

# WHO REALLY STYLED THE 914?

Think Gugelot styled Porsche's first mass-produced, mid-engined sports car? Think again.

STORY BY KIERON FENNELLY PHOTOS COURTESY PORSCHE ARCHIVES UNLESS NOTED

To almost any eyes, the 1970 914 was something entirely new for a Porsche. Its appearance did not deceive: It was the first mass-produced Porsche with its engine mounted amidships, the first available only as an open car, and the first designed to add a model line alongside the company's primary, rear-engined offering.

Introduced in 1969, the 914 was Porsche's third all-new production car. The *Vierzehner* (Fourteener), as Germans called it, was conceived as an entry-level car. The interim 912, essentially a 911 powered by

the discontinued 356's flat four, was too close to the 911 in appearance and pricing.

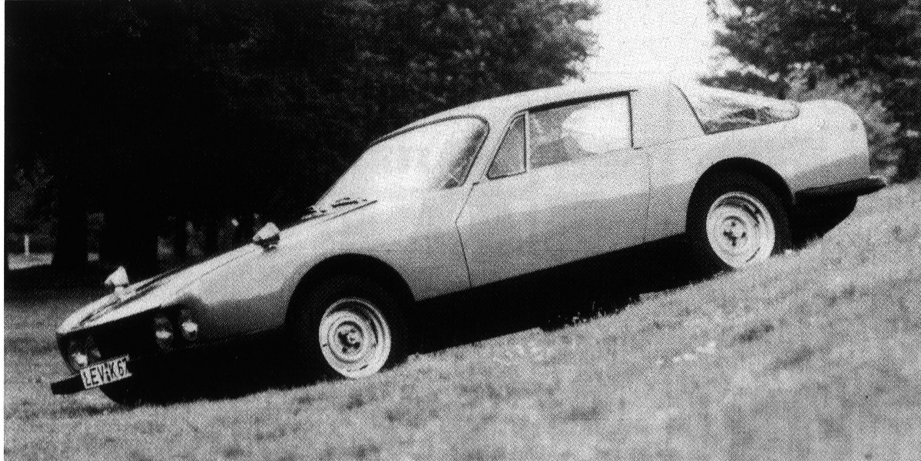
Today, we can see that the 914's design was ahead of its time — but it looked alien in 1969 alongside the elegant fastbacks that Porsche was known for. The design drew lukewarm reviews, at best. Though Porsche publically credited F.A. "Butzi" Porsche with the 911's design, it remained silent about the 914's originator.

"Strangely, given the 1960s was a period when the automotive stylist really became established, nobody seems to lay claim to

the overall styling direction of the 914," writes author Jeff Daniels in his book, *Porsche, the Engineering Story*. Many historians have credited Gugelot, but they were wrong — the minimalist 914 was very much an in-house design.

The 914 was born out of the needs of two car companies inextricably linked: Porsche and VW. The former wanted a new model but was in no position to tool up for one, and the latter was in the market for fresh designs.





While Gugelot's original design featured a lift-off top, the eventual concept car was a coupe.

By the mid-1960s, VW's range looked dated — and limited. The success of BMW's *Neue Klasse* showed the importance of the growing middle-class market. After a solid decade of prosperity since World War II, Europe was characterized by a thirst for social, cultural, and political change.

Industrially, this was apparent in fresh designs and materials ideas from companies like Gugelot Design in Neu-Ulm, Germany, which devised attractive forms for the new wave of consumer goods. Gugelot fancied an attempt at automotive design,

and its process — which sought to mold Glass-Reinforced Plastic body panels to a GRP chassis — attracted the interest of several manufacturers. Among them was BMW, for which Gugelot produced a two-seater sports car concept — a seemingly anonymous, front-engined affair.

While BMW ultimately passed on the Gugelot concept, it was indicative of a new take on “form follows function” — and got automakers thinking about new sports cars. This was certainly the case at VW, where such a two-seater might replace its aging Karmann Ghia.

As usual, VW turned to Porsche, which did much of its design and engineering. VW boss Heinz Nordhoff and Ferry Porsche enjoyed a close relationship that dated back to 1948, when Nordhoff was appointed to run Volkswagen and briefly tried to lure Ferry away from Porsche KG.

