

The story of motor car trade in Hungary

The story of Hungarian motoring sits at the intersection of several subjects, including industrial history, social history, sports history, history of technology and so on. And naturally there's the history of trade as well.

According to the latest research both the first car and motorcycle arrived to Hungary in 1896. The first automobile show was held in 1901. Motor car trade in Hungary has a 115-year long story. You can say that the title is slightly misleading, because Dream Car was a 1934 movie, while Merkur existed until 1990. However these serve as the perfect cornerstones.

The story of motor car trade has a lot of interesting angles, but there were hardly any attempts at uncovering the past of this profession. We sincerely hope that this exhibition may start this process. We would like to show where this profession is coming from. During the last few decades hundreds, maybe thousands of people worked in this sector. Before the 2nd World War there were several companies with a long, 30-40 year long history. We don't know these companies any more. The story of motor car trade after the 2nd World War and that of Merkur, the state-owned automobile distribution body, which worked between 1964-1989 are fading away. We put together text panels, displays, objects, contemporary news reels, scale models, a Trabant and a fuel pump to make this story compelling.

We'll be happy to hear your comments and stories as well.

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The beginnings of motor car trade in Hungary

"In the old days, Hungarian motor car trade was a dream! Exceptional talent was required as those who wanted to buy cars had to trust the dealers. The motoring industry was in its infancy in the 1890s and the dealer had to be really up-to-date on the latest models... When count Imre Károlyi and count Béla Rezső Zichy bought their first cars, they became trendsetters and within months it was fancy to own a car – which would go as fast as a galloping horse" recalled József Bárdi, one of the first dealers in an interview in the 1930s.



Local outlet of Spitz Arnold, an Austrian dealer in 1905



Henrik Löw and his Daimler, in around 1900

The first car, a Benz probably arrived to Hungary during Fall, 1896. There's not much known about it. The 2nd one, another Benz was bought by József Törley, a renowned champagne producer. This car was tested by engineers at the local city council who said that the driver needs to have a licence, not the car.

In 1900 the Hungarian Automobile Club was set up. There were just a dozen cars in Budapest and around 30 in Hungary.

Between 16-23 June, 1901 the first Budapest International Motor Show was held. This is where the first Hungarian car dealers appeared. Among them was 22-year-old Ignác Herskovits, sales manager of Automobile Union de Paris which represented French brands. Béla Fényi, director of the local subsidiary of the Schember scale company distributed Peugeot bicycles, tricycles and cars. Róbert Csáky, a former railway engineer represented Cudell. József Bárdi a former employee of Magyar Rugszantárugyár exhibited car parts. There were dealers and manufacturers from Austria, who brought along the Oldsmobile Curved Dash and a Lohner-Porsche hybrid among other vehicles. It soon became apparent, that the few potential buyers favoured Vienna and not Budapest, which made business very difficult.



József Bárdi's first shop was near the Opera in Budapest

Károly Csermely

Károly Csermely (1884-1976) was a pioneer Hungarian aviator, who spent most of his life close to motorized vehicles, especially cars. In his autobiography which surfaced recently he talks about his youth:

„In 1900 a new showroom was opened in Budapest, called Auto Union de Paris. This represented various French brands and looked for an apprentice during Spring, 1901. I applied for this position, because these machines mesmerized me. The owner of the shop was called Fournier. His assistant was a 21-year-old Hungarian, Ignác Herskovits who spent a few years in Paris learning his craft. Within a few months I was able to drive the car. Together with a colleague we went to Gödöllő driving a small voiturette, called La Mouche. Our trip went smoothly, so we sent a telegram to Budapest which was proudly displayed in the store window. There were a lot of newspaper reports on our trips, however most of these were tongue-in-cheek. (In 1902) Fournier left the company and claimed that Hungary needs another 10 years to accomodate automobiles.

My next job was at the the Első Hazai Biztosító Társaság (First National Insurance Company). Its president was Ferenc Kossuth. This company sold American Oldsmobile cars. They had a fleet of 20 such cars to be used by their agents... I was responsible for keeping these cars in shape. The company organised its national dealer network. Rural companies sent their mechanics to Budapest where I taught them how to handle, drive and repair cars. Once the man understood everything, his car was sent via railway to his place. If a trouble occurred anywhere, I had to go there personally and repair the cars”.



Ignác Herskovits at the wheels of a La Mouche



Károly Csermely

MAGYAR AUTOMOBIL GARAGE

BUDAPEST, VII., ARENA-UT 50.

TELEFON
FŐNÖK:
126—36.

TELEFON
PORTÁS:
174—18.

Autómotilok berbe kaphatók órákra is.

Modern garage éjjel-nappali üzemmél.



SÜRGÖNY:
LARDOLIN.

SÜRGÖNY:
LARDOLIN.

Elsőrangú javítóműhely. Auto kellekek. Semperit pneumatikok.

