsche's earliest roadsters evolved in a series of six fitful steps, from the drawings of October 1950, through the Sauter roadster, to the three series of production America Roadsters, ending with the steel-bodied Atlanta car. [Neither bastard nor inspiration for the America Roadster, the Sauter car appears to have been the first working prototype built from Porsche's earliest plans for an America Roadster.]

There is still much missing from this story and many uncertainties remain. I have tried to clearly separate what we know to be fact, what represents the recollections of three decades ago, and what we have then assumed. I hope I have not continued to propagate errors or made too many new ones.

Acknowledgements: Many people have helped along the way in the development of this story. Sincere thanks to Jack Armstrong, Gene Babow, Jurgen Barth, Helmuth Bott, Tom Countryman, William Crabtree, Ken Daugherty, Bob Devlin, John Fitch, Chuck Forge, Hans Klauser, Hans Klenk, Karl Ludvigsen, Dale Miller, Jim Moore, Stan Mullin, Kelly Namour, John Paterek, Bill Perrone, Mike Robbins, Ron Roland, Heinrich Sauter, Vic Skirmants, Jerry Sloniger, Chuck Stoddard, Betty Jo Turner, Coby Whitmore, and the Public Relations Department of Porsche AG.

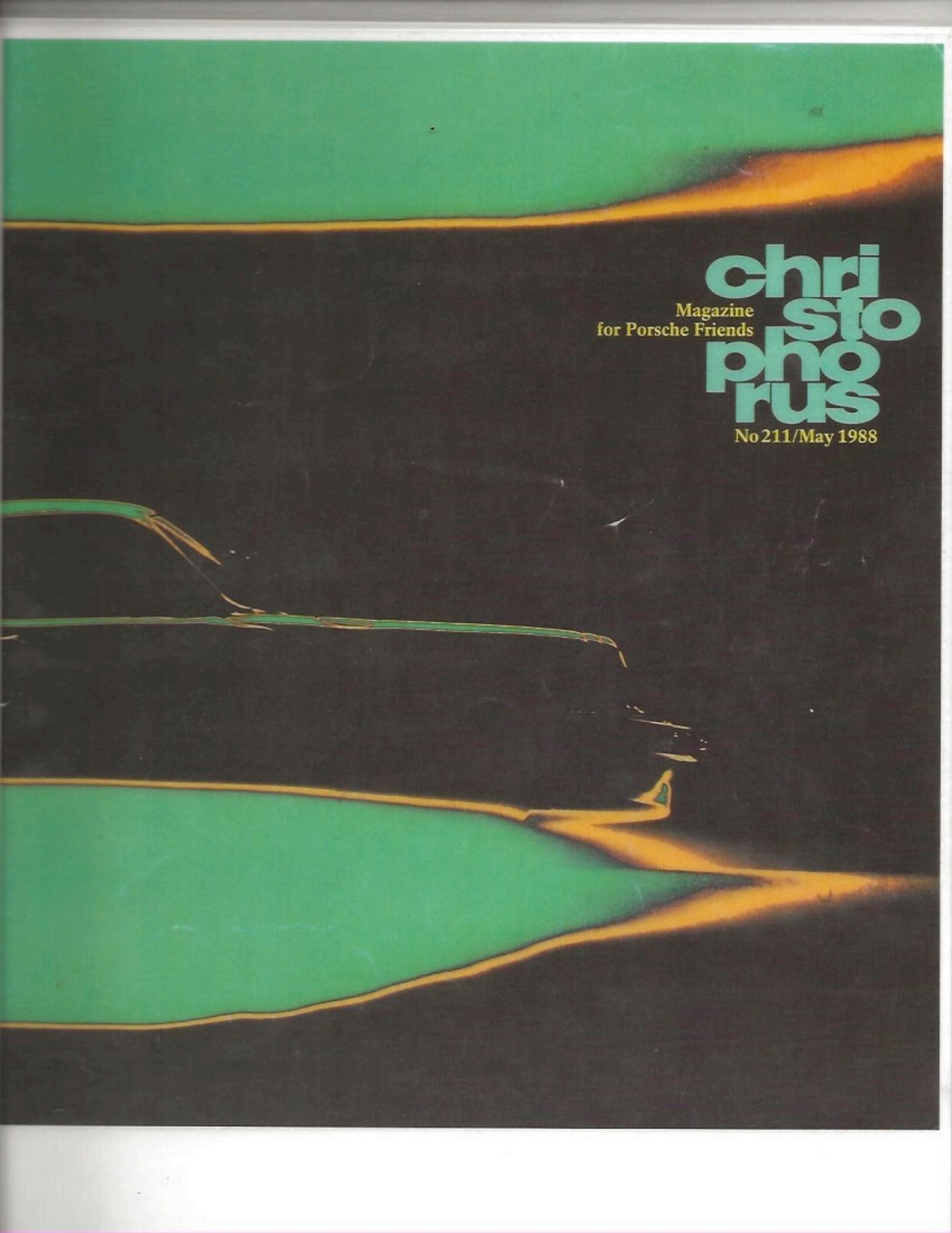
Yvonne

remove Gene Babow

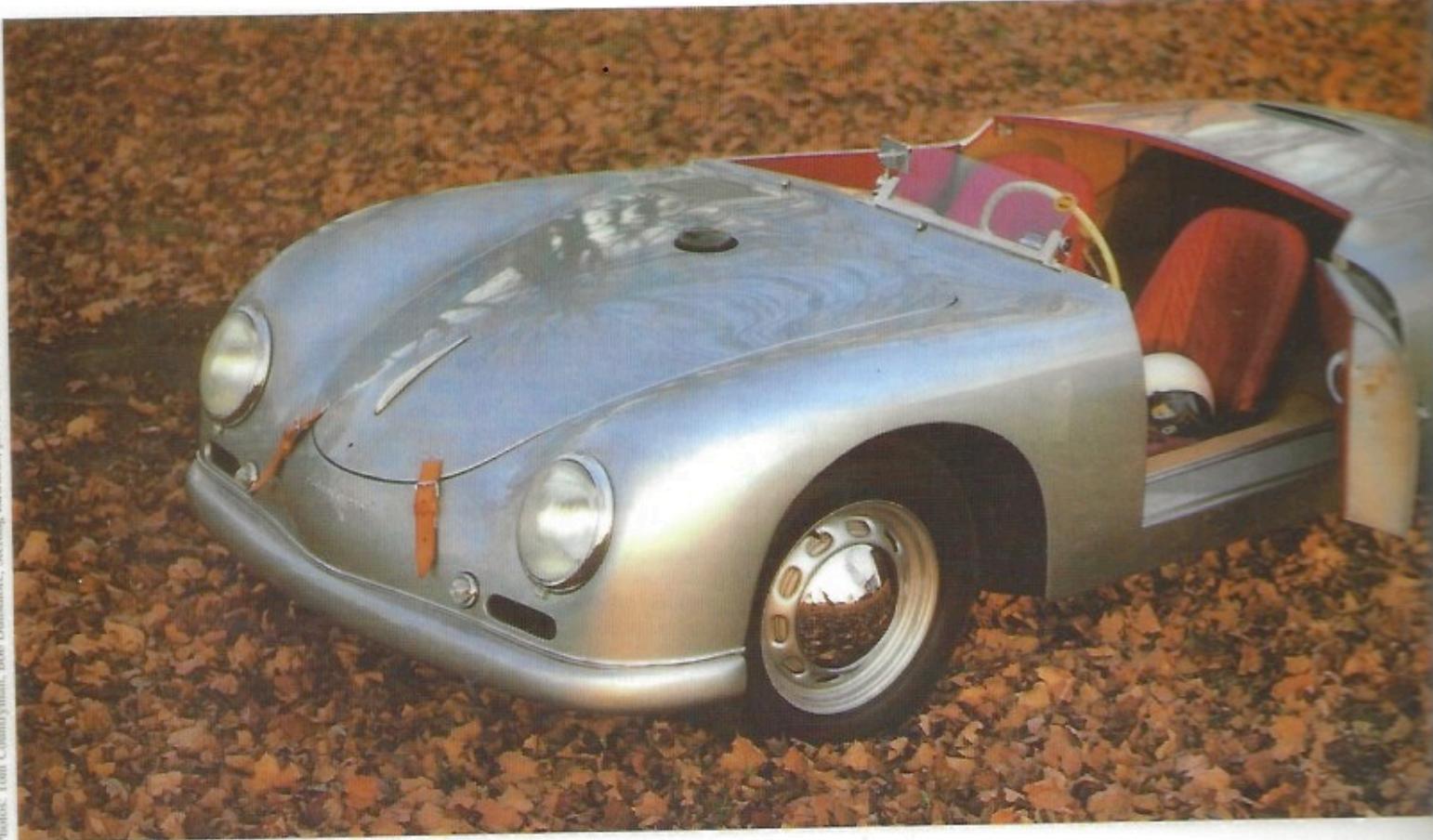
add - Leslie Golberg
Dale Miller

