New “Raceborn Moments” Episode: Uncovering the story of the 1952 Porsche 356 SL

30/09/2026 The Porsche 356 SL marks the beginning of Porsche’s history in factory-supported motorsport. In 1951, the sports car secured the brand’s first class victory at Le Mans, laying the foundation for an extraordinary racing heritage. Yet even after 75 years, not every chapter of this early era has been fully written. Reason enough to take a closer look once again at the 356 SL and its history.

For a new episode of *Raceborn Moments* , Porsche Heritage and Museum has explored the story of a 356 SL from the company collection. Files, photographs and historical records reveal a fresh perspective on the vehicle and its role in the early years of Porsche motorsport.

The 1952 Porsche 356 SL never left the company’s ownership. Nevertheless, relatively little is known about its history. The new *Raceborn Moments* episode investigates the identity of this car. To do so, the corporate archive worked together with specialists to analyse numerous sources and historic photographs. “If we want to understand the story of this particular 356 SL, we need not only to examine

its documented technical characteristics and specific racing appearances, but also to understand the history of the other cars," explains Frank Jung, Head of Corporate Archive and Collections.

Project "514": The Early 356 SL

The story begins in 1950. At the time, Racing Director Paul von Guilleaume approached Ferry Porsche with the idea of entering an international race. However, such a programme was not yet feasible. Production had only just begun in Stuttgart, and the first vehicles had already been allocated to dealers. For the later 356 SL models, Porsche drew upon aluminium bodies remaining from the Gmuend era. Some of these had been manufactured by Tatra in Vienna. The body numbers assigned there are of particular importance to today's research. The remaining examples were subsequently converted and modified in Stuttgart for motorsport use.

Internal documents refer to the undertaking as Project "514". Although the designation originally referred to the engine type, it also appears throughout the records in connection with the overall project.

In 1951, a total of five 356 SL cars were built. A further four examples were created in 1952 from four additional aluminium bodies, bringing total production to nine vehicles. One of the 1952 cars remained with Porsche and continued to be used for racing activities and testing for several years. Today, it forms part of the company collection.

Reconstructing the Vehicle's History

Continuous company ownership alone does not automatically clarify the car's historical identity. The records contain several numbering systems. Alongside chassis numbers, body numbers from production at Tatra in Vienna also appear in the archives. These body numbers make it possible to trace individual bodies across multiple documents and reconstruct the history of specific cars. For this reason, the investigation into the 1952 vehicle also included research into the other 356 SL models.

Evidence was found across various holdings within the corporate archive. Notebooks kept by racing engineer Wilhelm Hild document both vehicles and their racing activities. Financial records reveal how many aluminium bodies remained available at specific points in time. Motorsport registration documents help establish when particular chassis numbers were used. In addition, notes from Karl Rabe, one of Porsche's early engineers who played a key role in developing the 356, provide further valuable information.

The corporate archive then compared its files, photographs and the findings of external experts with existing literature and privately held sources. Sometimes a photograph confirms a vehicle's identity; at other times a document answers a question raised by an image. By cross-referencing all available evidence, it becomes possible to determine which vehicle is being referred to at a particular point in

time.

"With this episode of *Raceborn Moments* , we offer an insight into the historical work carried out by Porsche Heritage and Museum. We are not only presenting the vehicle and its story, but also demonstrating how we arrive at our findings," says Achim Stejskal, Head of Porsche Heritage and Museum. "The corporate archive provides the essential foundation for this work. Its documents, photographs and records enable us to understand historical contexts and to reconstruct the history of our vehicles with confidence and accuracy."

Six Vehicles Known Today

Six 356 SL vehicles are known to exist today. Three are located in the United States, one in Mexico, one in Belgium and the 1952 vehicle remains in Porsche's company collection. It is the only one of the nine cars to have remained continuously in company ownership.

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