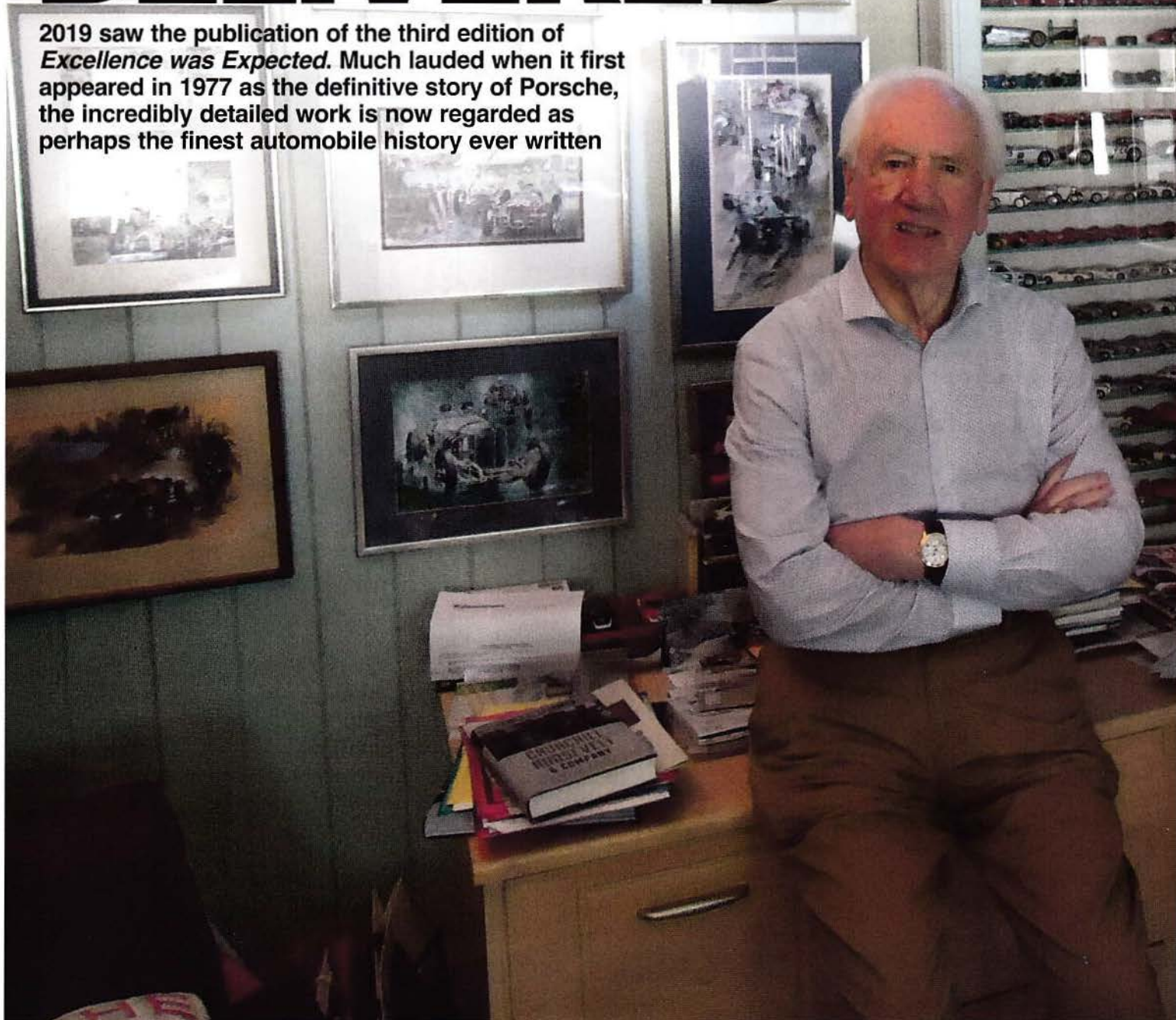


Words: Kieron Fennelly Photos: Karl Ludvigsen and Author

EXCELLENCE: EXPECTED AND DELIVERED

2019 saw the publication of the third edition of *Excellence was Expected*. Much lauded when it first appeared in 1977 as the definitive story of Porsche, the incredibly detailed work is now regarded as perhaps the finest automobile history ever written





ts author, Karl Ludvigsen, a mechanical engineer from MIT and career auto journalist, would seem in retrospect to have been destined to write it, but of course the reality is slightly more complex. He was born in 1934 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and as a youngster Karl devoured car magazines and reviews, and even had a subscription to the British weekly, *The Motor* (which was subsumed by *Autocar* in 1988). This gave him a European perspective and was where, in July 1948, he read the first road impressions of a small, rear engine coupé made by a company in Austria.