The two reached an arrangement where Porsche would design a sports car that Karmann would build. Fitted with VW's new, 1.7-liter flat four intended for the forthcoming VW 411, the car would be sold as a VW-Porsche by a joint venture of the same name. Per their agreement, a proportion of fully trimmed bodies would be delivered to Zuffenhausen for the installation of the 911T's flat six. Since Karmann's Osnabrück plant was already delivering some 911 bodies to Porsche, the logistics existed. While the 914 and 914-6 would be sold as VW-Porsches in Europe, they'd be marketed as Porsches in the United States.

Designing and engineering the 914 fell to Porsche. Its running gear would be familiar, with front suspension and steering borrowed from the 911. The five-speed transaxle was also adapted from the 911,

**BELOW: Heinrich Kille (at far left) and Ferdinand Alexander Porsche (at far right) in Porsche's design studio with models and drawings of two contemporary 914 projects, the 901/902 and 904.**



and used with both engines. The four-wheel disc brakes used four-lug hubs on 914-4s and five-lug Porsche hubs on 914-6s. While the 914's interior mixed Porsche and VW bits, its exterior was entirely new.

Today, it's hard to look at Gugelot's concept and connect it to the 914 — but it's easy to see why some did in the 1970s. There are similarities, and Ferry had looked outside for design help. After a visit to the U.S. in 1956, he saw the importance of styling. Until then, it was the preserve of *Konstruktionsbüro* (body construction) stalwart Erwin Komenda, who was essentially a body engineer.

In 1957, Ferry asked Albrecht von Goertz, of whose BMW 507 he was an unconditional admirer, to come up with a Porsche. Ferry was dismayed with the drawing that eventually materialized, feeling it adhered to none of his conditions. By then, Butzi had left his art studies at Neu Ulm and was working at Zuffenhausen under Komenda. The 901/911 would be conceived in-house.

When the design team in Zuffenhausen took on the VW-Porsche project in 1964, it looked at several concepts, the Gugelot sports-car proposal being one of them. Then it went its own way. Michael von Klodt's definitive work, *Das Grosse VW-Porsche Buch*, quotes Butzi as saying the Gugelot design "had a few similarities to the 914," but that was all. The *Vierzehner* would be an internal Porsche design.

"The first sketches were made in 1964 at the Porsche Design Studio," writes von Klodt. "Five different sketches were chosen for the final design choice in early 1966. All five sketches were turned into 1:5 size clay models. The (unanimous) vote went to a model designed by Heinrich Klie, then head of the Porsche studio, who also designed the Porsche Formula One car and the Carrera 6."

Klie, who had come to Porsche in 1953, drew a mid-engine installation, which was

**RIGHT, TOP TWO PHOTOS:** This early clay model was close to the production 914, but had scalloped doortops. The initials on the model's license plates are, at the very least, rather curious. **RIGHT, ABOVE:** Later 1:5 scale model showed different headlight and bumper-grille widths; it is possible that the wider setup was under consideration to separate the 914-6 from the 914-4 visually, but only Ferdinand Piëch's 914-8 would end up using the wider headlight treatment. **RIGHT:** Heinrich Klie ended up with the studio's 1:5 scale model, and continued to play with its front end in retirement.

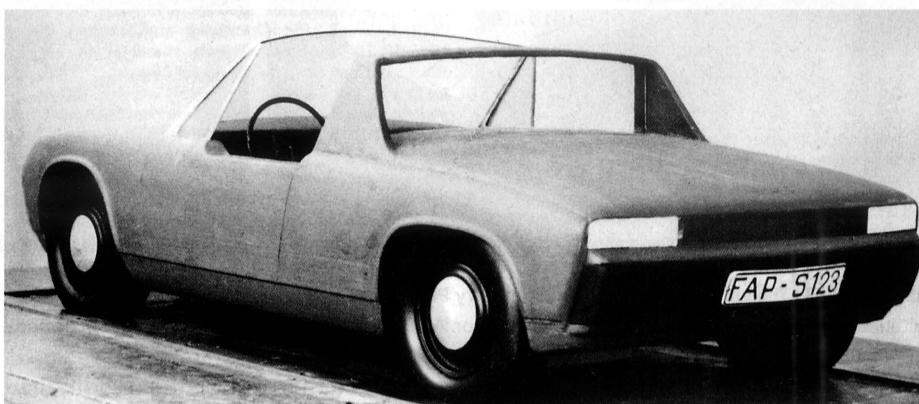
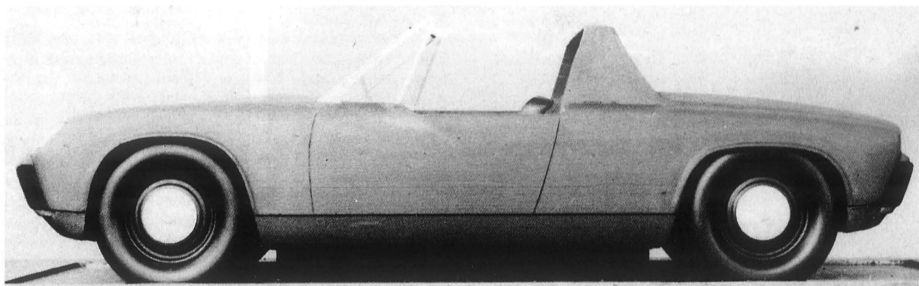


