Masterpieces: From early customer requests to factory one-offs

29/05/2025 Almost no other brand represents personal freedom and individuality like Porsche. The first customer requests appeared in the 1950s, laying the foundation for today's Sonderwunsch department and Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur.

From the very start, Ferry Porsche connected his sports cars to the vision of fulfilling dreams, and the brand has remained true to this objective to this day. Today more than ever before, there is very little chance that two identical Porsche models will leave the factory halls. And yet the customization trend began rather unremarkably. For example, a rear windshield wiper for the 356 A Coupé of industrialist Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach in 1955: not a problem for the repair department at the main factory in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen.

What seems ordinary today was an exotic option at a time when a car radio, for instance, was viewed as an extravagant add-on. The first car phones were an absolute rarity, usually ordered by government clients. The factory responded to the growing demand for customization by expanding the range of accessories, which included reclining seats, grab handles, rev counters, and luggage racks.

What started out as individual customer requests evolved into a tradition that has consistently expanded over the past 70 years, a period in which Porsche has developed valuable expertise. “Since the beginning, we’ve been consistently expanding our customization range and making it more attractive for our customers,” explains Alexander Fabig, Vice President of Individualization and Classic at Porsche. “While individual customer requests tended to be the exception in the early years, the Sonderwunsch and Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur ranges now include some of the most popular products.”

Exclusive Manufaktur currently offers customers around a thousand predefined options to choose from. Through the Paint to Sample programme, more than 190 colors can be configurated. “Demand varies significantly depending on the series,” explains Fabig. “The most popular option is the LED door projector with Porsche lettering, followed by the enhanced taillights and the emblem on the headrests,” he says, listing the top three features for the 911.

From factory repair to Sonderwunsch programme

The history of the Sonderwunsch (special request) programme is full of unique projects that illustrate the brand’s innovative power and attention to detail. Examples include modifications to engines, chassis, and brakes for racing purposes. Particularly active motorsport customers were interested in optimizing their series models for competitions, and the brand helped them with tailored solutions.

For example, a highly modified version of the 911 S 2.0 was developed for the London–Sydney Marathon in 1968. In addition to two factory cars, a 911 owned by a customer was converted and adapted to the rally version of the 911 S 2.0, an important step in founding the customer racing department in 1973. With projects like this one, Porsche was able to lay the groundwork for the connection between motorsport and customization, which is still important to this day.

In 1974, famed conductor Herbert von Karajan, an enthusiastic Porsche customer of many years, ordered a lightweight version of the 911 Turbo 3.0 (G-Series) in silver grey. It was the only 911 Turbo to feature the lightweight body of the Carrera RS 3.0. At the request of Count Gregorio Rossi di Montelera of Italy, one of the legendary 917 race cars was converted for use on the road in 1975, which was anything but simple for Porsche technicians. The 620 PS race car was fitted with exterior mirrors, turn signals, and a rear muffler, and completed its maiden voyage from Zuffenhausen to Paris without any issues.

All of that culminated in the official establishment of the Porsche Sonderwunsch department in 1978, the aim of which was to fulfill the growing demand for custom vehicles. Rolf Sprenger was responsible for customer care. But with more and more customers requesting aesthetic adjustments, motorsport modifications weren’t the only options in high demand. The focus extended very quickly to paint jobs in extraordinary colors.

Porsche Exclusive: factory customization

Another milestone followed in 1983 when Porsche built a street version of the 935 race car for Mansour Ojjeh, the owner of TAG. With 409 PS, a "Flachbau" body, and a luxurious interior with leather in Creme Caramel and wood paneling, the 935 "Street" became a symbol of the 1980s. Highly complex custom vehicles like these eventually formed a "Flachbau" small series that immediately achieved cult status. These exacting tasks, combined with the increased demand for finishing options at the factory, required a simplification of the processes. The conversion of new vehicles was integrated directly into the production area, while final assembly took place at Zuffenhausen Werk II in the so-called "Rössle" building. This ultimately resulted in the founding of Porsche Exclusive in 1986, known as Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur since 2017. To this day, the experts there, with the support of other departments, refine new vehicles at the factory and, following the example of the 935, still develop small series that become icons.

With the introduction of Porsche Exclusive, customization reached a new level at Porsche. Full-leather interiors in just about any color of the rainbow were all the rage in the 1980s, as were protruding hi-fi towers in the central console with correspondingly dimensioned boxes. Around the same time, Porsche produced seven custom Porsche 959 vehicles for a member of the ruling family of Qatar, featuring special colors like Sahara Beige and Royal Blue, buffalo leather interiors in corresponding colors, and exhaust pipes plated with 24-karat gold.