Charron-automobilonk vezérképviselete.

Motorcar trade before the 1st World War

The Hungarian Automobile Club organized the 2nd Budapest International Automobile Show between 7 and 21 May, 1905. There were 69 exhibitors, half of them Hungarians, including automobile manufacturers, car and motorcycle traders and sellers of equipments and accessories. Several foreign manufacturers had their own stands as well.

There were around 10 cars sold during this event. But hosting a standalone exhibition proved to be too costly for the Hungarian Automobile Club. Car shows were organized in 1906 and 1908, but then there was a 17-year gap.



Laurin & Klement opened its Hungarian subsidiary in 1908 at Váci str 81 in Budapest



The Renault dealership was opened in the heart of Budapest in 1915 and stayed there for more than 30 years

Development was assisted by the Ministry of Defense. Within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the Austrian Ministry of Defense studied motorized vehicles since the early 1900s. In 1908 a tender was announced for „grant trucks”: if someone bought a truck which complied with military requirements and was willing to offer his/her truck for military purposes each year in a given time, the Ministry subsidised the deal. The same program was applied in 1910. It is no wonder that demand for such trucks erupted. By 1915 the Hungarian car parc consisted of 2877 passenger cars and 316 trucks. Most of these vehicles were destroyed during the war.

In 1910 Hungary became a member of the international automobile transportation association. Until then registration was compulsory only in Budapest, but from this moment a national register was set up. This provided a better background for aspiring dealers. At that time there were only 937 passenger cars and 110 trucks registered on the territory of Hungary. Though magazines talked about stagnation and economic woes with many „businesses going bankrupt”, but this did not prevent the emergence of new companies and several banks also set up subsidiaries specialising in automotive trade.



Angyalföld became a favourite spot for Budapest-based dealers before the 1st World War

Motor car trade in Budapest, 1920-1929

At the end of the 1st World War, a couple months before the armistice an important event marked a new beginning for Hungarian motor car trade. In March, 1918 the Association of Hungarian Automobile Dealers was established as part of the Hungarian Trade Association. Its first president was Gyula Reiman, who previously helped setting up the Royal Hungarian Automobile Club.



Motor Automobile Rt existed between 1923-1925 at Eskü square. It ended on a very bad note as the owners committed fraud



The last showroom of Hazai Automobil Rt. at Múzeum ring in 1924

With the development of trade new methods appeared, including guarantee and leasing. Leasing originates from the United States of America. The buyer had to pay a deposit of 25-33 percent and then pay the rest in installments. The dealer retained ownership until the last installment.

In 1927 there were 2,602 cars and 1,916 motorcycles sold in Hungary, which has increased to 2,738 cars and 3,193 motorcycles in 1928 and then decreased to 2,576 cars and 2,440 motorcycles in 1929.

At the beginnings of the 1920s as Hungary managed to stabilize its economy motor car trade roared to new life and reached new heights. The Hungarian government clinched new trade deals with a lot of countries, which enabled imports from America and France, UK with low duties. Motor car trade became a trendy profession. „My brother was way ahead of me when it came to cycling and cars ... A few of his friends set up a car dealership in Dorottya street; they sold previously unknown French brands without too much success. Their business went bankrupt soon... My brother together with his friends went to Paris and brought chassis home. These had no bodies but they were driving home in rain and snow” recalled Pál Granasztói, a Hungarian architect in his memoirs.



Chevrolet showroom in downtown Budapest, 1927

Motor car trade outside Budapest, 1920-1929

In the mid-1920s the first bigger dealerships appeared in rural cities. Ford appointed dealers in Győr, Békéscsaba and Makó. In 1927 Nemzetközi Gépkereskedelmi Rt, which was a subsidiary of the British-Hungarian Bank opened a few sales outlets outside Budapest, where Ford cars were sold. Later the company switched to the brands of General Motors. Additionally dealers of technical goods, like Vilmos Freund in Miskolc, Jenő Mestrits in Pécs and József Hamerli in Szombathely added cars and motorcycles to their portfolio. In 1926 the Észak-magyarországi Automobil Club organized an automobile show in Miskolc. Other country fairs also featured cars and motorcycles.



Hahn Arthur és Fiai, which sold Ford cars in Budapest between 1910 and 1950 opened its Székesfehérvár branch in 1927



Automobil és Traktor Kereskedelmi Rt., was one of the biggest Ford dealers in Hungary which held demonstration plowings featuring Fordson tractors. Naturally, Ford cars also appeared at these events

Despite these developments cars and motorcycles were still in the possession of a privileged few: according to a statistics from 31 December, 1928 there were 11,480 cars registered in Hungary and over 60 percent of those were used in Budapest. The situation was similar in the case of trucks and motorcycles.

But it can be said that 1926-1929 was the first heyday of motor car trade. In 1928 there were close to 50 American brands represented in Hungary along with the best-known French, German, Italian, Austrian and Czech brands. Motorcycles were mostly of British origin.