put in plans to ~~pull~~
update list &
gather information.

one of the first 10 in Stuttgart



chri
Magazine
for Porsche Friends
Slo
phg
rus
No 211/May 1988



EARLY BIRD

History
of the Sauter roadster

By Ray Knight

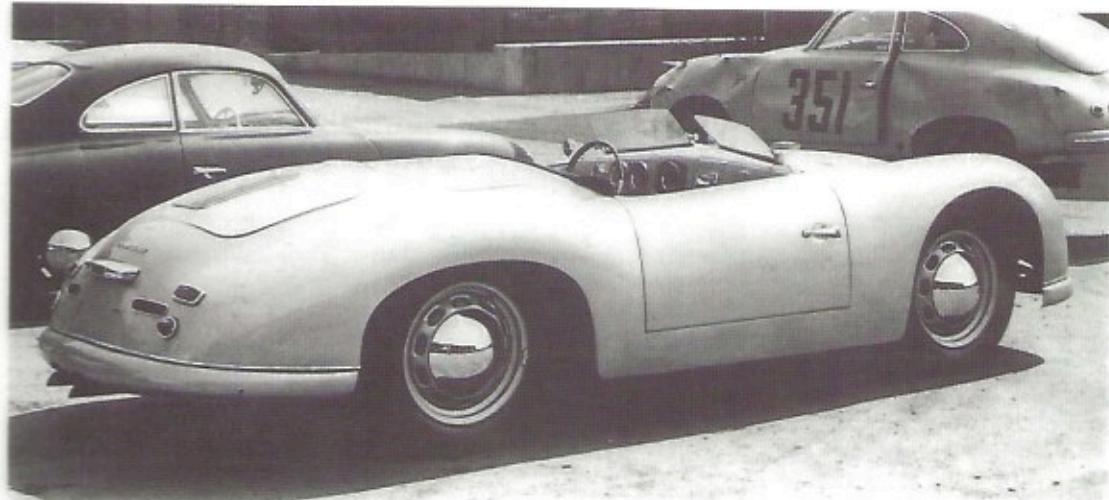


As enigmatic as Porsche's small series of 1952 America Roadsters has been to Porsche historians, an earlier roadster, the Sauter Porsche, has been more mysterious. This roadster with the rear-hinged, "suicide" doors was last featured in the pages of *Christophorus* number 26 (English) in 1960. This unique car recently surfaced in the United States and new information has helped clarify the evolution of early Porsche roadsters and the Speedster.