In 1990, the Turbo 3.3 Cabriolet (G-Series) of a collector in New York, whose list of special requests was no less than 28 pages long, represented both the culmination and end of the era of the 911 Turbo with Flachbau. To this day, it's considered to be a customization milestone. In addition to the highly extensive leather features, the one-off was also fitted with an electric convertible top with rain sensor, a Turbo engine with Motronic, and a six-speed transmission.

In 2004, Porsche launched the "most personal car" initiative to promote the topic of customization worldwide. One of the most spectacular examples was when furniture designer Carlo Rampazzi was presented with the 911 Turbo Cabriolet of his dreams – with the identical shade of orange both outside and in the interior. The inspiration for the exquisite color request was a plate he'd brought to Zuffenhausen.

Sonderwunsch programme: uniquely extraordinary

Today, the Exclusive Manufaktur is responsible for predefined small series and finishing options, while the relaunch of the Sonderwunsch programme in 2021 took "the attention to detail to a whole new level," as Porsche emphasizes. Style Porsche is the key partner for all customization topics. The Sonderwunsch programme enables customized features and one-offs to be created at the factory across all vehicle generations. For example, customers can request their own wheel designs or body modifications. The range also includes factory restoration for historical vehicles, allowing these to be

restored to their former glory. “Our Sonderwunsch customers tend to be absolute Porsche experts,” says Alexander Fabig. “They’ve not only had a real connection with the brand for years, but in most cases also have extensive expertise and know the product inside and out.”

A more recent example is when the work of art Appearance of Crosses 2022-2 by Chinese artist Ding Yi was applied to the surface of a Taycan Turbo S. The project required a brand-new painting process developed specifically for the purpose. Challenges like this are anything but rare at Porsche and are overcome with a great deal of dedication and creativity.

In addition, the 911 Speedster (993) of designer Luca Trazzi demonstrates in a spectacular way how entirely unique one-offs are created through the Sonderwunsch programme. “That's our most elaborate project to date,” says Fabig. According to the Vice President of Individualization and Classic, up to 12 one-offs like this can be produced at the same time, “though demand far exceeds capacity.”

The art of customization

The process of implementing a Sonderwunsch one-off begins with the customer's idea. After the first feasibility test, the customer is invited to a project meeting, during which designers and engineers prepare a specification sheet together. This process can take up to a year. Once the customer approves the project, development and production kick off in close collaboration with designers, engineers, mechanics, vehicle body builders, upholsterers, paint specialists, and historians.

While technical or legal restrictions may impose some limitations, Porsche thoroughly assesses every request. Safety and legal compliance take top priority. All factory one-off vehicles created are documented in the company archive to honor their uniqueness.

As the project leader, customers assume a key role in the process and can accompany every step of the project firsthand. “This degree of involvement in their project is the biggest luxury for our Sonderwunsch customers,” says Alexander Fabig. A symbol of that is the workshop ID, which customers receive at the start of the project. “It’s no exaggeration to say that they all wear it with pride.”

The degree to which the customer is involved in the development process can vary significantly. While some of them provide Porsche with concrete sketches or mood boards, others begin with vague ideas that need to be fleshed out together. Historical elements are often incorporated into the project if customers want to include emotional memories or design requests from the past. This variety makes the work all the more exciting for the Sonderwunsch team.

One of the most recent examples demonstrates in a spectacular way how not only new vehicles, but also classic models can be incorporated into the Sonderwunsch programme.

In collaboration with Porsche, singer-songwriter Álvaro Soler designed a 928 S from the ground up and thus fulfilled the dream of a lifetime. The vehicle boasts a customized Soler Yellow Metallic paint job

and an interior fitted with pampa brown leather. In collaboration with the sound system engineers from the Porsche Development Centre Weissach, a 360-degree sound system was installed that was individually tailored to Soler's needs. The luggage compartment also offers space for a guitar painted in the same color as the car and its case.

These days, customization is more important to Porsche than ever before. Customers expect top quality and the option to add a personal touch to their vehicle. The company therefore wants to continue expanding the Sonderwunsch programme and thus enable sports car customization up to factory one-offs. This growth will primarily be driven by Paint to Sample and interior individualization. For employees of the Sonderwunsch department, their work is more than just a career – it's also a passion. "It's an exciting, sometimes challenging, but always positive task," says Alexander Fabig with enthusiasm. "We work with our customers to make their dreams come true." Entirely in the spirit of Ferry Porsche.

Info

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Consumption data

Taycan Turbo S (Predecessor model)

*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

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