

Brumos Pre-911 Pt. 2
Story/Photos by
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On the cover: Carrera louvers at Monterey Car Week. Photo by John Hearn
On the this page: The Revs Institute's 1958 Porsche Carrera GT Speedster leaps downhill at Laguna Seca during the Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion. Photo by David Witty



BRUMOS BEFORE THE 911

PART 2: 1950 TO 1955

By Sean Cridland

Hubert Brundage recognized the sports car scene of the early 1950s as a growth market from which he could prosper. Confirming his observation, *Speed Age* magazine called 1950, "The Year of the Sports Car." Another article in the same magazine described sports-car racing as, "GROWING-GROWING-GROWING." Most importantly for an entrepreneur like Brundage, sports car enthusiasts enjoyed making and spending money. But he learned very quickly that getting into the imported car business meant working with Max Hoffman. Truly prospering meant working around him and, in some cases, pushing him out of the way. Yet it all started much more innocently.

After World War II, Max Hoffman converted his ambition to import European cars into an industry. By the early 1950s, he was riding the crest of the sports and luxury car frenzy, importing and distributing Rolls-Royce, MG, Jaguar, Austin, Mercedes, and Porsche. He also had distribution rights for Volkswagen but considered it a lesser brand, with its plebeian name and low profit margins.

Above: The exterior of Brundage Motors in Miami Springs, circa 1954. Originally started as a hobby shop to procure cars for silent partner Glenn Hammond Curtiss, Jr., the small business eventually became America's most prominent Porsche dealership.

For Brundage, owning and selling Porsches was the goal. He would get there by leveraging a business relationship with Volkswagen, which gave him experience in importing, sales, service, marketing, distribution, and corporate politics.

Nadine Brundage said that when her husband Hubert saw the first two Porsches in the United States driving around Watkins Glen in autumn of 1950, it was love at first sight. But when Brundage expressed interest in purchasing one, Hoffman told the Miami-area hardware store owner there was a long line ahead of him, and precious few Porsches coming into the country. For Brundage, that was strike one in their relationship, a slight that wouldn't be forgotten. Then, when Miami's Foreign Motors hosted the south Florida debut of the Volkswagen, Brundage started strategizing.

The VW, powered by a little 26-horsepower, 1131cc engine, was a fun car with great potential. But Brundage wasn't a consumer looking for a good deal; he wanted a dealership. That led him back to Hoffman, who told him that if he wanted to sell Hoffman brands, he'd have to sell VWs. Whether Hoffman knew it or not, the trap was set. In autumn 1951, a Volkswagen went on display in the front window of Brundage Hardware. That one sold fast; Brundage ordered a couple more. Soon he was scouting locations for his dealership.



Hubert Brundage, wife Nadine, and son Jan in the driveway of their Hialeah home, leaning against an early VW Beetle, circa 1953.

At the same time, Brundage started building his own race car—eventually known as the Brundage VW-Aero Special—and wrote to Hoffman parts manager Karl Grassow in search of a Porsche engine. Grassow was politely dismissive, suggesting Porsche didn't sell engines for "specials." Undeterred, Brundage installed a rear-mounted VW engine in a skillfully crafted aluminum body. Some people think this car was the inspiration for the Karmann Ghia of a few years later. Because the car wasn't ready for the Vero Beach event the weekend before Sebring, Brundage attended just to check out the other cars. That's when he saw Hoffman sitting on the grid in the Glöckler-Porsche special. Photos show Hubert Brundage looking scornfully at Hoffman's new Glöckler with a combination of resentment and envy. Strike two! In one glance, Brundage knew that Hoffman would always hold the reins to his ambitions, unless...



Proof of ownership: a stock certificate showing majority ownership of Brundage Motors by Glenn Hammond Curtiss, Jr., signed by J.R. Fordham and J.L. (Jan) Brundage.



The first parts and service desk for Brundage Motors, circa 1953.

As early as 1952, Hubert was already writing letters to Volkswagenwerk A.G. Chairman and Managing Director Heinz Nordhoff in Wolfsburg about buying cars directly from the factory and bypassing Hoffman. In March of 1953, Brundage Motors opened at 17 Palmetto Drive, Miami Springs, financed by a $30,000 loan from family friend Glenn Curtiss, Jr. Filled with an array of Hoffman-sourced cars, Porsche, Mercedes, Jaguar, Austin-Healey, and Volkswagen were displayed inside and out. There was ample signage, a comfortable display area, a well-stocked parts department, and a small service bay. Soon Brundage was the exclusive Miami-area VW dealer.