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**ABOVE, LEFT:** The subtle silver 914-8 built for Ferry Porsche looked far more like the production 914 than Piëch's car, but was a true, all-steel coupe with a sunroof. Note also its separate fuel-filler door. **ABOVE, RIGHT:** Klie's unusual 914-4 is currently being restored in Germany. Stay tuned...

how Porsche built its race cars. While Porsche hadn't tried the configuration in a mass-production car, the 904 had demonstrated its potential on the street. In addition to handling advantages, a mid-engine car could be optimized as a dedicated two-seater. Trunks fore and aft would make for a true tourer, with a rigid targa roof panel that stowed neatly in the rear trunk. Such a configuration would also distance the entry-level 914 from the 911.

Visually, Klie's design differed from the mainstream significantly by having abbreviated overhangs and a striking, "wheel at each corner" stance. Though its roofline recalls the RS61 coupe of 1962 to a certain extent, the 914 proved remarkably individual looking in 1969. If it bore any similarity to any production car, it was perhaps to 1966's mid-engined Lotus Europa.

**T**he subsequent history of the 914 is a classic "what might have been," especially given the Boxster's success. Sadly, the 914 was doomed from the start in Europe, where it was perceived as both a VW and a Porsche yet neither a VW nor a Porsche. Everyone agreed on one thing, however: The 914 offered incredible handling, clever packaging, and admirable efficiency.

The design was nothing if not functional: Four inches lower and 1.5 inches wider than a contemporary 911, the 914 was also seven inches shorter overall — on a wheelbase that was seven inches longer. The open-top 914, with its six cross-section bulkheads and deeply boxed longitudinalinals, was roughly the equal of a 911

coupe in terms of structural rigidity, and noticeably stiffer than a 911 Targa.

The chassis was largely developed by legendary Porsche engineer Helmuth Bott, and proved its worth at Le Mans in 1970 by winning the GT category, sixth overall, and fourth in the Index of Efficiency. The 914-6 GT followed that with a 1-2-3 finish at the Marathon de la Route, a grueling 86-hour contest on the Nürburgring.

That Porsche saw what might have been with the 914 is clear. Two experimental, 914s with 908 flat eights were built, one for racing director Ferdinand Piëch, the other for Ferry Porsche. Plans to put the flat eight into a racing 914 never came to fruition, but a 916 proposal got a little further. Considered as an answer to Ferrari's Dino, the 916 had a fixed roof, a 2.4- or 2.7-liter flat six, and a sumptuous interior. The last of eleven was built by early 1972, the year that Porsche pulled the plug on the 914-6.

Put simply, the 914-6 was not a commercial success in Porsche's view. Heinz Nordhoff died before the 914 went into production and his successor, Kurt Lotz, chose not to honor the largely gentleman's agreements Nordhoff made with Ferry. The upshot: Karmann charged Porsche full fare for each 914-6 body. As a result, the 110-hp, 2.0-liter 914-6 was priced too close to the 125-hp 2.2-liter 911T.

Buyers responded predictably. In three years, Porsche built just 3,351 examples of the 914-6 (2,658 for 1970, 433 for 1971, and 260 for 1972). The 914-4 did far better. Over seven model years between 1970 and 1976, nearly 119,000 914-4s found buy-

ers. The sales peak came in 1973, with 27,660 examples sold. Consider these figures against the well-received 928: Over 18 model years between 1978 and 1995, Porsche sold 57,998 examples of the luxurious V8 coupe — with the single-year sales peak of 5,438 coming in 1979.

