



Attachment

The documentary film “My brief was very simple”

The British era at Volkswagen from 1949 to 1945, recounted by Ivan Hirst

In one of his last interviews, in 1999, Ivan Hirst tells the story of the British trusteeship over the company in Wolfsburg precisely 50 years after responsibility for Volkswagenwerk GmbH was returned to Germany. In an unprecedented tour de force, with improvisation and farsightedness, the course was set for the plant, which had been partly destroyed and was intended for demolition, to return to success.

Film, Complete version_EN: <https://youtu.be/VysqC-TEeoU>

Part 1: “Just go to Wolfsburg and find the factory”

At the end of the Second World War, Volkswagenwerk GmbH had lost its proprietor, as the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Labor Front) had ceased to exist. Following the liberation of the plant, the Americans had established a workshop there. When the Britons entered their zone of occupation in June 1945, they took over the trusteeship of Volkswagenwerk GmbH and assigned 28-year-old Major Ivan Hirst to Wolfsburg. Hirst rapidly saw that the factory offered much greater potential than for the use of the factory halls as a repair shop. He made preparations to resume civilian production of the Volkswagen saloon, the “Beetle”.

Film, Part 1_EN <https://youtu.be/QK-aEyXqJrl>

Audio, Part 1_EN_ Audio <https://youtu.be/Qf4wD14zMzU>

Part 2: The difficult path to an unclear future

Because the Volkswagen plant had mainly produced armaments during the war, it was on the list for demolition in the spring of 1945. With an order for a total of 40,000 vehicles, Volkswagenwerk GmbH secured a postponement of four years, which was crucial for the survival of the plant. However, the order alone was not enough. Hirst had to overcome considerable resistance in order to resume and then continue production. It was scarcely possible to ensure the procurement and transport of the material required, it was difficult to recruit appropriate personnel and people lacked all the essentials. The main task of the first democratically elected Works Council was to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of the shortage.

Film, Part 2_EN <https://youtu.be/jd1OSrpQ29k>

Audio, Part 2_EN <https://youtu.be/hKJ6HYAtAeY>



Part 3: The company had a future

The denazification process conducted by the allies led to the dismissal of the previous plant manager. He was succeeded by Dr. Herrmann Münch, a lawyer, in June 1946. As managing director, supported by a commercial and a technical director, he had to ensure production of the planned volume of 1,000 vehicles per month. In addition to these organizational changes, the Britons continued the optimizations which they had immediately initiated, improved the quality of the vehicles and the production processes, trained customer service personnel and started to develop a dealership organization. These efforts were so successful that Volkswagen was able to start exports in October 1947.

Film, Part 3_EN <https://youtu.be/zPbegk2bWCc>

Audio, Part 3_EN <https://youtu.be/A86XfRoIAZA>

Part 4: Every German in Germany wanted to buy a Volkswagen

In 1948, the factory already produced 19,000 vehicles, of which about a quarter were intended for export. At that time, the production of spare parts for the steadily growing service network had already started. In view of the good prospects for the future, the British trustees decided to transfer the management of the plant to an expert and to return the company to German responsibility. Heinrich Nordhoff was appointed managing director with effect from January 1, 1948.

Film, Part 4_EN https://youtu.be/OmYt_anBvcs

Audio, Part 4_EN <https://youtu.be/VVZzyMLJ8kM>

Part 5: Everything began to move

Three years after the end of the war, Volkswagen had developed from a ruined armaments plant into a well-functioning car factory with 8700 employees. While the living and working conditions in Wolfsburg were perceptibly improving, the situation in Germany as a whole was still dominated by shortages. The decisive turning point came on June 22, 1948 with the currency reform, which initiated an economic boom in the three Western zones of occupation and gave Volkswagen the decisive impetus. For Ivan Hirst, everything was moving in the right direction. On October 8, 1949, the British Military Government transferred the trusteeship of Volkswagenwerk GmbH to the federal government, which commissioned the State of Lower Saxony with the administration of the company.

Film, Part 5_EN <https://youtu.be/i4zksz8FLSk>

Audio, Part 5_EN https://youtu.be/j_V4uDuQr7s

Wolfsburg, June 2020