



# SALISBURY CONCOURS d'ELEGANCE

A Celebration of the Art & Design of the Automobile

## The BMW Tradition: DESIGN EXCELLENCE



1934-1937 BMW 315/1 – Photo: Stephen Foskett



1936-1940 BMW 328 – Photo: Lothar Spurzem

Few people take time to learn about the rich history of the automobile brands they drive... including me... until now. During my architectural education, I developed a deep curiosity and love for the history of architecture and art and civilizations. And so I was surprised, as driver of a BMW Z4, to realize that I knew very little about the history of BMW or the designers that have created so many beautiful and enjoyable automobiles over the past 80-plus years.

Serving as chair of the BMW Class for the 2012 Salisbury Concours d'Elegance provides the perfect opportunity to learn and to share the fascinating history of this fine marque that has made DESIGN EXCELLENCE a cornerstone of its products. Consider these BMW highlights:

**1913:** The company that would become BMW began as a maker of aircraft engines when Karl Freidrich Rapp established *Rapp Motorenwerke* in a former bicycle factory near Munich.

**1916:** Not particularly successful, the role of the Rapp company in World War I nevertheless gained sufficient momentum to evolve into the *Bayerische Motoren Werke* (Bavarian Motor Works) under a new leader, Franz-Josef Popp.

**1918:** After design of a successful new aircraft engine, the company formally became *BMWAG*.

BMW struggled in the difficult German economy following the war. The company broadened its product line to include railway car brake systems, office furniture, and smaller engines for industrial use. And in its first real step toward the future, it began building motorcycle engines.



1923 BMW R32  
Photo: © by Jeff Dean



1930 Dixi 3/15  
Photo: Public Domain



1933 BMW 3/20  
Photo: Stahlkocher



1933 BMW 303  
Photo: Stahlkocher

**1923:** BMW built its first successful complete motorcycle, the **R32**, utilizing the “boxer” engine design (horizontally opposed cylinders) that continues to the present.

**1928:** BMW branched out into automobile manufacturing with the purchase of a factory at Eisenach and the license from the English Austin Seven company to build the **Dixi 3/15**.

**1932:** The **3/20PS** was introduced as the first model developed entirely by BMW. It won a prize at the Concours d’Elegance in Baden-Baden.

**1933:** A landmark year, BMW introduced the **303** saloon (sedan) with its first inline-six cylinder engine and, beginning a design tradition that continues today, twin-kidney shaped radiator grilles.

As a design theme throughout its history, BMW has shown a deep commitment to *evolution* in the use of major design elements, while also striking a balance with innovation and creativity. One example is the twin grilles. See more images of the grille evolution [here](#).



Design in the early decades of automobiles and motorcycles was chiefly a matter of engineering and function. Innovation and experimentation were paramount as designers and engineers struggled to make the vehicles more reliable, easier to drive, and faster than the competition.



**1936 BMW 315 Saloon**  
Photo: Stahlkocher



**1934-1937 BMW 315/1**  
Photo: Stephen Foskett



**1938 BMW 326**  
Photo: Lars-Goran Lindgren

**1934:** The **315** saloon was offered as a 2-door, a tourer, and convertible. Attention to design as a consideration began to be evident with the development of the milestone **315/1** sports roadster, using the same chassis as the 315 saloon.

**1935:** The **326** was the first BMW produced as a 4-door model.

Names of designers began to become known as the importance of aesthetics approached that of engineering. The 326 body was designed by Peter Szymanowski, with the engine and chassis the work of Fritz Fiedler and Alfred Böning... men important in the continuing evolution of BMW excellence.



1936-1940 BMW 328 – Photo: Lothar Spurzem



1940 BMW 328 at the Mille Miglia – Photo Lothar Spurzem

**1936:** The iconic **328** roadster was a natural evolution, with design again led by the team of Szymanowski, Fiedler, Rudolf Schleicher, and body specialist Wilhelm Kaiser. Its handsome lines included headlamps smoothly blended into the transition between fenders and hood, a characteristic feature that would last for the next 2 decades of BMW design. It was not just beautiful; it was effective, highly successful in competition and nearly unbeatable in 2-liter class sports car races, winning the famous Mille Miglia in 1940.

While the focus of the Salisbury Concours is on the beauty of the body and its interior, it is appropriate to recognize that the totality of automotive design relies heavily on engineering creativity as well – chassis, engine, transmission, brakes, suspension – all must be synthesized into a whole greater than its parts. The 328 was a true milestone in automobiles, bred first on the racing circuits with much success, then refined for the road version. An excellent article on the design development of the 328 is available [here](#).