Then came the infamous "steel roadster" episode. Hoffman called Brundage to offer him the perfect Porsche, something he'd dreamt about since that Watkins Glen weekend. It was a Type 540. If Brundage wanted it, he needed to come to New York immediately, as he had other clients willing to take it in a moment's notice. Powered by Porsche's latest 1500 Super engine, it purportedly had a lightweight aluminum body and removable windshield and bumpers, making it perfect for a weekend racer. Hubert and son Jan hopped the next flight to New York and rushed to Hoffman's Park



Hubert Brundage shows off his VW Aero Special before the running of the 1952 12 Hours of Sebring. Originally intended to be Porsche-powered, Hoffman told Brundage that "Porsche doesn't allow its engines to power 'specials.'"

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Just one point of contention for Hubert Brundage with Max Hoffman; after being refused a Porsche engine for his own Brundage special race car, Hoffman bragged about his own Glöckler Special in his 1952 national advertisements.

Avenue office, sat with Hoffman to sign the papers, handed over a check for $4,600, and set off to Hoffman's New Jersey warehouse to collect their first Porsche. It should have been a great day, but something wasn't quite right.

The windshield was fixed, not removable. In the first few blocks of driving, Brundage had an odd feeling. The Roadster's performance wasn't as crisp as he expected, having built his own aluminum-skinned car. Upon passing an office-supply store, he pulled over, bought a small magnet, and dashed back out. Running



A less-than-happy Hubert Brundage inspects the Porsche engine in the back of Max Hoffman's Glöckler before the running of the 1951 Palm Beach Shores Grand Prix. Only weeks earlier, Hoffman had denied Brundage's request for a Porsche engine for his own race car.



Jan Brundage stands next to the steel-bodied America Roadster Max Hoffman sold to Hubert Brundage. While today it stands as one of the prime jewels of any concours event it graces, Hubert was highly displeased with the car.

it close to the car, he immediately felt a disheartening "thump," as the magnet jumped onto the car's body. The Roadster was steel, not aluminum. Though this car later became a priceless collectible, for Brundage the steel Roadster was a huge disappointment. The great club-racing car he anticipated turned out to be somewhat of a dud.

Adding insult to injury, a few weeks later Porsche factory drivers Baron Huschke von Hanstein and Karl Kling were entered at the SOWEGA Nationals at Turner Air Force Base in two of the very latest Porsche 550 race cars, which were several seconds per lap faster than the America Roadster. Though the 550s didn't finish the race, Hubert realized that his Roadster was, at best, an "also-ran." Had Brundage bought the car from anyone but Hoffman, it might have been an excusable offense, but Hoffman's involvement in the concept and design of the Type 540 meant he couldn't claim ignorance. Jan Brundage remembers his dad fuming, "Hoffman screwed me again!" Strike three. From then on, Hubert played



The introduction of the 550 Spyder was a milestone for Porsche racing but added a further wedge between Max Hoffman and Hubert Brundage.



With his aviator's jacket and America Roadster in the background, Hubert Brundage presented an imposing image at the 1954 12 Hours of Sebring. It was at this race that he was approached by Volkswagen recruiter Will Van de Kamp about a southeastern distributorship.

hardball and appealed to his new connections for a direct supply of Porsche cars for his dealership. But something even greater was just over the horizon.

By March of 1954, Brundage sold thirteen Volkswagens, making him one of the most successful VW dealers in the country. That, combined with the letters he'd written to Nordhoff at Volkswagen, set up a chain of events that would change the fortunes of Brundage, VW, and Porsche. VW's association with Hoffman was never a great fit, and Max did little to develop the market, extend its sales network, or promote the brand. His strategy for moving VWs was more akin to extortion than a marketing plan: if dealers wanted his more desirable marques, they had to take Volkswagens.



Not long after Brundage bought the Auratium Green Porsche, he painted it black and raced it. Here, Porsche representative Herbert Linge tunes the car at Sebring.



A 1954 newspaper ad for Brundage Motors in Miami Springs.