A Mercedes dealership in Szombathely, mid-1930s

With the 1929 Depression, the motor car trade collapsed in Hungary. Newspaper articles covered the financial mishaps of several dealers, who escaped from the law to South America or who were caught.

Motor car trade, 1929-1939

Due to the 1929 Great Depression the Hungarian new car market collapsed and most of the dealers went bankrupt. Though an automobile show was held in 1931, but the market only recovered in the mid-1930s.

In 1935 new car sales amounted to 1,719 units, two year later it grew to 3,520 units and the Hungarian car fleet consisted of around 19,000 vehicles. In the 1930s the Fiat Balilla, Opel P4, DKW and Ford became the local bestsellers. Recovery of the motorcycle market was slower. In 1933 only 200 units were sold and the 1000 unit level was



Star Garage, which was the heart of motoring in Győr. Its subsidiary, Győri Általános Közlekedési Rt. managed local bus lines. The building was destroyed during the 2nd World War



Mihály Majláth distributed DKW and BMW cars from his showroom in Lehel tér

As Hungary increasingly gravitated towards Germany Jewish dealers had to give up their businesses. This situation attracted the attention of car magazines, but due to censorship there were hardly any critical articles featured. At the beginning of the 2nd World War some dealers had a field day. In 1943-1944 their days were also numbered. Their workers were drafted, Military orders dried up and the army confiscated their fleets.

[scan0013.tif: Star Garage, which was the heart of motoring in Győr. Its subsidiary, Győri Általános Közlekedési Rt. managed local bus lines. The building was destroyed during the 2nd World War]

The retiring German army confiscated vehicles, machinery, everything. According to a report, Ferenc Wiesengrund, a well-known sportsman saw his beloved Alfa Romeo sports car in December, 1944 when the German army "drove it towards Vác".



László Rácz, the husband of renowned actress, Hanna Honthy opened his Alfa Romeo showroom in the mid-1930s. It was located in Liszt Ferenc tér, downtown Budapest

Car Shows 1900-1945



The Budapest Concours d'Elegance was described as a showcase of the most beautiful „girls and cars from Pest”



How coachbuilders and car dealers cooperated: the stand of Király Automobil Rt at the 1925 Budapest Autoshow. The Buick has a text panel telling the virtues of its body, which was made by Gyula Schillinger

Concours d'Elegance was one of the most spectacular events before the 2nd World War, Originating in France and then spreading around the world, it featured the most exquisite coachbuilt cars and the latest trends in fashion. A couple of journalists transplanted the idea to Hungary. György Siró and Tibor Bartók, editors of the monthly *Úrvezető* (Chauffeur) magazine who reported on foreign Concours d'Elegance events, hosted the first such event in Budapest in 1928 at Margitsziget. During the next ten years, nine such events occurred in Budapest, with international entries. Additionally there were Concours d'Elegance events outside the capitol in Miskolc, Siófok and Székesfehérvár. These focused more on local cars and motorcycles. All of these shows were visited by famous actors and actresses, opera singers and the aristocrats as well.

The Concours d'Elegance provided the perfect opportunity for dealers, who were able to show their latest models at a very elegant setting. Additionally they were able to support local coachbuilders – back then most of the cars had individual, hand-made bodies. Many carriage builders switched to motorized vehicles in the 1920s both in Budapest and in rural cities. Also, several specialist companies emerged, which focused on coachbuilding.



Lajos Zupka jr., director of the Zupka coachbuilding company with his wife at the 1935 Concours d'Elegance next to their award-winning Mercedes

Shows 1945-1989

In Hungary there were hardly any standalone car shows between 1901-1939. Dealers used any opportunities they could to promote their vehicles. Cars and motorcycles appeared at country fairs, industrial fairs and at livestock sales as well!

After the war, the Budapest Nemzetközi Vásár (Budapest International Fair) which was hosted twice a year became the only opportunity for car fans to look at the latest models. Just as in other COMECON countries, this fair was used by „Western” car manufacturers to show their models. Mercedes, Ford, Simca, Opel, Volkswagen, NSU and others appeared regularly. According to contemporary accounts, most of the exhibited cars remained in Hungary and were bought by privileged customers with good connections.



Advertising trucks

Over the last 125 years cars and trucks were the perfect tools for promotional purposes. Companies using trucks utilized them as mobile sign boards



After 1945



A scrapyard in 1945



The Fiat-distributor became a part of state-owned MOGURT in 1948

The first half of 1945 was mostly about fighting between the retreating German army and the Red Army, and then surveying the damage. Though the political situation was normalised in May and a new government was set up, it was not easy to legalise vehicles again. On the 5th of May, the Minister responsible for Trade and Transportation received the necessary permissions to reorganise the Hungarian car parc. In January, 1946 a new committee, called the National Committee for Vehicle Matters and Road Police was set up which provided advices and took part in driver education. At the same time the Minister announced 23 new vehicle districts and a mandatory test for all vehicles. New number plates and papers were given to all road vehicles.