1937-1941 BMW 327 – Photo: Harald Spiegel

BMW, not concerned with sequential numbers for its models, introduced the 327 a year later. With Szymanowski styling, this stunning coupe or cabriolet featured distinctive two-toned paint.

Production of automobiles stopped with the advent of World War II, shifting to the manufacture of motorcycles and propeller and jet engines. During the war, most BMW facilities were destroyed. After the war, the Allied Occupation placed strict controls on what could be manufactured in the first few years following. As production resumed, the factory in Eisenach fell under Soviet occupation. The 327s produced there were badged as EMW (Eisenacher Motoren Werke) with the BMW roundel badge changed to red and white. Adaptations of the BMW 327 design were produced as Bristols (1947-1955) under the guidance of BMW's Fritz Fiedler, relocated from Germany.





**BMW R51/3** – Photo: Th-Photos

**1948:** BMW motorcycles were again built. By 1950, the R51/2, R51/3 and the R67 became major sales successes.



**1952-1962 BMW 501** – Photo: Jed



**1955 BMW Isetta** – Photo: Biser Todorov

**1952:** The first post-war BMW was the V8-equipped 501 luxury sedan (1952–1958). Called *Barockengel* (Baroque Angels), their flowing shape reminded some of the carved wooden figures in German and Austrian Baroque churches.

**1955:** A curious sidebar to the reputation of BMW as a manufacturer of sports and luxury cars and competition motorcycles was the acquisition of a license from ISO in Italy to build the 1955-1962 BMW Isetta, an egg-shaped one-door microcar. In the economic recovery after WW II, it became a top seller, inexpensive and economical, driven by a one cylinder motorcycle engine with 13 hp.



**1956-1959 BMW 507** – Photo: Public Domain

**1956:** BMW design credentials were again enhanced with the introduction of the 507. Inspired by US importer Max Hoffmann of New York City, the 507 was designed by Albrecht Goertz as an exclusive sports car to rival the 1954 Mercedes-Benz 300SL (also inspired by Hoffman). The styling set a design character that later resulted in the designs of the Z8, Z3 and Z4. High production costs not only prevented the 507 from economic success, but took BMW to the edge of bankruptcy.



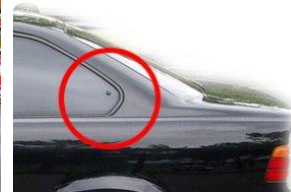
**1959-1965 BMW 700**  
Photo: Public Domain



**BMW 700 RS**  
Photo: Norbert Schnitzler



**1963 BMW 1500**  
Photo: Public Domain



**The Hofmeister kink**

**1960:** Fortunately for BMW, an infusion of capital from Herbert and Harald Quandt and the introduction of new, less expensive models, the **700** and the *Neue Klasse* (“New Class”) **1500**, helped the company survive. Under the objective of sales volume rather than exclusivity, both the 700 and the 1500 were dramatically different than past BMW sports and luxury automobiles. The **700**, designed by Italian Giovanni Michelotti, was an economy car with a rear-mounted R67 motorcycle engine. The **700 RS** was a handsome racing version driven by several well-known racing drivers including Hans Stuck and Jacky Ickx. The **1500** (1962-1966), a 4-door sedan by the team of design chief Wilhelm Hofmeister, Fritz Fiedler, and Alex von Falkenhausen, introduced another BMW icon: the “Hofmeister kink”, a low forward bend in the C-pillar (the metal body between the side and rear windows)

Beginning in the 1960s, new sophisticated models reestablished the BMW reputation for design excellence in sports and luxury performance automobiles. Some of the important models included:



BMW 3200 (1962-1965), a sports tourer designed by the Italian company of Gruppo Bertone (Photo: Jed)



BMW 2000C/CS (1965-1969), a coupe built by Karmann for BMW as a design evolution of the 3200 CS (Photo: Public Domain)



BMW New Six (1968-1977), a line of 6 cylinder sporting luxury cars including the 2500, 2800, and the 3.0 series (Photos: Sven Storbeck, dave\_7, & Olli 1800)



BMW 2002 (1968-1976), one of the most well-known BMWs, became the icon for sports sedans. Designed by Giovanni Michelotti, more than 860,000 were sold before it was replaced by the 3 series of today. (Photo: Public Domain)

From the 70s forward, BMW designers have shown a remarkable ability to capture the BMW heritage in evolutionary designs while also introducing contemporary, creative new ideas... never losing sight of the twin kidney grilles and the famous logo. A comprehensive list of BMW designers through the years, including brief biographies, is available [here](#).

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Text by Bill Dikis, FAIA Co-Chair of the 2012 Salisbury Concours d'Elegance

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[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

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