Even though the first Porsche was a roadster, practical considerations led Porsche to build its first series of cars as coupés. The desire to create a sporting, open two-seater was



The Sauter Porsche from 1951, based on a 356 body. Most important, visible changes: doors for the Sauter Porsche were hinged at the rear and a cover could be bolted over the rear seats.



The handmade steel body was built of altered production pressings. It is lower than the standard body of that era and was assembled in Hans Klenk's workshops.

First test on Nürburgring in 1950: on hand were race driver and journalist Richard von Frankenberg and engineer Mantzel, designer of "sprung hubs," tested at the same time.



Frenchman François Picard, a friend of Heinrich Sauter, called the Spyder "le petite tank" and entered it many times during 1952.

The photo below was taken at Bordeaux, where Picard won the 1500 class.



François Picard had the Sauter Porsche painted blue and also ran it in many rallies (center right).



Stan Mullin bought the Sauter Porsche in 1953 and had it painted silver-blue.

He drove club races in California until the end of 1954. The photo shows Mullin and his son with the Sauter Porsche at Moffet Field, California, in 1954.



to wait until 1951. At that time Max Hoffman, the prominent New York importer who introduced many European cars to the United States, expressed displeasure with the aesthetics of the original 356. He favored a roadster with more classic, Jaguar-like lines. Hoffman and Porsche met in Paris in early October, 1950, to discuss US import plans and shortly after the meeting drawings (356.00.320) dated October 25, 1950, were completed by Komenda. The limited resources of the tiny Porsche company prevented immediate construction of this car.

Heinrich Sauter, a Stuttgart businessman, had been racing a stock 356 Coupé quite successfully and wanted a lighter, lower and faster open car. He bought Porsche chassis no 10359 and commissioned the fabrication of a body interpretation from Komenda's drawing 356.00.320. The unusual aspects of the car were hand fabricated. These included doors, hinges, cladding panels and rear deck cover. The work was done in Hans Klenk's shop in Böblingen, just outside Stuttgart. Klenk, later of Continental Tire, was to gain fame driving the winning Mercedes 300 SL in the 1952 Carrera Panamericana. Sauter's car was completed within about six months and first appeared on the track in early spring 1951. It featured a stock chassis and handmade, lowered steel body fabricated by modifying factory body stampings.

Just how closely does Sauter's car fit the drawings? It differs primarily by being lower, having the suicide doors and having the rear cockpit area closed by a bolt-in rear deck. The most striking similarity to the drawings is the wide back end of the body at the fender lines. This feature seems unique to the drawings and the Sauter car. These unique doors were chosen by Sauter in hopes of easier egress at rally checkpoints. When inspected by Hoffman it apparently met his aesthetic requirements.

The roadster's first race was the Eifelrennen on the Nürburgring in Spring, 1951. It was listed as a VW Special with 1300 cc engine modified to 1500 by the owner. This was

quite impossible since the increase to 1500 was accomplished only by using the roller crankshaft. Today Sauter confirms that the car was fitted with a factory 1500 engine. This race was the first known competition use of the new Porsche 1500 engine.

Sauter recalls that he used a much hotter cam than the factory would have preferred. Porsche asked him to enter the car as a Volkswagen Special: perhaps because of uncertainty about the hotter cam, secrecy about the 1500 engine, secrecy about the new body style or all three. When Sauter had the second-fastest qualifying lap he was instructed to announce the car as a Porsche. He then proceeded to complete the first lap far in the lead, only to retire later with engine failure. Earlier it had been used for testing of some spring rubber, damped wheels designed by engineer Mantzell.

Stan Mallin (49) with the 1500 Sauter Porsche in Santa Barbara, 1953. Only technical problem was brake cooling.



Sports car Grand Prix in Monaco 1952 (left and below): François Picard had to battle the rapid two-liter cars from Italy with his 1500 roadster.



American Ray Knight bought the Sauter Porsche in 1982. He uses it for old-timer races in the USA today (below).