As the situation returned to normal, pre-war traders reappeared and tried to resume business. Méray Motorkerékpárgyár relaunched its transportation business and talked to British car makers on obtaining distribution rights. The Reiman company started importing Renault cars again. The local Fiat distributor became active as well.

There were a lot of dealers who sold barely legal cars and parts built from vehicles destroyed during the war. The state also appeared as a stakeholder and started importing Škoda cars.

Back in 1938 there were 19,000 passenger cars and 3,8000 trucks registered in Hungary. On 31 January, 1947 the Hungarian car parc amounted to 7,200 passenger cars and 7,500 trucks.



In 1946 the American government provided a loan of USD 15 million so the Hungarian state was able to procure ex-military vehicles from the American army. This provided a lifeline for many repairshops in the next few years

The 1950s



Still from Budapest, early 1950s. Most of the cars were made before the 2nd World War

In April, 1947 a new rule restricted the sale of new cars; in October a new committee was set up which mandated distribution of fuel – this was the beginning of a ticket system. On 20 April, 1948 a new number plate system was introduced with two letters and three digits and the Kossuth-crest.

MOGÜRT aka Magyar Országos Gépkocsi Üzem Rt, which was originally set up in 1945 by the Cordatic tire company, a dealer association and transportation companies to supervise and manage the activities related to rebuilt wrecks was transformed to become a state-owned body overseeing the motor car trade. In Spring, 1949 restrictions were lifted on new car sales and the ticket-system was withdrawn.

A couple months later the Kossuth-crest was replaced on all cars with the new symbol of the Hungarian People's Republic. Paralelly dealer companies were nationalized. This was the end of private car trade in Hungary.

In the 1950s only a couple hundred new cars arrived each year to Hungary, which were distributed almost exclusively among government bodies. In addition to Škoda, Tatraplan, ZIM and ZIS cars, party leaders favoured Chevrolet and Mercedes cars.

While MOGÜRT imported the cars, distribution was handled by Autó és Alkatrészkereskedelmi Vállalat

Motorcycles did not face such drastic measures. In addition to Hungarian-made Csepel, Danuvia and Pannonia motorcycles, pre-war BMW, Zündapp and other motorcycles were repaired and put into use.



From the late 1950s Autó és Alkatrészkereskedelmi Vállalat aka Autóker catered for parts only



From the early 1960s Csepel Kerékpár és Motorkerékpár Nagykereskedelmi Vállalat supervised the distribution of new cars but it was only a temporary solution

Motor car trade, 1960-1989

From 1959 restrictions on buying new cars were lifted. Customers were able to pre-order new cars – however demand far outstripped imports so there was a 3-4-year waiting period. Beginning from 1962 more and more Škoda, Trabant and Wartburg cars arrived to Hungary. It was clear that only a new organisation will be able to cope with the required processes. In January, 1964 Merkur Passenger Car Distribution Company commenced its activities. For the next 25 years this was the main car distributor in the country. At the end of the 1960s the Hungarian vehicle fleet consisted of 30,000 passenger cars, 5,000 buses, 250,000 motorcycles and 67,000 trucks. Private persons could only import cars with special permissions. There were only a few exceptions, including diplomats and those who had relatives abroad, who could help them obtaining a Renault, a Ford or something similar. Even Merkur received a few batches of Western cars, mostly through barter deals: in 1969 a few British Ford cars arrived and the Hungarian government paid with refrigerators. Merkur only stored, handled and distributed the cars and it was the wholesale retailer of parts and equipment. Import activities were handled by Mogürt.



A few lucky people got his car thanks to a lottery scheme based on car saving deposit books



The Csepel headquarters of Merkur at the end of the 1970s. Most of the cars are Trabants, but you can spot a lot of other brands, including a few Volkswagen Beetles



On 4 March, 1975 the 100,000th Lada was handed over

By 1985 almost 1,5 million cars, 25,000 buses and 200,00 trucks were in use. But supply still couldn't cope with demand. „Demand for passenger cars have increased due to higher living standards and savings by the public – however it is impossible to fulfil it from COMECON countries” stated a 1986 report. It was only after 1989, the fall of the Iron Curtain that a solution to this problem was possible in a new political and economical climate.