It was a practice the Volkswagen board resented, not just because it downgraded the brand, but because it ignored the infrastructure Volkswagen built in all its other markets, where it was known for superb reliability and service. Quietly, Nordhoff's team gathered data from all the American VW dealerships to see which were most effective at selling its cars, and why. At the same time they sent Georg Lange and Will van de Kamp to the United States to set up Volkswagen of America (VW of A) and to enlist a new team of

Jan Brundage poses with Siegmund Mayerlen with the famous Fletcher Aviation Porsche 550-04 in 1954. The car was housed at Brundage Motors before and after that year's 12 Hours of Sebring.

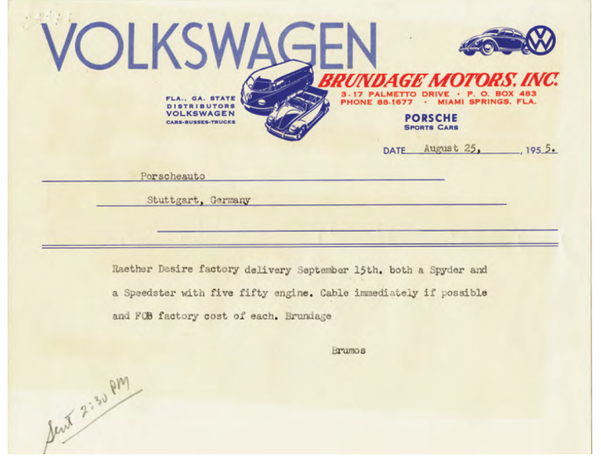




A photo of eventual Brundage Motors/ Brumos service manager Siegmund Mayerlen, taken on one of his first trips to North America.



Receiving an air delivery a 356 coupe, by the mid-1950s Brundage motors had transformed from a hardware store selling VWs to one of the premier Porsche dealerships in the United States.


VOLKSWAGEN

BRUNDAGE MOTORS, INC.
3-17 PALMETTO DRIVE · P. O. BOX 483
PHONE 88-1677 · MIAMI SPRINGS, FLA.

FLA., GA. STATE DISTRIBUTORS VOLKSWAGEN CARS-BUSSES-TRUCKS

PORSCHE
SPORTS CARS

DATE August 25, 195 5.

Porscheauto

Stuttgart, Germany

Raether Desire factory delivery September 15th. both a Spyder and a Speedster with five fifty engine. Cable immediately if possible and FOB factory cost of each. Brundage

Brumos

Sent 2:30 PM

From 1955, one of the first Brundage Motors telexes referring to its future name "Brumos." A direct order bypassing Hoffman, it requests both a 550 Spyder and 1955 Carrera Speedster.



The Brundage family VW van, equipped with viewing platform and chairs, sits behind a row of racing 550s and 356s at the 1955 running of the Nassau Speed Week.

regional distributors. Clearly Volkswagen was developing an exit strategy from Hoffman's orbit.

During all the race weekend hubbub of the 1954 12 Hours of Sebring appeared a man walking through the paddock in perfectly tailored, Saville Row business-formal attire carrying a briefcase. Will van de Kamp was on a mission to find Hubert Brundage and offer him a multi-state Volkswagen distributorship. Yet when he found Brundage, busily running his team, he was curtly dismissed, "Come see me in my office next week. I don't do business at the track." It was a story Brundage would tell countless times over the next ten years, marveling at his own ineptitude and at Will van de Kamp's patiently determined, magnanimous nature.

Fortunately, van de Kamp met with Hubert and his partner Glenn Curtiss, Jr., later that week to offer them the Volkswagen distributorship for Florida, Georgia, and—if they moved their headquarters to the port of Jacksonville—South Carolina. Brundage and Curtiss, though stunned by the windfall, maintained their composure as van de Kamp went on. He reassured them that VW of A would assist them with training for owners, managers, sales personnel, and mechanics in the "Volkswagen Way." In turn, Volkswagen of America had several expectations for its distributors. They were required to maintain a parts inventory to supply all their subsidiary dealerships as needed. They were also responsible for training new dealerships in the "Volkswagen Way." Last, but far from least, they would be expected, through their store and the dealerships in their region, to sell 75 cars in the remaining months of 1954. Van de Kamp supplied Brundage and Curtiss a list of existing VW dealerships, another of foreign-car dealers in their district that were not yet selling VWs, and a list of American-car dealers whose history suggested they could represent the brand. As soon as Brundage and Curtiss signed the contract, van de Kamp would send the first 25 cars, with the remaining 50 to be sent in two further installments through the summer and fall months.