Sauter then raced the car in the Freiburg-Schauinsland hillclimb and the Liège-Rome-Liège Rallye with Roth. Though fast, the car retired with tire and brake line failure. In late 1951 the car was repurchased by the factory. Sauter continued racing, his career highlighted by his 1954 Mille Miglia GT class win with Richard von Frankenberg, in a 356 Coupé. Sauter reports he drove nearly the entire distance. He retired from racing in 1955 and now resides in the Bahamas.



gart, to sit in the corner at Works I, no longer of much use. François Picard continued racing for several years. He is said to have been killed racing a Ferrari some years later but this is unconfirmed. In early 1953 the car was purchased for Stan Mullin, an attorney and prominent figure in early sports car racing in California. Huschke von Hanstein described the little roadster as "last year's race car, a car now obsolete because of the Glöckler," and told the Americans of plans to build a

Stuttgart businessman Heinrich Sauter had the car built in 1950. He raced it until 1955. Today he lives in the Bahamas. Our photo (left) was taken in 1986.

The roadster stood outside for nearly three decades and was in very poor condition when Ray Knight discovered it in 1982. He had the car completely restored.

In 1952 the car, now nicknamed "le petite tank," was raced extensively by François Picard of Nice, France. A local French hero and friend of Sauter, Picard had won the 1950 Tour de France with a faster engine which had been secretly switched from Sauter's coupé. By sacrificing his own chances of winning, Sauter avoided inflaming anti-German sentiment among racing fans and with that gesture, according to news reports, did much to bolster the Porsche reputation in France in those early postwar years.

Repainted French racing blue, the car ran many road races, rallies and hillclimbs, winning most. Its last European race was the French Grand Prix for sports cars in 1952, at Monaco, where the Roadster did not do well against the faster Italian two-liter cars. After that season the car was returned to Stutt-

gart. The roadster was repainted to its current silver-blue color and rebuilt. The engine it has used since late 1951 (30244) was retained. Shipped to California, it raced a full season of club events. Brake cooling continued to be a problem. There were no major victories, the car no longer competitive against the production America Roadsters, OSCAs and new 550 Spyders. The car was retired after its last race at Pebble Beach in 1954. It then went through a series of owners and eventually sat outside deteriorating for nearly three decades. In 1982 it was purchased by its current owner and, after a lengthy restoration, has been returned to vintage racing.

To return to 1952 and the America Roadster story. With Hoffman's apparent approval and probable insistence, plans for production of the aluminum roadsters were completed. Heuer-Glaser in Weiden was contacted to do the bodies, which were all fitted with Type 528, 1500 S engines. Quite fast for their class, they did very well in American club racing. America Roadsters figured in the early careers of many prominent American racers, notably Briggs Cunningham and John von Neumann. America



Roadsters continued to race with much success for several years, remaining competitive until they were superseded by the 550 Spyders.

Never catalogued, the America Roadsters were made for only a short time. There were several changes during the brief series, most notably the change from single to dual grilles and some associated body contour changes, all in an attempt to help combat overheating problems. It appears about 16 were made and nine are known to remain.

Another evolutionary link roadster was made by Heuer-Glaser in their last days in Weiden. This car is shown in drawings, 540-00-202, of July 9, 1952. They depict the same lowered belt line characteristic of the Sauter and America Roadsters, but with a fixed, cabriolet windshield.

Presumably with the encouragement of Hoffman, the roadster concept was quickly resurrected back in Stuttgart, in the form of the Speedster, with release in late 1954.

With this Speedster, Hoffman seems to have finally gotten what he wanted from a marketing point of view. Paradoxically, it did not fit his original styling demands. In summary, we can trace the evolution of early Porsche roadsters in a series of fitful steps, from the 1952 356 prototype, Number 1, to the drawings of October, 1952, through the Sauter roadster to the production America Roadster, briefly through the Heuer-Glaser steel desperation car and eventually to the Speedster.