GAZ M20 Pobjeda

Production: 1946-1958
Place of production: Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod), Soviet Union
Length x width x height: 4665 x 1695 x 1640 mm
Engine: 2112 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke
Body: Hatchback
Total production: 235,999
Number of cars in Hungary, 31 December, 1973: 708



GAZ M21 Volga

Production: 1956-1971
Place of production: Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod), Soviet Union
Length x width x height: 4830 x 1800 x 1620 mm
Engine: 2432 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke
Body: Sedan
Total production: 638,875
Number of cars in Hungary, 31 December, 1973: 8,515



Škoda 440/Octavia

Production: 1955-1971
Place of production: Mlada Boleslav, Czechoslovakia
Length x width x height: 4065 x 1600 x 1430 mm
Motor: 1221 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke
Body: Limousine, Kombi
Total production: 450,171
Number of cars in Hungary, 31 December, 1973: 10,094



Škoda 1000 MB

Production: 1964-1969
Place of production: Mlada Boleslav, Czechoslovakia
Length x width x height: 4170 x 1620 x 1390 mm
Motor: 988 cc (later 1107 cc), four-cylinder, four-stroke
Body: Limousine, Coupe
Total production: 443,141
Number of cars in Hungary, 31 December, 1973: 13,053



Trabant 601

Production: 1963-1990
Place of production: Zwickau, GDR
Length x width x height: 3555 x 1504 x 1437 mm
Engine: 595 cc, two-cylinder, two-stroke
Body: Limousine, Kombi, Kübelwagen
Total production: 2,818,547
Number of cars in Hungary, 31 December, 1980: 186,225



Moskwitch 412

Production: 1976-1988
Place of production: Moscow, Soviet Union
Length x width x height: 4250 x 1550 x 1480 mm
Engine: 1358 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke
Body: Limousine, Kombi, Furgon
Number of cars in Hungary, 31 December, 1980: 13,467



Dacia 1300/1310

Production: 1969-2004

Place of production: Mioveni, Romania

Length x width x height: 4340 x 1640 x 1430 mm

Engine: 1289 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke

Body: Limousine, Kombi, Kupé, pick-up

Total prouction: 1,959,730

Number of cars in Hungary, 31

December, 1984: 52,537



Wartburg 353

Production: 1966-1989

Place of production: Eisenach, GDR

Length x width x height: 4220 x 1642 x 1495 mm

Engine: 995 cm2, three-cylinder, four-stroke

Body: Limousine, Kombi

Total prouction: 1,225,429

Number of cars in Hungary, 31

December, 1980: 123,923



Škoda 100

Production: 1969-1980

Place of production: Mlada Boleslav, Czechoslovakia

Length x width x height: 4155 x 1620 x 1380

Engine: 1107 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke

Body: Limousine, Kupé

Total prouction: 1,136,610

Number of cars in Hungary, 31

December, 1980: 71,000



Lada 2107

Production: 1982-2012

Place of production: Togliatti, Soviet Union/Russia

Length x width x height: 4145 x 1611 x 1440 mm

Engine: 1458 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke

Body: Limousine

Total prouction: 1,534,372



Lada Samara 2108

Production: 1984-1999

Place of production: Togliatti, Soviet Union/Russia

Length x width x height: 4006 x 1620 x 1400 mm

Engine: 1289 cc, four-cylinder, four-stroke

Body: Hatchback

Total prouction: 881,824



Fiat 126p

Production: 1973-2000

Place of production: Bielsko-Biala and Tychy, Poland

Length x width x height: 3054 x 1378 x 1302 mm

Engine: 594 (652) cc, two-cylinder, four-stroke

Body: Hatchback

Total prouction: 3,318,674

Number of cars in Hungary, 31

December, 1984: 85,397 (Polski-Fiat cumulated)

New ways

Though Merkur had a few „Western” cars in its lineup and there were certain methods which allowed a few people to possess a Volkswagen, a Fiat or any other non-COMECON cars, but the majority of the Hungarian car parc consisted of Trabant, Wartburg, Lada and Dacia cars. An official Volkswagen repair workshop was opened at the end of 1960s, and in the mid-1970s a BMW showroom was opened in Budapest. In 1988 György Haris organised a standalone automobile show. When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989 an era came to an end. Merkur was forced to raise prices.



In 1990 import of used cars was enabled. Between 1989-1995 Merkur was forced to close, while people bought cheap, old „Western” cars. Western automobile manufacturers opened their local subsidiaries, and their dealer networks had to adhere to international standards. The 1990s and 2000s were a period of enormous growth on the Hungarian new car market with almost all major brands being represented on the Hungarian market. Suzuki, which opened a Hungarian assembly plant in 1991 and advertised its cars as „Our cars” enabled tens of thousands of Hungarians to replace their old Trabants to new Suzukis.



However development came to a halt recently. Due to the 2008 stock crash the Hungarian new car market collapsed and its recovery is very slow.



Fuel stations

Internal combustion engines were first powered by lighting gas or anti-lice petroleum which was available in pharmacies. The latter was called benzin in Germany and Hungary, petrol in the United Kingdom and gasoline or gas in North America. This is still the most popular fuel today.

As more and more automobiles appeared, grocery stores started selling fuel: from barrels it was poured into cans and from cans it was poured directly into the fuel tank. It was complicated and dirty. Sylvanus Bowser patented a mechanical pump in 1885 to ease the handling of kerosene which was used in street lights. He demonstrated a version adapted to cars in 1905. A hand-operated suction mechanism pumped gasoline directly into the vehicle through a flexible hose, with each pull of the lever dispensing a preset amount.