A bright boy, his academic career took him to Phillips Exeter Academy where he graduated with honours before going to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and then studying industrial design at Pratt Institute. His father was chief operating officer at Fuller, a transmission manufacturer, and during the summer vacations Ludvigsen junior was employed at the plant where he learned to be a draftsman and worked in the transmissions shop. His academic achievements would be supported by solid practical engineering experience.

Part of his university course involved creative engineering which alerted Ludvigsen to the possibilities of industrial design, a field which particularly interested him. Always a writer, he contributed a column to the MIT magazine, 'Uncle Karl's car notes'. One article, on the 1935 Bugatti GP car notable for its straight-eight engine, caught the attention of the editor of *Sports Cars Illustrated* and it would later result in Karl's first remunerated writing job.

On graduation from MIT he was offered a position in GM's design department under Chuck Jordan, but so taken was he with the possibilities of becoming a technical editor, like one of his heroes the *Motor* journalist Laurence Pomeroy, that he resigned after a few months, rather, he says, to Jordan's dismay. But Ludvigsen had other plans: at 23 he was to be technical

“THIS LED TO THE OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE A HISTORY OF PORSCHE...”

editor of *Sport Cars Illustrated*. Military service intervened and Karl was despatched to Germany in 1958. Today he says 'the net effect of my peculiar education, a combination of mechanical engineering and styling, helped me to talk to industry engineers.'

He already had an entrée in Stuttgart: a few years earlier, he had met Porsche's gearbox specialist Leopold Schmid when the German had been invited to Fuller to examine the possibility of applying synchromesh to Fuller's truck gearboxes. As it turned out, Fuller did not go the synchronised route but Ludvigsen stayed in touch with Schmid for many years even after the latter left Porsche in the early sixties.

Ludvigsen returned to the US in 1959 to take up the editorship of what was to become *Car & Driver*, but a desire to understand more from the manufacturing perspective saw him go back to GM in 1961 to its PR department. After six years of corporate lobbying and press releases he quit to become a full time freelance writer. During the subsequent decade, as well as numerous articles and several books, he produced his award winning *Mercedes Benz Sports and Racing Cars*, an achievement which moved him firmly on to the automotive book publishers' radar.

This led to the opportunity to write a history of Porsche, the first edition of *Excellence was Expected*, a four year undertaking after which he returned to corporate PR, first at Fiat North America then at Ford. In 1980, Dearborn moved him to London and Ludvigsen would henceforth establish the UK as his new home. He married again and, after leaving Ford in 1983, he made use of his now very comprehensive auto industry address book to run a successful London-based automotive consultancy



Above: Home sweet home, and the epicentre of the extensive research – the Ludvigsen abode near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

until the mid 1990s. Thence he resumed his journalism and writing career which has included many more books, biographies and, above all, two further editions of *Excellence was Expected*.

The origins of Karl Ludvigsen's interest in Porsche are not hard to identify: American enthusiasts were always intrigued by European auto engineering, particularly that coming from Germany, and by sports cars which seemed to be a British speciality. Having read about Porsche in 1948, it would be three years later at Watkins Glen before he saw an example in the flesh:

'It was a mouse grey coupé and, humble as it looked among the arrogant Allards and Jaguars, it was so obviously a quite beautifully made thoroughbred,' he observed. He even managed to get his eighteen-year-old hands on one to record a road test for the MIT undergraduate magazine:

'It is only necessary to wish the car in a certain direction,' he wrote, 'to have it respond quickly and accurately...Dr Porsche's creation comes very close to being the ideal sports car for the American continent.' Clearly the language of the writer-apprentice at work here, the effort which Karl Ludvigsen would put into crafting his characteristically stylish prose would make him not only one of the most authoritative, but also one of the most readable of auto historians.

In 1956 he traded his Triumph TR2 for a five-year-old 1300 Porsche coupé which eventually let him down when in deepest winter the casing of its (non-synchromesh) gearbox split, but by now Karl was smitten and Porsches and Porsche news –

reporting the racing exploits of the 550 Spyders – were informing his writing. By 1958 he had established a working relationship with Zuffenhausen's racing manager and PR man Huschke von Hanstein and been introduced to Ferry Porsche, a man whose modesty, thought Ludvigsen, made him a fitting heir to *das Haus*. During his military service in Germany, he used his contacts with Leopold Schmid to visit Zuffenhausen and tested various cars which he reported on in *Sports Car Illustrated*.

