

VW Americanization owes much to local talent

By DELL McCLOY

Volkswagen's plunge into automobile production in the U.S. received much of its early impetus from a team of people with western Wayne and Oakland county connections.

Ten of the West German giant's initial 22-member American launch team were formerly employed at General Motors Corp. Livonia Spring and Bumper Plant.

That the team knew its business when the American subsidiary was formed is evidenced by the fact that VW's domestic operation is already eclipsing production and sales marks of American Motors Corp. and has moved into fourth place behind GM, Ford and Chrysler.

That's fast company to be keeping in just a little more than two years of existence.

It's especially fast, bearing in mind that the staff nucleus started out with only a shell of an assembly plant in Pennsylvania and a dream of becoming the first new manufacturer of American cars since Studebaker folded its operation in 1964.

Tapped to head that dream was Richard E. Dauch, who was appointed vice president of manufacturing for the fledgling firm late in October, 1976.

Dauch, a former plant manager at Spring and Bumper, whose GM career was considered meteoric, began immediately to build a staff.

Not surprisingly, many of his key aides were chosen from the Spring and Bumper staff.

Dauch, a former football player at Purdue University, surrounded himself with others who had athletic backgrounds.

One of the first people he selected was Marvin G. McFadden, a former Michigan State and Pittsburgh Steelers lineman.

McFadden was personnel director at the Spring and Bumper Plant and was

appointed general director of personnel for Volkswagen. (McFadden has since left Volkswagen and accepted a position with SCANS, Inc., a Livonia-based firm with plants in several foreign countries.)

Dauch and McFadden sat in Dauch's office in the company's Warren headquarters recently and discussed the early, turbulent days and what it was like to start a corporation.

They spoke of madcap flights to and from Volkswagen's West German headquarters; of writing policies and regulations which would have to govern a soon-to-be-sprawling corporate complex; of interviewing prospective employees under the most bizarre of circumstances; of attempting to do the impossible — and do it in a big hurry.

At one point, they were using Dauch's Bloomfield Hills home for interviewing potential employees.

"In many cases, we didn't want one person to know we were interviewing another one, and we were shutting them in and out of front and back doors," laughed Dauch. "They were utilizing the kitchen, dining room, family room — even the bedrooms."

"Dick's wife tried to go to bed one night and when she walked into her room, I was interviewing some guy she'd never even seen before," said McFadden.

In those days, Dauch's schedule went like this: Fly to West Germany for two weeks for meetings with Volkswagen officials, fly home for two weeks of implementing plans; fly back for two weeks; fly home for two weeks, etc.

McFadden's job, in addition to steadily building up the staff, was to handle the globe-traveling Dauch's administrative duties in the company, a grueling pace to maintain.

Other people were maintaining the same kind of pressure-packed schedule as they "came on board," the men said. One person was hired on a Friday and was aboard a plane bound for West



RICHARD DAUCH
Sports helped

Germany by Saturday morning.

Numerous other newcomers found themselves thrust into unusual positions by the rapidity of the corporate formation process and lack of people to do the amount of work that it was creating.

Sixteen-hour days were not uncommon.

There was machinery to be designed and ordered.

There was temporary housing to be acquired for incoming corporate officials.

There were vehicles to be purchased and maintained.

Another plant was purchased in South Charleston, W.Va., and it had to be staffed, renovated and put into operation for stamping body panels.

There were thousands of people to be hired in the future to staff the plants, a process which was to take months of

interviewing and discussion.

There were systems to be designed and training programs to be administered.

There was transportation which had to be arranged.

What had to be done in order to make the corporation a reality was mind-boggling.

The West German hierarchy predicted it couldn't be accomplished in anything less than 36 months. The Americans got it off the ground and producing automobiles in 18 months.

To accomplish that goal, Dauch recruited the kind of people he was used to working with — youthful, experienced, aggressive and loyal.

"That's why we looked for people with sports backgrounds, where possible," he said. "People who are used to working as a team were essential if we were going to be successful."

Successful?

"If we had had the production capacity, we could have outsold Chrysler in January," said Dauch in summing up the company's progress.

Late last month, the firm's mammoth Pennsylvania plant cranked out its 60,000th vehicle since it went into production last April.

By next month, the Pennsylvania plant will be operating on two full shifts a day and producing a total of 400,000 cars per year, according to production schedules.

There are other Spring and Bumper Plant people who are playing a major role in the new corporation's development, according to Dauch.

They are, along with their titles at Volkswagen:

• Robert Pickering, general superintendent, South Charleston.
• George Dallas, superintendent of

manufacturing planning, Warren.

• Richard Donaldson, general superintendent of production, Pennsylvania.

• Paul Hegwood, department head, maintenance, Pennsylvania.

• Charles (Chub) Krug, maintenance supervisor, Pennsylvania.

• Richard Zella, shift superintendent, maintenance, Pennsylvania.

• Bruce D. Berger, acting director of corporate labor relations, Warren.

• George Knapp, administrator of labor relations, Pennsylvania.

• Reeder Singler, director of personnel, South Charleston.

• Robert G. Daniels, corporate director of safety and security, Warren.

• Robert Stout, chief of safety and security, Pennsylvania.

• Wayne Ure, administrator of medical services, Pennsylvania.

• Kenneth Fletcher, corporate transportation manager.

• Alison Buchanan, corporate Equal Employment Opportunity coordinator, Warren.

• Rick Hirsch, chief inspector, South Charleston.

• W. C. (Bill) Craig, plant manager, South Charleston.

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