John J. Tokheim patented a pumping unit with a domed glass cylinder on top in 1901. The product being dispensed—kerosene, machine oil, or gasoline—would first be pumped into the cylinder, which was marked with a volume scale. After the quantity had been verified and any water had separated out, the liquid would be released to flow by gravity into the customer's container. This enabled the driver to check the amount and quality of the fuel. It was Tokheim who also put together the first electric fuel pump. In 1907 Standard Oil Company opened its first fuel station. By the first World War the first European fuel stations also appeared. In 1933 an American company introduced its ingenious "variator," a mechanical computer. The variator displayed the amount dispensed with revolving number wheels and simultaneously calculated the price, eliminating the need for any familiarity with arithmetic by either party to the transaction. The Tokheim company made an electric version in 1975.

In Hungary the one of the main tasks of the Hungarian Automobile Club was to provide fuel to motorists. To that end they made a deal with the Austrian Gerson Böhm & Rosenthal company in order to set up a national fuel station network. By 1913 there were 124 places where fuel was available from barrels.



After the first world war the first proper fuel stations appeared: in 1924 Fővárosi Autóüzem Részvénytársaság set up two fuel stations in Budapest. More and more oil companies set up shop in Hungary and set up their own fuel station network. The Hungarian subsidiary of the Dutch Fanto concern which also operated a refinery had 100 fixed and 52 mobile fuel stations before the war. Shell, which also had a refinery in Csepel set up a similarly sized network. These fuel pumps were based on the principles of the Tokheim machines.



Fuel stations

During the 2nd World War refineries were heavily damaged. Though reconstruction started in 1945, but soon international companies were ousted. A new, state-owned company, Ásványolajforgalmi Rt (ÁFORT) took their place. Its name was changed to Ásványolaj Forgalmi Vállalat (ÁFOR) in 1952.

In the 1960s the red ÁFOR fuel stations were joined by the yellow Shell and Agip fuel stations and from 1972 the first green BP fuel stations as well. Shell fuel stations, which were operated by Interag has strategically been placed in bigger cities and along major roads. The Agip and BP networks were operated by ÁFOR.



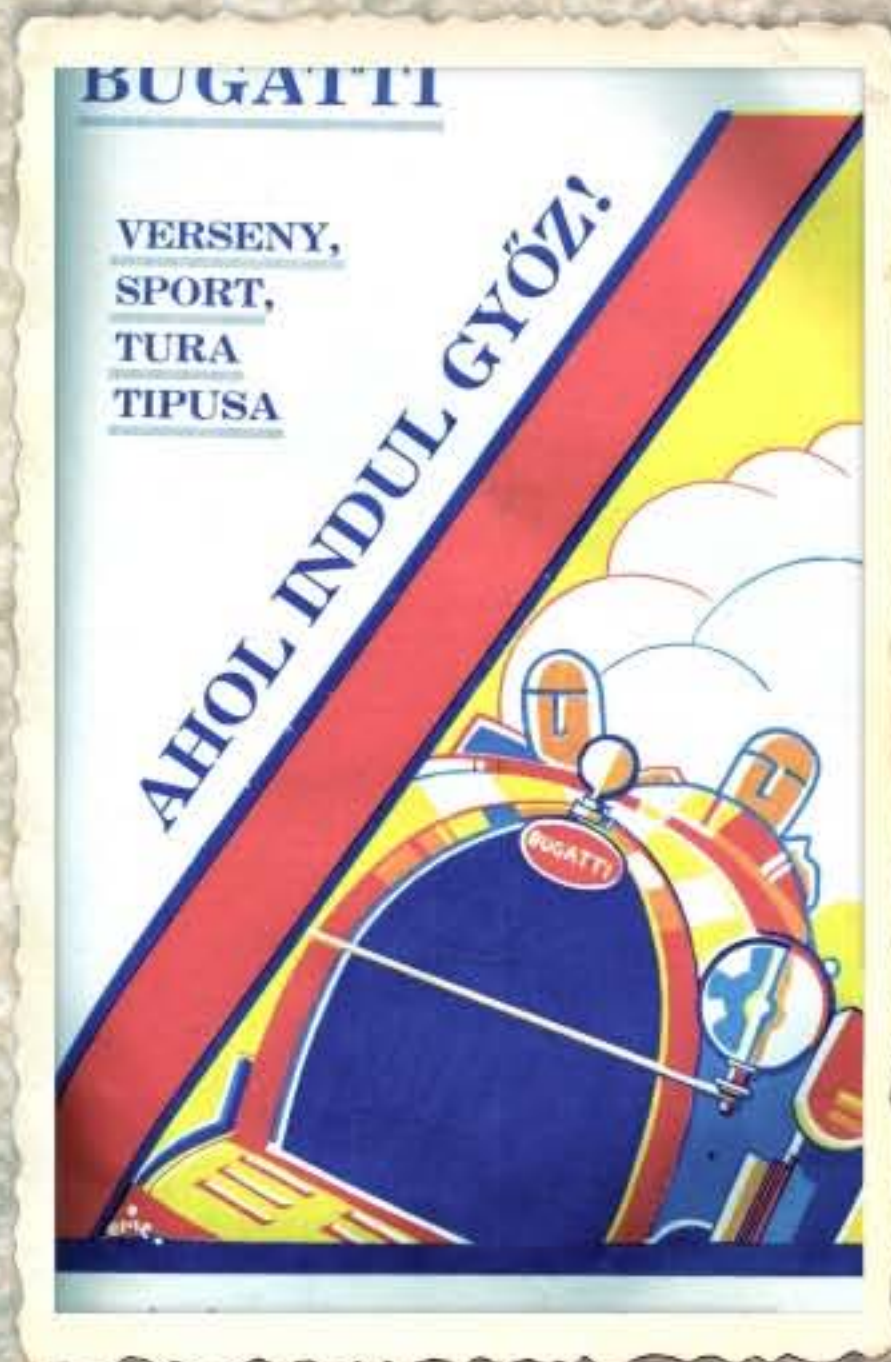
During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s these networks evolved and became more comfortable. Mechanical pumps were replaced with electrical pumps. Even the average ÁFOR fuel stations had roofs and some had shops as well.



