



Dr. Ing. Rudolf Ottenstein, Nuremberg

(15.2.1889 in Nuremberg - 30.1.1984 in Schaan, Liechtenstein)

Parental Family

Rudolf Ottenstein was born in Nuremberg on 15 February 1889. He was the son of the merchant Max Ottenstein (23.2.1860 Gunzenhausen - 26.10.1947 Schaan, Liechtenstein) and his wife Adele, née Sahlmann (19.10.1863 Fuerth - 30.1.1913 Munich). In 1886 Max Ottenstein, together with Max Frankenburger, founded the Victoria Works for the production of bicycles. The firm later also produced motorcycles, with great success.

Early Years

Rudolf Ottenstein frequented, first, the elementary school and then the Alte Gymnasium (Old Gymnasium), today the Melanchthon Gymnasium, both in Nuremberg. After his matriculation he studied in Munich where he acquired his doctorate in engineering.



Rudolf Ottenstein at his desk at the Victoria Works, 1932

(Photo: Walter Otten)



Diploma for the gold medal winning Nuremberg bicycle trademark "Victoria" at the World Fair 1893 in Chicago.

(Photo: Nuremberg City Archives)

War Service

In the First World War Rudolf Ottenstein served in the cavalry from 1914 to 1918. His last rank was full lieutenant. During his war service he wrote a diary in six volumes which are now deposited at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York.

During these years he acquired a great liking for being on horseback. He remained a good horseman well into his old age.

Professional Life

Rudolf Ottenstein joined the Victoria Works in January 1919 and immediately and vigorously committed himself to his work. In 1923, after his father had withdrawn from the board, he assumed the management, together with his younger brother Franz (born 11.3.1892). The firm was located at Ludwig-Feuerbach-Strasse 53, Nuremberg.

Rudolf Ottenstein was immediately confronted with the difficult task of converting production from war to peacetime conditions. He was then charged with the technical development of the product range. His knowledge of the industry allied to a capacity for innovation led to a widening of the range

beyond bicycles: In 1920 the company started to manufacture motorcycles under the product description "KR", i.e. Krafrad (motorcycle). In fact, the first attempts by the Victoria Works to produce an engine-driven bicycle go back as far as 1901. Also before the First World War the company was briefly engaged in the production of motorcars.

In 1923 the Victoria Works took over the motor engine manufacturing firm Sedlbauer, Munich. Previously they had to rely solely on engines which had been bought in, mainly from BMW. To these the Victoria Works could now add their own production. Time and again, Rudolf Ottenstein was able to attract and engage chief engineers who developed novel types of motorcycles which steadily enhanced the popularity and turnover of the Victoria brand.

Consequently, between the two world wars, the Victoria Works contributed substantially to Nuremberg's reputation as the main centre of Germany's two-wheeled vehicles industry, not least through the many successes which Victoria motorcycles gained in competitive races. Examples are the world speed record of 165 km/h set in 1926 by their works driver Alfred Brudes and victories in, notably, mountain and reliability races.

Around 1927 the Victoria Works, under Rudolf Ottenstein, employed 1,229 people, achieved an annual production of 7,000 motorcycles and 17,753 bicycles and reached the pre-1933 peak of its importance. The management also successfully guided the company through the world economic crisis in the following years.

In accordance with the importance of his company and in recognition of his professional expertise, Rudolf Ottenstein was, for many years, a member of the council of Germany's motoring industry.

The Nazi's Seizure of Power and Emigration

After the Nazis had seized power, the Victoria Works were "aryanised", along with all other Jewish firms. In 1934, however, before the process of "aryanisation" had affected the ownership of the Victoria Works, a photographically documented meeting took place between Rudolf Ottenstein and Adolf Hitler when the latter, together with Goering and the then Minister of the Interior Frick, visited Victoria Works' stand at a motoring exhibition in Berlin. What might have been Rudolf Ottenstein's thoughts when this photograph was taken?



In the foreground (from left to right): Hitler, Sales Manager Klein, Goering, Rudolf Ottenstein and Frick

(Photo: Walter Otten)

Not long afterwards Franconia's Gauleiter Julius Streicher installed one of his friends, Dr. Alexander Mayer, as the Victoria Works' new director. He made Rudolf Ottenstein's work impossible so that he had to leave the factory. Consequently Rudolf Ottenstein emigrated in 1936 with his family to Liechtenstein. His brother Franz had, already in 1935, had to give up his directorship and emigrate first to Milan and then, in 1938, further on to Argentina.



First page of Rudolf Ottenstein's passport with the infamous 'J' rubber stamp

(Photo: Walter Otten)

After the war the brothers Ottenstein returned briefly to Nuremberg and helped with the reconstruction of their firm which had been greatly damaged by the war. They did not, however, resume the management of the firm.

In the New Homeland

In Schaan near Vaduz Rudolf Ottenstein created a new existence for himself. In spite of difficulties created by the Swiss authorities he founded a small enterprise and led a normal life with villa and garden. He was dealt a sad blow by the early death of his wife Emilie (Emmy) née Klein (1.10.1898 - 15.4.1941). He had married her on 21.8.1919 in Nuremberg. Their union produced two children, Marianne (4.8.1920 Nuremberg - 1972) and Walter (13.12.1925 Nuremberg). Living in a neutral country during the war years he helped, whenever he could, his old friends who had emigrated to other countries.

Interests and Character

Apart from his professional work, music was Rudolf Ottenstein's main interest in life. He played the viola and the violin privately with friends, but also at public concerts.

He had absolutely no room for religion in his family and his personal life. He did, however, take part as violist in the musical events of the orchestra of the Jewish congregation.



Extract from the programme of the 3rd Synagogue Concert, Thursday, 1st of March 1934, in which Rudolf Ottenstein participated as violist of the Jewish Orchestra

(Photo: Walter Otten)

Rudolf Ottenstein was highly inventive and had a fine sense of humour. He loved literature and poetry and composed poems himself.



Rudolf Ottenstein in his old age

(Photo: Walter Otten)

Death and Last Resting Place

Rudolf Ottenstein died on 30 January 1984, aged 94. His ashes were laid to rest next to those of his second wife, Dr. med. Gerda Ottenstein, née von der Porten (9.10.1912 Hamburg - 1985 Schaan) in the garden of his villa in Schaan.

October 2002

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Literature

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