The opportunity to write what would become *Excellence was Expected* came about in the early 1970s. By then Ludvigsen had resumed his contact with Porsche following his six-year interregnum at General Motors. A former GM colleague and journalist had begun a book on Porsche, a task Ludvigsen says he envied, and when this fellow died unexpectedly, the publisher asked Ludvigsen to continue the work: 'I was thrilled to take on this tribute to my fallen friend.'

The experience brought out the nature of the man: he read the uncompleted manuscript and was dismayed to find words like 'probably', 'possibly' and 'perhaps' recurring far too often for his taste. With many of the actors still alive and working at Porsche, some of whom he knew, he determined he would start again and tell the story in his way. By late 1973, he had already made significant inroads.

But then a setback occurred which almost shipwrecked the venture. The publisher fired Ludvigsen's editor Dean Batchelor, a man in whom Ludvigsen had implicit faith for what was a major publishing venture. He had already worked with Batchelor to produce his prize-winning *Mercedes Sports and Racing Cars*

Below left: When the three-volume second edition was launched in 2003, so inevitably began a new round of book signings!

Below right: A Porsche man by choice, Karl poses with his own Boxster



so, with a heavy heart, he resigned from his undertaking with the publisher and returned the advance. Then he had a stroke of luck: another publisher, a fellow scribbler from their *Automobile Quarterly* days, offered to produce the work.

Then it was back to business: in May 1974 he went to Stuttgart to cover Porsche's 25th anniversary of car making and took advantage to meet the self effacing Ghislaine Kaes, Ferry's first cousin and also his secretary in the early years. Kaes would prove an extraordinarily useful contact: as well as opening the archives he showed Ludvigsen the ten year report books which Porsche had begun in 1942 and which provided a huge source of information. Kaes also helped him with the photographic archive: simply finding and identifying the pictures was quite an achievement. Ludvigsen immersed himself in *Christophorus* files, interviewed Ferry and came across the then still-secret Studebaker project: 'I loved discovering that kind of thing.'

But at times the would-be Porsche historian admits that he did feel overwhelmed: as well as this almost unmanageable plethora of historical information, he had to keep up with contemporary Porsche activity which in the mid-seventies included a series of new models, plus an energetic racing programme based on the 911 derivative, the 935. To make matters worse other books were appearing long before his own finish line was anywhere in sight.

'There was John Bentley's biography of Ferry Porsche (*We at Porsche*), Paul Frère's *Porsche 911 Story* and the *Porsche Book* by Lothar Boschen and Jürgen Barth. I began to wonder if all my efforts were worthwhile.'

In Ludvigsen's defence it is worth pointing out that the Bentley book (*We at Porsche*) was Ferry's personal memoir which, if revealing, had relatively little to say about the post war

years; the other two books were technical works, invaluable references for writers and enthusiasts of the cars, if rather dry. Neither tackled what was for Ludvigsen his central mission. As he later observed:

'We all knew what happened on a superficial level: cars came and went, races were won or lost, people came and went and Porsche's business flourished or slumped. But often what we didn't know was why the company and its cars evolved as they did or how its leaders made the business and engineering decisions they did that determined the company's fate. For me the how and why of car-company decision making is the most interesting topic an enterprise has to offer.'

This was the essence of *Excellence was Expected*. Nevertheless, even with the enthusiastic support of his publisher he still worried about the acceptability of his work which would be judged by Porsche owners – the most difficult of people to please. And despite Porsche's records there remained details he had not been able to resolve to his satisfaction – who built all the America Roadsters in the 1950s, for example, or why there did not seem to be a definitive record of how many 904s were built.

And as the publishing date neared he was surprised that, despite asking on two separate occasions, he did not

receive information on the 928's transaxle when normally this sort of information was always forthcoming. Of course in later years answers to these would materialise: in the case of the 928 transaxle, the 'Weissach Axle' was finalised only at the very last moment as Porsche cast about to master its new GT's wayward handling.

Perhaps after such focus he needed different stimuli, for in 1978 Ludvigsen joined Fiat North America as head of Public Affairs and then transferred to a similar role at Ford in 1980. His move to London coincided, appropriately for such an enthusiast, with assuming responsibility for Ford's European motorsport

"THIS WAS THE ESSENCE OF EXCELLENCE WAS EXPECTED..."