Cars and ads

In Hungary the first ads were translated from French and German. Hungarian-language brochures were a rarity – a Hungarian Laurin&Klement brochure survived from the 1910s. In the 1920s Hungarian talents, graphics were employed in local ads. And there were more and more dealers who published Hungarian language brochures and a few even put together corporate magazines as well. Additionally cars and motorcycles appeared in non-automotive ads as symbols of freedom and mobility.

After the 2nd World War car ads started to appear in the 1960s: parts and workshops were advertised along with saving books. Sweepstakes were held on a regular basis and holders of such saving books had the chance to win a car.



A négyhengeres CITROËN „C4”

A „FAUX-CABRIOLET” 4 személyes, belső kormányzású luxusautó.

Teljesen acélból készült, igen lényelmes és alacsony, nagy ellenállóképességű karosszérián, amely az ajtó- és ablakkeretek összekapcsolása folytán a bennülőknek tökéletes kényelmet biztosít. Két azéles, egyenként 3 csuklóspánttal ellátott ajtó, biztonsági zárossal. Hátról nagy ablakok. Az ajtók ablakai fogantyúk által súlyszelhetők és emelhetők. Ajtózással. A kocsik hátsó része, sportkocsiszerű, nagy podgyásként. Finom posztóból és nemes anyagból készült belső berendezés, horizontális és vertikális irányban állítható első ülések és két irányban rugózott hátsó ülések. Három szényszerű. Függönyök az oldal- és hátsó ablakokon. Belső világítás. Csomagtartó háló. Állítható egyrészes szélvédő. Automatikus szélvédőtisztító. Hátranzó töltő. Napellenző. Szabályozható szellőztető. Hátoldalmérő. Az indirektul megvilágított szerelvényfal tartozékai: 8 napig járó időóra, napi- és óraszámjelzőmértővel kombinált sebességmérő, üzemtermérő, oleométer, benzinállomástól és az egész szerelvény-

falat indirektul megvilágító lámpa, amely egyúttal a gyújtás ellenőrzéséről szolgál. Ugyancsak a szerelvényfalra van elhelyezve a gyújtás önindító és szélvédőtisztító kapcsolója, valamint a kézi gáz- és levegőszabályozó is. Széles gumikkal bevont felhágódesszák fémkerekekkel. Tűzzárnacsozott, újformájú, igen azéles és elegáns sormotívók. Nagyteljesítményű Marchal fényszórók és külön városi lámpák. Stoplámpával kombinált hátsólámpa. Külön országúti és külön városi villamoshűtő, amelyek kapcsolói a világítás kapcsolójával együtt a nagyméretű kormánykerékhez vannak elhelyezve. Az időjárás viszonyosságainak különösen ellenálló és igen könnyen javítható, nitrocellulózse lakkal készült fényezés. Nikkel kerékgysaphékok. Külön táskában elhelyezett komplett szerelvénykészlet. Zománcozott „SIX” falrás a hűtőfelületen és nikkel háromszög a hátsó jobb sárménón. Külön felszerelés: villamos irányjelző, keréklámpa, kézikelet, hámufartók és virágvázak.

The social aspects of motor car trade

At the beginning of the 20th century the first car dealers appeared in Budapest. These people came from different background: Gyula Reiman, who was the first secretary of the Hungarian Automobile Club and became a Renault dealer was a banker; József Bárdi who had early success with Mercedes was an accountant at Magyar Ruggyantaárugyár, a rubber goods company. Others, like Károly Csermely and Géza Szám were mechanics who became interested in the new form of transportation.