Today, more than four decades after its somewhat shaky introduction, the 914 has been widely accepted as a member of the Porsche family. While the 356 and 911 have far larger followings, the 914 has one that's every bit as fervent. Porsche is still involved with 914s, too, handling all parts support for the cars, whether 914-4 or 914-6. It has also proudly displayed several 914s in the new Porsche Museum, and is considering a "new 914" to expand sales — hopefully one that will stay true to the original's design purity.

**A**s for Klie, the 914 was the high point of his 20-year career at Porsche. 1966 would prove to be a pivotal year within Porsche's design department. Klie resigned from his role as Style Porsche's manager of planning and coordination in 1966 and was replaced by Butzi Porsche. That same year, Komenda, who had overseen Porsche styling since 1931, died. Komenda had been steadily marginalized, and perhaps Butzi's elevation simply reflected the *de facto* hierarchy within Style Porsche. Whatever the case, Klie would no longer carry the weight he once did.

At the invitation of Ferry, designer Tony Lapine arrived in 1969 with a remit to bring some of GM's styling flair to Por-

sche. Lapine recalls a design department that consisted of Butzi, Klie, himself, and a couple others. Gradually, he built a team, recruiting Wolfgang Möbius and Dick Soderburg from Opel as well as Harm Lagaay, the first in a new graduate generation schooled in styling and design.

In 1972, Butzi, along with his Porsche and Piëch cousins, left the family business after Ferry decided none of the family was fit to manage the company. Butzi struck out on his own, founding Porsche Design, a product design firm in Austria. By then, Lapine had a team of over 25 people tasked with projects as diverse as a car for Lada and a cockpit for Airbus. Of course, there were critical Porsche jobs too, from the 924 and 928 to the G-series 911.

Lapine remembers he never knew quite what to do with Klie, who by then was the only employee he had inherited. "He just used to work away at modelling stuff for Butzi," says Lapine. "I never saw him at the drawing board. I often said, 'Mr. Klie, is there anything I can help you with?' I never really found out why he was still there."

Lagaay, then 25, immediately understood Klie was an anachronism. "When Tony Lapine came, it was a total transfor-

mation," says Lagaay. "The whole business of styling and design became a proper department, not an offshoot of engineering. With all these people around, Heinrich was a bit lost. I think he retired after a couple of years."

Klie made several important contributions in his time at Porsche, but he was apparently content to make them quietly. Recalls Wolfgang Möbius: "I did hear he had been involved in the Targa hoop and the design of the Fuchs wheel, but he was really a modeller, not a stylist."

Klie died in 1999 at the age of 85. One man who got to know Klie in retirement was Norbert Schlüter, a member of the German Westfalen 914 Club.

"I'd been restoring a 914 for years, but, in the end, I gave up and sold it to a guy in the Netherlands because I just didn't have time," says Schlüter. "Two weeks later, I happened to be in Munich when I saw a classified ad for a 914 for sale. It was no ordinary 914; (it was) the very car used in the Porsche design studio until 1974, when it was acquired by Klie. This 914 was evidently a one-off, having a special instrument panel. Of course, I had to have it!"

Having bought Klie's old 914 in run-

down if salvageable condition, Schlüter was keen to talk to its designer and one-time owner. Through his 914 club, he learned the former Porsche employee was living somewhere near Kassel. By working through all 20 Klies in the phone book, he tracked Heinrich Klie down in Göttingen.

Schlüter says Klie was delighted to learn his 914 still existed. Having no children of his own, Klie gave it to his nephew in 1983 and then lost sight of it. Amongst the materials that Klie gave Schlüter were two posters on which he had marked cars he'd worked on. As well as the 914, these posters indicate Klie was involved with the 356 from 1957 on and all 911 variants up to 1969. The charts also suggest Klie had at least a hand in several racing Porsches, including the 550 Spyders, the Formula One 804, and the 904 and 906 (von Klodt says Klie's involvement was essentially chassis design). Klie then generously handed Schlüter the studio's 1:5 scale 914 clay model, which he had received upon retirement from Porsche.

Schlüter is restoring Klie's full-scale 914, and hopes to have it back on the road in 2012. If nothing else, it will make for a fittingly quiet tribute to a man many historical accounts of the marque missed. ♣

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