Below: Karl Ludvigsen was a trusted and welcome 'insider' at Porsche, earning the respect of all who met him, including, as seen here, Ferry Porsche himself





Left: The original single-volume *Excellence was Expected* was published way back in 1977. It was an instant hit, with copies changing hands for substantial amounts prior to the advent of the new three-volume edition in 2003

division as well. Post-Ford, his role as automotive consultant and journalist meant he maintained his close involvement with the industry – and with Porsche, for in 1990 he was invited to Zuffenhausen to meet CEO Arno Bohn and Financial chief Walter Gnauert who were keen to quell rumours that Porsche, then in the depths of a slump, would be taken over.

In the late 1990s, *Excellence was Expected* had been out of print long enough for the rights to revert to its author and he turned to Bentley Publishers. Twenty years had elapsed and much had happened in the Porsche firmament, not the least of which was rather more information on the period covered by the first edition. The prospect of revising everything he had written previously as well as incorporating two more decades was daunting, but Ludvigsen was spurred on by encouragement from several quarters, not only Bentley but the redoubtable Betty Jo Turner of Porsche Club America: 'Karl, you have to tell us what happened next!'

The new edition, once again a four-year mission, would take Porsche into the brave new world of water-cooling, SUVs and above all celebrate the survival of a now flourishing 911. On the way the transaxle, front-engined cars would come and go as did Porsche competition successes and not such successes. The

new edition, now in three volumes, ran to 1500 pages yet, even more than in 1977, it would sell out completely. Indeed, such had become the rate of change at Porsche that Ludvigsen felt compelled to produce an update, a task which took almost two years itself, in 2008.

His outstanding book on Colin Chapman, *Inside the Innovator*, appeared in 2010, shortly after another Ludvigsen masterpiece, the *Origin of the Species* which used all the vast resources of his knowledge and painstakingly assembled picture library to explore the first phases of Porsche. Showing the same restless curiosity as his subject, Ludvigsen then produced the definitive work on the amazing range of Ferdinand Porsche's wartime work, *Dr Porsche's War*, which simply underlined the professor's unimaginably inventive and eclectic genius. Ludvigsen then neatly demonstrated his own ability to move laterally into unrelated fields with his prize-winning book on Napier Railton, again a piece of remarkable scholarship.

And then it was time again to reconsider *Excellence was Expected*, especially as with *Origin of the Species*, he had now effectively written the prequel. However, another massive task loomed:

'Not only had so much happened since 2008,' he says, 'not

Below, left and right: Karl Ludvigsen's research over the years has earned him the respect of top names in the Porsche world, including Ernst Piëch (left) and celebrated journalist and author Paul Frère (below)



just more material and more models, but events such as the attempted takeover of VW which ended with Porsche becoming part of VW. There were also several books from insiders such as Mezger, Singer, Herrmann and Ferdinand Piëch to consider. But this time,' he adds, 'I told my publisher it would be my last amendment.'

He was already 80 years old, so it hardly seemed unreasonable. Yet once more it took several years to revisit sources and he was surprised at some of the new information his trawls uncovered: 'I learned for example that in the 1960s VW subsidised two thirds of Porsche's racing programme as long as Zuffenhausen continued to use air-cooled engines, but VW never reckoned on the cost of the 917 programme!'

After nearly fifty years following the company closely, he remains staggered at its consistency. Writing in 1977 he said 'over thirty years of its existence I saw no slackening of the strong, distinctive Porsche spirit. Porsche (unlike other manufacturers) usually spots shortcomings long before press or public and moved to erase them. That's one reason why the book is so big: the people at Porsche have simply never left the cars alone. I'm confident they never will.'

Today he does not demure: 'It's incredible how Porsche has retained its "Porscheness", an amazing achievement. When people ask "What car do you like", it is impossible not to mention Porsche because the firm builds drivers' cars, model after model. It's a uniquely brilliant way of working.'

Quite apart from the sheer breadth of his research, another characteristic sets Ludvigsen apart from many other Porsche authors, his command of the German language: never having to rely on the filter of translation simply adds to the authority of his work. Indeed the ability to read German enabled him to take immediate advantage of the previously unseen Porsche archives which Ghislaine Kaes showed him in the early 1970s; it also allowed him to pursue other German-only resources, for

example a website which lists German patents, another route for confirming Porsche's engineering history.

Speaking the language also advanced his cause: Ludvigsen says he conducted most of his interviewing in German, although, he concedes, 'Horst Marchart's Austrian accent was so strong we ended up talking in English!'

Individuals at Porsche he recalls who especially helped him with the first edition were Helmuth Bott and Ernst Fuhrmann, who both gave him many extensive interviews, and former archivist Klaus Parr, who was instrumental in assisting the 2003 edition. Porsche's stylists, too, he says gave him a lot of their time. Ludvigsen is especially grateful to Wendeling Wiedeking 'who gave me a wonderful interview: his contribution is unquantifiable.'