Official distributors also appeared in the early 1900s: Spitz Arnold, an Austrian dealer set up shop in Budapest and Laurin&Klement also opened a showroom in Budapest.

After the first World War there were a lot of people who tried their hands on dealing with cars, motorcycles and parts. There were a lot of strange characters. One of them, Hermann Salm had a very conflicting career. He was born in Serbia, but grew up in Germany. He was probably a British spy during the 1st World War, but it is possible that he was a double agent. After the war he became a very cruel henchman. Once he retired he became a distributor of the French Bugatti cars in the 1920s.

After the great Depression the Hungarian motor car trade was restructured again. Only bigger, financially sound companies survived. Nemzetközi Gépkereskedelmi Rt, a subsidiary of Magyar-Angol Bank distributed General Motors brand, including Opel. Méray Motorkerékpárgyár Rt, which was financed by Magyar Általános Hitelbank had a very good business with Adler cars. Mihály Majláth, a former mechanic who sold motorcycles in the 1920s was able to transform his business and sold DKW and BMW cars in the 1930s.



Méray-Horváth Loránd



Majláth Mihály



Reiman Gyula

Motorsport in Hungary

In Hungary the first races were held as part of bicycle races. Motorized tricycles already appeared in 1899 and a year later runs for four-wheeled automobiles were held in Pécs and Szombathely. As part of the first Budapest International Auto Show a race was held on the horse race track in 1901. Between 1906-1908 the newly founded Association of Hungarian Motorcyclists organized trips and touring races. In 1909 a leg of the pan-European touring race, named after Prince Henry of Prussia attended Hungary. This was the beginning of international motorsport. Between 1912-1914 the Royal Hungarian Automobile Club organised international touring races.

After the 1st World War racing returned to bicycle tracks. Then the Royal Hungarian Automobile Club organized a race on the Svábhegy hill in 1920, which was the beginning of a new era. In 1921 the Automobile Club and the Royal Hungarian Yacht Club organized a Sporting Week at Lake Balaton, which included an automobile race event. In 1922 touring races returned to the calendar with routes including Hortobágy-Balaton, Alföld-Alpines etc. Beginning in 1925 a new yearly event, called Hungarian Tour became the highlight of the season.

Other clubs, both in and outside Budapest joined in from 1926. In 1928 the first road with concrete surface was inaugurated between Tát and Nyergesújfalu where record runs were held until 1933. From 1934 record runs were held near Gyón. In 1936 the first Hungarian Grand Prix was held – the predecessor of today's Formula 1 event. This race was attended by the best-known racers of the time. Automobile racing ceased in 1939, but motorcycle events were held until 1943.



In 1909 the touring race, named after Prince Henry of Prussia was attended by Hungarians for the first time



The start of the Hungarian Grand Prix in July, 1936



The finish line of the Svábhegy hill run. The race which was held between 1920-1930 eventually became a part of the European hill-climb calendar

Motorsport, 1945-1989

After the 2nd World War, the structure of the Hungarian motorsport was radically altered. Motorcycle races became heavily subsidized. In the period between 1951 and 1954 there were more motorcycle races than during the previous 25 years altogether. These races had 8217 participants – motorcycle-sport became a popular activity. Autosport on the other hand barely existed. Small race cars were built from leftover parts by a few workshops.

In August 1959 the newly formed Hungarian TV had a live coverage of the international motorcycle race, which was organised by the reformed Hungarian Automobile Club.

A year later the Tour d'Europe international automobile touring race crossed Hungary. At the same time the Hungarian Automobile Club got in touch with FIA. In June, 1961 an international automobile race was held at the Ferihegy airport. There were 29 cars from nine countries, including Finland, GDR, West Germany, France and Austria. A similar race was held in 1962 and then international touring car races were held in two parks in Budapest: Városliget and Népliget. Touring car races were later joined by Formula Junior and Formula V races. These races gained lots of attention.

The Hungarian Automobile Club together with ADAC and ÖAMTC hosted the first Munich-Wien-Budapest Rally in 1963. This became a staple in the racing calendar until the late 1970s and became a part of the European championship.

From the 1970s rally racing took hold in Hungary: Mihály Balatoni, Attila Ferjancz, Dezső Kiss and later László Ranga and János Tóth jr. were at the forefront.

In 1986 Hungary hosted its first Formula 1 race, which put the country back on the international racing map.



The Hungarian Grand Prix in 1958 was for motorcycles and cars. Participants came from Poland, Yugoslavia and Skoda entered its official team.



László Szabó, nicknamed „Kuksi” at the Motorcycle Grand Prix in 1949. He was an internationally recognised racer.

Attila Ferjancz at the wheel of a Renault-Alpine rally car, around 1972