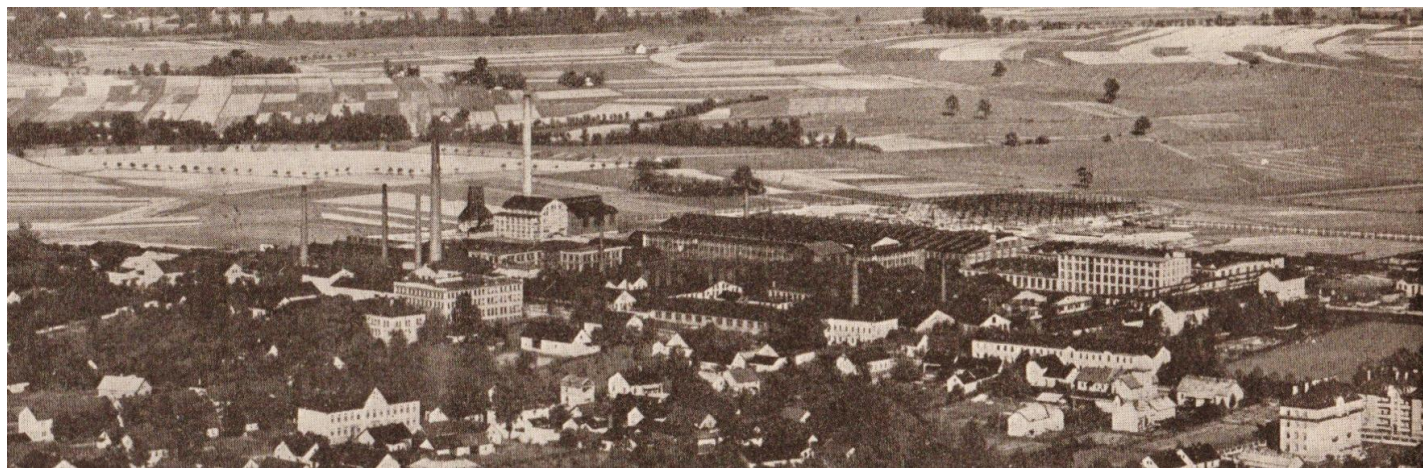


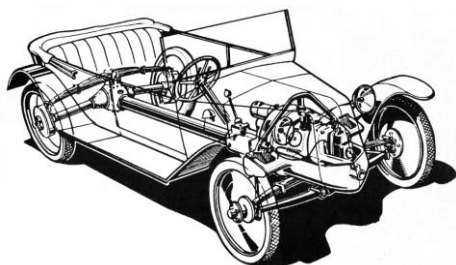
Tatra as the Modern World Symbol

by Ivan Margolius



Tatra Cars

Above, archive image of Kopřivnice (German: Nesselsdorf), Moravia, in continuous automotive vehicle production since 1897.



Right, Hans Ledwinka (1878 -1967) in front of his Tatra T87 car; left, the Tatra T11



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The Tatra company, the producer of world-renowned innovative, streamlined cars, based in Kopřivnice (in German Nesselsdorf), Moravia, the Czech Republic, has been in continuous automotive vehicle production since 1897 and as such belongs to one of the oldest car manufacturers in the world. Its survival is due to the great technical mastery and talent of the people of Central Europe, and one man in particular, Hans Ledwinka (1878-1967).

Tatra started its existence in 1850 founded by Ignaz Schustala and from 1858 traded as Schustala & Company. It was incorporated in 1891 as Nesselsdorfer Wagenbau-Fabriks (Nesselsdorfer Wagon Works) and was well regarded at home and abroad for the high level of craftsmanship and progressive designs. The factory was located below the Beskydy section of the Carpathian Mountains with the highest peaks in the Tatra range, after which the factory named its cars in 1919.

It may come as a surprise to learn that such innovation had developed from what is regarded as a remote area of the European Continent. However, Brno, the Moravian capital, became the centre of modernism; its closeness to Vienna enabled the new European thinking be imported there through young designers who had returned after being educated in the Austrian capital, and the city had an enlightened leadership in its urban development department, led by modernist architect Jindřich Kumpošt from 1920 to 1925. The region of Moravia, with the further towns of Olomouc, Prostějov, Znojmo, Zlín, Ostrava and Přerov, was greatly industrialised, providing products for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and later the new republic. The industrialisation, out of necessity to sustain itself and in order to compete and be continuously progressive, required of its employees a high level of education. The region became a location for scientific research, of universities, colleges, libraries, museums, science clubs and associations. All these longstanding activities and institutions raised the local population's educational status. Hence Moravia could boast of being a birthplace of a large number of well-known people. The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, was born in Příbor, architect Adolf Loos, mathematician Kurt Gödel and writers Milan Kundera and Bohumil Hrabal in Brno, physicist Ernst Mach in Chrlice, the founder of genetic science Gregor Mendel in Hynčice, architect Josef Hoffmann in Brtnice. Composer Leoš Janáček was born in

Hukvaldy, painter Alfons Mucha in Ivančice, shoemaker Tomáš Bat'a in Zlín, philosopher Edmund Husserl, and the inventor of contact lenses Otto Wichterle in Prostějov, and Emil Zátopek in Kopřivnice. Ledwinka himself was not born in Moravia but near Vienna, although his father Anton came from Brtnice.

In 1921 Ledwinka designed a radically innovative Tatra T11 marketed as a 'people's car' from 1923. The new type was simple in construction, modest in maintenance, servicing and fuel consumption. The T11 consisted of an air-cooled, front two-cylinder engine with a central tubular chassis which served as the carrier of the car body. The T11's front bonnet solid mask, without the need of openings for a radiator, reduced drag and had great influence on subsequent proposals for small air-cooled engine cars by other manufacturers. During the economic crisis of the early 1930s when automobile factories designed small cars to be able to survive, Tatra tried similarly a rear air-cooled engine car directly powering the rear wheels as this arrangement was more economical to produce. Ferdinand Porsche among others also tried to produce a people's car, later developed into a Volkswagen Beetle, on similar well-tried Tatra air-cooling principles, and some of his proposals were a compound of other designers' prototypes, such as Josef Ganz's and Béla Barényi's ideas later resulting in patent infringements disputes.

As its small T57 car was already successful, Tatra decided to abandon its experiment and continue with large streamlined models instead using Jaray's patents, starting with Type 77 with a V8 engine in 1934 becoming the first company in the world to produce these innovative designs successfully on a mass scale. Production continued with models T87, T97 and T600 after the war. One Tatra patent dispute with Porsche/Volkswagen was resolved in 1961 but only to the benefit of Hans Ringhoffer's heirs, the descendants of the Tatra factory owner up to 1945.

Tatra, as well as other companies such as Wikow, Zbrojovka, Bat'a, Vítkovice, Zlín Aircraft, embodied the progressiveness of the Moravian lands, illustrating the hardworking efforts of the local communities to place themselves to the forefront of the modern era in Central Europe.

For more information please see Tatra – The Legacy of Hans Ledwinka by Ivan Margolius & John G. Henry, Veloce Publishing, Dorchester, 2015, ISBN 978-1-845847-99-9