He was less fortunate with former engineering director Wolfgang Dürheimer, his request to interview the then Bentley chief being rejected. 'I then discovered that Dürheimer had apparently ended the fabled Porsche tradition of the ten-year books so useful to historians. Paul Hensler used to keep them up to date.' The look on Karl Ludvigsen's face suggests he regarded such an act as almost criminal.

Most interviewees recognised his achievements, however, and occasionally his standing would grant him the kind of privileged face to face meetings rarely available to journalists: he mentions the intensely private Ron Dennis of McLaren: 'He gave me a fantastically generous interview about the TAG period and allowed me to take pictures, too.'

More books have been written about Porsche than any other make – the fascination of the Zuffenhausen sports car firm attracting scores of authors and hundreds of journalists over half a century. Many of them have and will continue to consult the pages of Karl's book in their research, a source whose veracity is rarely if ever questioned. If excellence was once again expected, it has, with this magnificent and concluding third edition, emphatically been delivered. **CP**

“IT'S A UNIQUELY BRILLIANT WAY OF WORKING...”

Below: Karl taking notes aboard the new 911S Targa in 1972



EXCELLENCE DELIVERED

The long-awaited update of Karl Ludvigsen's seminal work brings the history of the Porsche marque bang up to date, writes Kieron Fennelly, with the addition of a fourth volume covering the years 2002–2020

With this fourth edition of *Excellence was Expected*, Karl Ludvigsen has once more delivered the definitive history of Porsche, bringing the narrative up to date. Much has happened in the last ten years: the VW takeover, the Panamera and Macan models, the advent of the 992, the exploits of the 919 at Le Mans and the Taycan electric programme, to mention only the major milestones.

Indeed, there is a vast amount of information here: the additional decade – the last edition was published in 2008 – adds a fourth volume, making a total of almost 3000 pages. But it is not so much its sheer size that makes *Excellence was Expected* stand out, but the way it is written.

Ludvigsen is not only a lifetime auto journalist and professional writer, but a natural communicator. His prose is thoughtful, stylish, varied: rare among automotive histories, it engages the reader like a work of fiction. And he is not above using the occasional arcane or abstruse term, not to parade his knowledge, but to create an effect, to give a gentle jolt to the reader.

The author, whose original research for the first 1977 edition involved hundreds of hours absorbing dry records in German in the Porsche Archiv, understands better than most how numbing reading endless technical detail can be.

There are numerous books on Porsche and many handle their chosen aspects of engineering and development with competence. But Ludvigsen's ambition was to go further than this, to examine also the uncharted human element. As he says, 'We all knew what happened on a superficial level: cars came and went, races were won or lost, people came and went, and Porsche's business flourished or slumped.

'But often what we didn't know was why the company and its cars evolved as they did or how its leaders made the

business and engineering decisions they did that determined the company's fate. For me the how and why of car-company decision making is the most interesting topic an enterprise has to offer.'

Ludvigsen is no mere Porsche anorak. His reputation as an author was made in the 1970s with his book on Mercedes-Benz; in the last ten years alone he has produced a fine analysis of Colin Chapman, *Inside the Innovator*, a compelling work on military and aviation engines, *Dr Porsche's War*, and a prize-winning 800-page opus, *Reid Raillon Man of Speed*, a demonstration again not only of his scholarship, but of his exceptional breadth.

It follows that this fourth edition of *Excellence was Expected* is no mere addition to the existing work. Ludvigsen has revisited the entire enterprise, updating, refocusing, even occasionally recasting a paragraph when new information meant an account needed revision.

Without doubt this is definitive work on Porsche and like previous editions it will continue to be mined by Porsche writers and historians, its veracity and authority unquestioned. But it also stands surely as one of the finest automotive books, indeed technical histories ever written. **CP**

Four volumes and nearly 3000 pages, Karl Ludvigsen's updated and comprehensively revised, 'Excellence was Expected' is the ultimate Porsche history

ISBN-13: 978-0-8376-1769-5

Contact:
Bentley Publishers
 1734 Massachusetts Avenue
 Cambridge
 MA 02138-1804
 USA
www.bentleypublishers.com



Classic **PORSCHE** 2009-2019

THE FLYING FINN

THE REDISCOVERY OF A LONG-LOST 911ST



www.classicporschemag.com



chp £4.95

ISSN 12.75 Can\$14.25 Aus\$12.20

CARRERA SPEEDSTER ● THE UK'S OLDEST 912
AMÉRICO NUNES STORY ● WERKS REUNION