

"There is no better partner"

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20/12/2015 It all started back in 1955 with five Porsches in Hong Kong. Today Jebsen Motors operates nine Porsche Centers throughout China. A conversation with Chairman Hans Michael Jebsen.

Mr. Jebsen, your company looks back on a 60-year partnership with Porsche. How did it evolve over such a long period of time?

It has been a great partnership right from the beginning for the simple reason that the companies share a set of common values, with a very simple understanding that you stick to your word, you go through thick and thin, and you don't need to look at partnership agreements. The minute you do, something is wrong, like in a marriage! We are proud that our companies have stood shoulder to shoulder even during trying times. Right now I have no doubt the future holds terrific promise in our markets, from a rising urbanized population that is maturing into a consumer class, appreciating the qualities that Porsche represents.

Can you tell us about the early days?

My father met Ferry Porsche in 1954 and the idea was born. The first commitment was five cars in 1955. Well, Hong Kong wasn't exactly a vast market to start with. For one thing, there weren't that many roads. It was a market that grew from 20 to 50 to 70 to 100 cars over 20 to 30 years, so that was a C market for Porsche. But as Hong Kong's economy picked up in the 1970s and '80s and as Porsche's model range expanded, with the Boxster, the Cayenne and of course with the mainland market opening up in 2003, we are talking leap-frogging in numbers of cars sold, a whole new dimension that has now made China the second most important market for Porsche.

How do you think Jebsen has maintained such a solid relationship in this dynamic industry?

Openness, communication, essentially loyalty is the key issue. As we sit here today we have a large number of staff who go back over three generations; our present CEO is third-generation, too. One has to say that good partnerships are well beyond KPIs, but have all to do with the simple qualities of trust and reliability. To be one of the longest-serving partners of Porsche fills us with pride and gratitude. Pride from working with the world's most fascinating automotive company and gratitude to be doing that here and now in this amazing market, dealing with those inspiring and engaging individuals that motivate us to embrace the future as it's unfolding itself every day anew.

What is the cooperation like today?

For us, Porsche is a cornerstone in many ways. When it comes to investments, when it comes to staff, numbers, training efforts, our own exposure and visibility both in Hong Kong and in the mainland, we can learn many things from the way Porsche handles HR issues, training and IT issues, for example. So this is also an educational experience for us, which we appreciate. Porsche has always been noted for its informal, friendly working environment.

Why has the Jebsen family made Hong Kong its home for so long?

Hong Kong is simply a great place to be. My greatgrandfather was the first member of my family to decide that Hong Kong was an interesting port of call, and he made this a regular stop. In fact, in the 1860s he set up an office in Hong Kong and came to this port so regularly that my grandfather decided to open up a trading company with his later brother-in-law in the 1890s. These two were the first partners of the Jebsen Company, which later became a trading company, plus shipping. The family has gone through thick and thin in Asia. We started off as German citizens before the First World War, coming from what is now South Jutland in Denmark, and really stuck to our second home on the South China Coast, with Hong Kong as our prime residence, having really become very much interwoven with the local scene.

And what do you like about the city?

Hong Kong is a very open society. It is one of the few true meritocracies in the world. It doesn't matter

who you are, or who you claim you are; what matters is what you can contribute, whether you are here for four generations or four days. Hong Kong is part of China but it is a little special. It has the best of both worlds. And it has the largest Porsche population per capita in the world. Which says something about the discerning tastes of people here.

By the way, which model do you drive?

I drive a Cayenne and a Panamera. It's a great thing to be a Porsche dealer, as we have a wide variety to choose from! My wife drives the Cayenne, and in Europe she drives the 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet. She's an even faster driver than I am!

What is your favorite model of all time?

That is a difficult one, because there are so many nice ones, a bit like favorite wines! But when we celebrated our 40th anniversary in 1995, I bought myself a 911 Speedster painted in a special "Peach" color. I drove it from Stuttgart to Denmark in one night in spring and I'll never forget that. I'm not going to sell it any time soon. The engine has the unmistakable Porsche sound of that era.

Nowadays eco-technology is on the advance. How does this affect and influence Porsche in Hong Kong?

I think that is a dynamic process. Porsche has been, and I believe will be, at the forefront of spearheading technological change. We are faced with a leap change in ecological awareness and the hybrid technology is one that Porsche has developed across its model range, often as first in class. This is something that in urbanized environments like Hong Kong and many places in China plays an increasing role.

And the future for Jebsen and Porsche?

The future is not just about selling new cars, but taking care of a very sophisticated market in service and finance in pre-owned cars and dealing with all those aspects around a total experience of satisfying customers who are becoming more demanding, more sophisticated, and have more choices. It's about running faster together with more competitors. That is the future and it is just as exciting as before. In any event, I can't imagine a better partner to work with than Porsche. If we were to start again, we would knock on the same door.

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