

# What's the story behind the first car

Interview with Hubert Kranz (Translated by Randal Engel – Clubnachrichten 137)



▲ Hubert Kranz during the interview

**JB: Mr. Kranz, was there a special event that sparked your passion for classic cars?**

**HK:** I can't remember. I've been interested in cars since my earliest childhood, and I've been particularly fond of sporty vehicles. By the way, it's the same with my son Hagen. When Bill Buckle visited here in 2005 and noticed Hagen's enjoyment of cars, he sketched him a sports car on paper, the Buckle II, so to speak. Hagen was just four years old at the time.

**JB: How long have you owned the prototype and where did you find it?**

**HK:** I discovered the Buckle Sports on ebay England in 2004 which was unknown to me. There were no bids. Perhaps it was because some people believed it was a misprint and in England Buckle cars were not common and so few people on ebay were interested.

I was attracted to the vehicle with the large grille and the screwed hardtop, especially since the technical side was

also uncomplicated. I decided to definitely take a look at the car on site if it wasn't auctioned.

**JB: You bought it after all.**

**HK:** Yes, the owner was Noel Hill who was happy to find someone interested in the Buckle because he was in the middle of moving and the car would have been just an obstacle for him.

**JB: What could the seller tell you about the history of the vehicle?**

**HK:** Noel Hill brought the Buckle in Australia in 1975 and he was the fourth owner. He restored the Buckle in the early 80s. Noel believed the original color was red – one of the previous owners had already opted for this color after seeing it on the cover of Wheels Magazine – so he painted it the same color. He also mounted the Buckle badge on the hood which is not the original position.

Noel took the Buckle to New Zealand where he worked for a few years and then

moved back to England. Noel had other interests and the Buckle was „mothballed“ for 15 years.

**JB: How did you find out that it was a prototype?**

**HK:** SERIAL NO. BUC/001 was stamped on the nameplate so it was at least clear that it could be the first prototype of the series. When I inspected the Buckle it was parked in front of Noel's house and covered by a tarpaulin. The inside of the car it smelt awful and the carpets and seats were fading. However and more importantly the engine was running and we were even able to do a small lap.

After a short negotiation we came to an agreement and I bought the Buckle. When I had the car on the trailer ready to go, Noel's wife surprised me and brought out two boxes full of documents related to the history of the car.

**JB: How did you get in touch with Bill Buckle and how did he react when he found out that his first car was in Germany?**

**HK:** The address of Buckle Motors was stamped on the nameplate. Among the documents were invoices, tables of race results and in correspondence I discovered the name Bill Buckle. I wrote Bill a letter not even knowing if he was still alive, with some history of how I came to own the car. The answer came promptly: „I am still alive, and I am coming to Germany!“ That was in 2005.

It was a coincidence that the 50th anniversary of the Goggomobil was celebrated in Dingolfing that very year.

Bill did not want to miss out and he combined the visit to Dingolfing with a visit to me. It was an emotional moment for him when he saw „his“ car again after so many years.

**JB: Wouldn't Bill have wanted to buy the prototype again?**

**HK:** No, absolutely not. He only asked me, should I ever want to sell the car, that it would be offered to him first. Bill supported my plans to restore the car to its original condition. The seats, for example, were no longer original, nor was the wood-paneled dashboard.

During the restoration, I used Bill's original construction drawings and documents which I found in the boxes of documents - these were very helpful. The floor plate was totally rotten and had to be replaced. Bill also had no objection if I wanted to make changes. On the contrary, he even advised me on this. He was of the opinion that the car was a prototype and therefore contemporary improvements were an essential part of it.

**JB: What changes did you make with the design of the prototype?**

**HK:** For example, there is the very narrow footwell which makes it difficult to operate the pedals. The reason is that the spare wheel is in the way and located between the pedal and the engine. I moved the spare wheel to the middle behind the seats which provided more space. It originally consisted of a simple wooden box now it is made of aluminium.

Another example: The en-

# Bill Buckle built?

gine compartment was so cramped that Bill had to do without wheel arches in the design of the car. This resulted in dirt constantly being whirled up covering the engine. With simple mudguards, I was able to almost eliminate this problem. Every change was with Bill's consent.

**JB: Did you restore the prototype yourself?**

**HK:** Of course, I did some of the work myself. The Buckle was completely disassembled which was relatively easy since the car design is based on series technology. But there was no time for special work.

My main job was as a fruit and vegetable wholesaler, and since 2002 I have been running the classic car business on the side. It was only after I sold the fruit and vegetable trade in 2008 and successfully completed an apprenticeship as an automotive technician that I turned my hobby into my profession.

**JB: What part of the restoration did you leave to specialists?**

**HK:** The former classic car workshop at the Rosso Bianco Museum in Aschaffenburg took care of the paintwork. The engine was only spot checked and a new cylinder head gasket was installed. The engine was a six-cylinder out of a Ford Zephyr which proved to be very robust since it had survived a long time without any problems. The body and sheet metal work were completed by Radsatzwerkstatt in Oldenburg, North Germany.

**JB: Did the plastic cause problems during the restoration?**

**HK:** The body was gently blasted with walnut shell granules. A lot of small dents came to light. At first it was a shock but this was nothing dramatic because in 1955 the processing of fiberglass was still in its infancy and air pockets were inevitable. These bumps were smoothed out with epoxy resin. Depending on light transparency, you can still see light today.

By the way, when I blasted the body, the original blue paint reappeared at the fuel filler neck. This gave me a clue as to the original paint color.

**JB: How long did it take to get German approval? Did the German Authorities create difficulties?**

**HK:** Less than two years have passed between purchase and approval. There were no difficulties as I had all the papers.

**JB: I read that in 2006 you wanted to take the prototype to Australia for Bill's 80th birthday. What has become of it?**

**HK:** I actually intended to do that but Bill advised me against it. He said at the time that the prototype is now part of Australia's cultural heritage and that entry and exit could therefore become a problem. There was a risk that the car would be confiscated by the authorities. This risk was too great for me.

**JB: How and where do you use the car today?**

**HK:** You've seen that the „Buckle“ is standing at the back of the hall at the moment. This means that the



▲ The Buckle photographed from all sides

last time it was driven was several years ago. The car was used for rides and I showed it at exhibitions. I also regularly tested the car. The Buckle must first be optimized for future racing events and my plan is to

take part in the Nürburgring Classic in 2024.

**JB: Mr. Kranz, thank you very much for the interview.**

