

Geschichte und Zukunft der deutschen Automobilindustrie [History and Future of the German Automotive Industry]. *Edited by Rudolf Boch*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001. 290 pp. Notes, illustrations, maps, tables. Cloth, 49 €. ISBN 3-515-07866-5.

Reviewed by Ulrich Jürgens

The collected papers in this book about the German automotive industry were originally presented at a conference held in Chemnitz in October 2000. Chemnitz, a center of the industry since the beginning of the twentieth century, is located in southwestern Saxony in what was once East Germany. Following reunification, the automotive industry was modernized and has benefited from long-term investment. This book focuses on the period when the East German government was in place.

Rudolf Boch, the editor, a professor of economic and social history at Chemnitz Technical University, describes the essays compiled here as having to do with the social aspects of the diffusion of the automobile and the development of a mass market rather than with motor-vehicle production and technology and the growth of individual firms. Most were written by economic, social, and technology historians. Six essays focus on developments preceding the Second World War, two are concerned with the 1950s and 1960s, and two describe the present and hypothesize about the future.

Research on the German automotive industry traditionally confronts the fact that Germany has not kept up with other industrial countries. Despite Germany's pioneering contributions to automobile technology during the early years, the country now lags behind in mass motorization and modern industrial structures. The book's first three articles try to explain why Germany has not kept pace with other nations. Barbara Haubner investigates why, despite widespread hostility toward motor transport among the German public and politicians, the technological deficiencies of early cars, and a lack of infrastructure, the car traffic nevertheless gained broader acceptance even among non-car users before World War I. She credits the activities and lobbying of automobile associations and the enthusiasm engendered by motor racing for this outcome. In the interwar period, as Heidrun Edelmann shows, Germany motorization continued to trail behind other countries. In comparing Germany and the United States, Reiner Flik

contrasts the socioeconomic and sociogeographic conditions that shape the two countries' demand structures.

Reiner Flik's article on the industry in Germany up to 1939 examines why no efficient production structures developed during that time. The wave of start-ups at the turn of the century and during the inflationary period in the early 1920s produced companies of inefficient size and various types, thereby precluding the advantages of mass production. However, Flik claims that Fordism—rationalization on the model of the American automotive industry—would not have been an option owing to the demand structures prevailing in Germany. Companies that embarked on such a venture failed or were taken over. Given the German pay scale and the high skill level of its apprenticed workers (*Facharbeiter*), the decision to specialize in upper-class vehicles was a sensible one.

The three articles that follow Flik's trace developments in particular companies during the interwar period. Carsten Thieme views the merger at Daimler-Benz as one part of a broader attempt to organize the market in the 1920s. He considers the industry's failure to consolidate in order to achieve economies of scale and scope to have been the result of a managerial will to independence and the strategic interests of the banks. Thus, plans to create a German group that resembled General Motors by incorporating BMW with Daimler-Benz in a South German automobile group that was eventually to include Opel were never realized.

Two articles examine Auto Union AG. Martin Kukowski briefly outlines the history of the company from 1932 to 1946 and describes the research opportunities provided by the newly established company archive. Eva Pietsch's investigation of Auto Union import and export strategies is based on this newly available archival material.

Three papers compare the history of automobiles in West and East Germany during the 1950s and 1960s. Norbert Stieniczka describes the car in West Germany after the war as an instrument of mental escape from the National Socialist past and withdrawal into the private sphere. Peter Kirchberg discusses an episode of technological cooperation between the two Germanies during the 1960s when East Germany was constructing the Wankel engine for the planned "car of the future" and building a modern diesel engine for its truck industry. Both projects were based on West German licenses

and often involved close cooperation with the development divisions of West German companies.

Two articles offer a sociological perspective on the present and the future. The industrial sociologist Thomas Haipeter examines the changes that took place in the production system at Volkswagen since the second half of the 1990s. To what extent can one describe the system as post-Fordist? The findings are ambivalent. At a conceptual level regarding new management ideas of flexible mass production there is a clear break with the Fordist past. At the level of organizational practice, the answer is no.

The final article, like the opening one, focuses on the consumer perspective. As postmaterialist value attitudes have spread and become established in younger age cohorts, Andreas Knie observes changing attitudes toward the car. The future orientation of motoring, he claims, will not be on car ownership; it will be focused less on the car as a technical artifact and more on optimum mobility. Car companies are seen to be adapting by developing into “mobility providers,” which treat the car just as one means of transport they offer to customers. Issues of car design and production, on the other hand, will become less important.

A comprehensive overview of the history of German motor vehicles, supplemented by two essays that offer a sociological perspective, is a praiseworthy undertaking that to date has no equivalent. As a multiauthor publication, the book is unable to cover everything, and the focus on social aspects of car diffusion and use must be accepted. The wide-ranging historical contributions elucidate current lines of research and provide a perspective, albeit a narrow one, on the evolution of the industry in East Germany.

The book fails to live up to its comprehensive claim in one important respect. Other than the valuable concluding panel discussion, the present is almost completely neglected and certain focal issues are neglected and this is also true for many of the themes now central in the debate about the development of the motor vehicle industry. What role has the supplier industry played? How do corporate governance, financing, and profitability figure into the picture? What were consequences of the start-up “bubbles” after the two wars for the evolution of the industry? What organizational and management concepts facilitated the development of the German motor-vehicle industry?

Current concepts such as new institutional economics, including transaction costs in mergers and acquisitions, are treated only vaguely. Often theoretical questions serve to introduce the reconstruction of history and are answered only in generalizations. The two articles that project into the future are not specifically concerned with the German car industry, but rather with explaining future developments in terms of broad trends toward post-Fordist forms of production and postmaterialist kinds of consumption. However, such assertions probably owe more to wishful thinking than to a clear understanding of future trends.

*Ulrich Jürgens is head of the research unit Regulations of Work at the Social Science Research Center, Berlin and is adjunct professor in the political science department of the Free University of Berlin. Recent publications include New Product Development and Production Networks: Global Industrial Experience (editor, 2000), and "The Development of Volkswagen's Industrial Model, 1967–1995," in M. Freyssenet et al., eds., One Best Way? Trajectories and Industrial Models of the World's Automobile Producers (1998).*