Brundage and Curtiss then revisited their partnership. The original corporation they founded two years earlier was structured on the premise that Brundage Motors was on the scale of a "hobby shop," serving friends and family within the Miami area. A two- or three-state distributorship with travel commitments, shipping costs, and car and parts inventory, would require a significantly larger financial outlay by Curtiss, and a reorganization and formalization of the company structure. By May, all the agreements were made, contracts were signed, and a long row of Volkswagens surrounded the Brundage Motors showroom. Soon, Brundage Motors ran commercial ads proclaiming themselves a VW dealership and distributor.

Sales grew exponentially. By August of that year, Brundage Motors Southeast Volkswagen Distributors surpassed its quota and needed several dozen more cars than the original allotment of 75. Hoffman's dismissal of the brand became Brundage's windfall. Though he still had to buy his other cars from Hoffman, Hubert had a plan for that, too.



Porsche official Wolfgang Raether and Hubert Brundage at the Brundage home in Hialeah, Florida.



The mid-1950s showroom of Brundage Motors, featuring a Volkswagen and several Porsches.

As Brundage honed his inventory practices, he noticed that he was paying highly inflated prices on Porsche parts. The problem was easy to identify. Hoffman bought parts from Porsche, shipped them to his warehouse, then shipped them to his Florida distributor: WACO Imports in Miami. They then sold them to Brundage and other Porsche dealerships in Florida. In Brundage's analysis, both he and Porsche could make more money if they could cut Hoffman and WACO out of the loop. Brundage was already leveraging his new status with Huschke von Hanstein in running the Brundage racing program. Over time, Brundage leveraged his position to purchase a 550 Spyder, a 356 Continental coupe, and the first Carrera Speedster to race in North America, directly from the factory and without traveling through Hoffman's warehouse. He saw no reason why he couldn't propose that his company deal directly with Porsche on other levels.

During the fall of 1954, Wolfgang Raether, Herbert Linge, and leading mechanic Sigmund Mayerlen visited the Brundages on their way home from the legendary Carrera Panamericana in Mexico. Ostensibly a friendly visit, Brundage knew that German executives rarely took time from their schedules without reason. As he toured the guys around Miami, he subtly inquired about the percentages Hoffman and his Florida sub-distributor, WACO Imports of Miami, were making. Raether was forthcoming, giving Brundage further food for thought. A day later, Brundage sent a letter to Raether describing his plan to eliminate the middlemen. Brundage also offered Mayerlen a job as service manager for $75 dollars a week. Brundage had his foot solidly in the door, but if he wanted to bust it down, he'd have to overcome a few deadbolts.



Siegmund Mayerlen puts the final touches on the Brundage Motors 356 1300 coupe for the 1955 12 Hours of Sebring. The car was driven by Howard Fowler, Al DuPree, and Hubert Brundage in his last driving appearance.

Hoffman had gambled on Porsche's American success based on Ferdinand's pre-war track record and Ferry's unequaled drive and enthusiasm, so he'd written an iron-clad contract with the then-struggling Porsche family. Partly due to Porsche's improved production process, and partly due to Hoffman's marketing efforts, the German marque's brand value grew dramatically. Of course Hoffman was acutely aware of Brundage's ambition, business savvy, and elevated position as an importer of Porsche's rapidly growing sister brand. If Porsche wanted out of its contract now that they were financially more secure, it would cost. A lot.

Correspondence between Brundage and Raether in July of 1955 suggested that Brundage might have his distributorship by October of 1955. Then, in a stunning reversal, Brundage wrote to Raether in mid-August, saying Brundage Motors would no longer be carrying the Porsche line! Though he didn't tell Raether, he had run into problems on the home front.

Curtiss, Jr., supported Brundage's original small dealership as a favor, but ultimately he wasn't comfortable with the financial involvement required by the VW distributorship. When Brundage approached him about the possibility of a Porsche distributorship, he'd had enough. He offered to sell Brundage his stock, but he also knew Brundage couldn't afford it. In exasperation, Hubert briefly backed away from Porsche altogether.

Miraculously, he later patched up his relationship with Raether and they continued communicating with one another about the prospect of a full Porsche distributorship. But there would be one major casualty, a few more dramas, and the addition of two legendary characters along the way, which I will cover in the concluding Part 3 of this story in an upcoming issue. 356