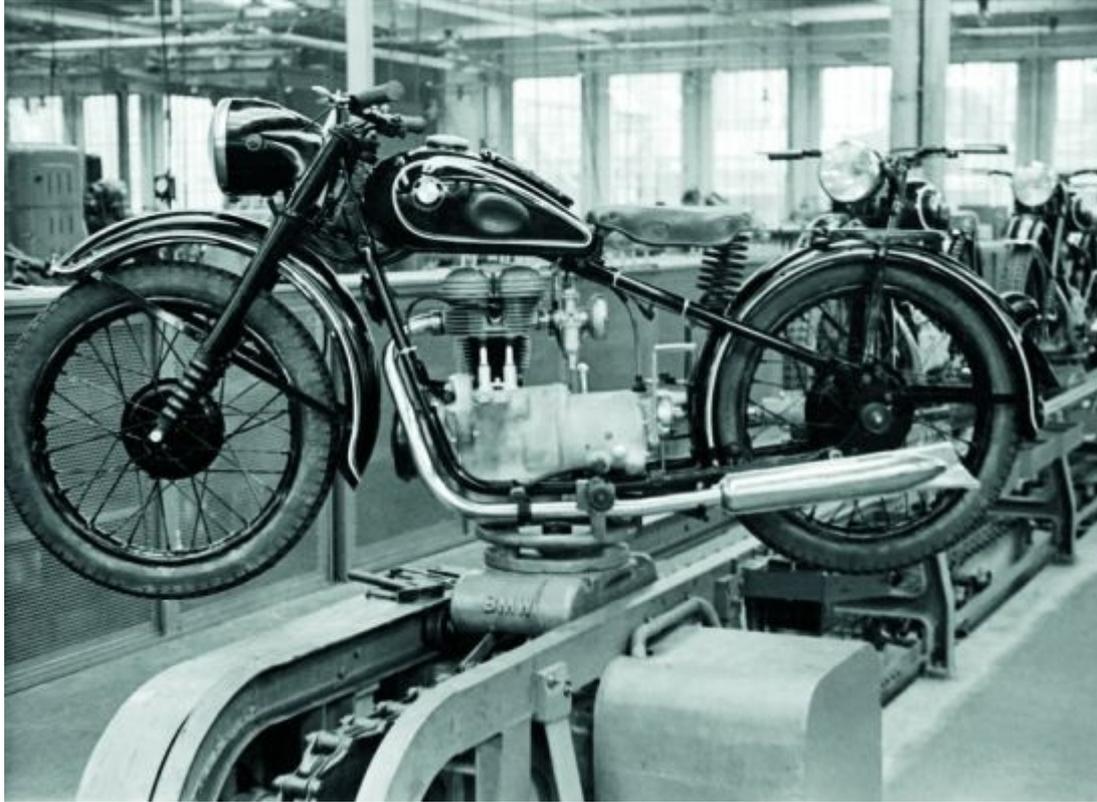


Rising from the ashes

Sixty years ago, on December 17 1948 the first post-war BMW motorcycle rolled off the Munich production line. The single-cylinder R 24 was the motorcycle that would bring BMW back from the brink of extinction.



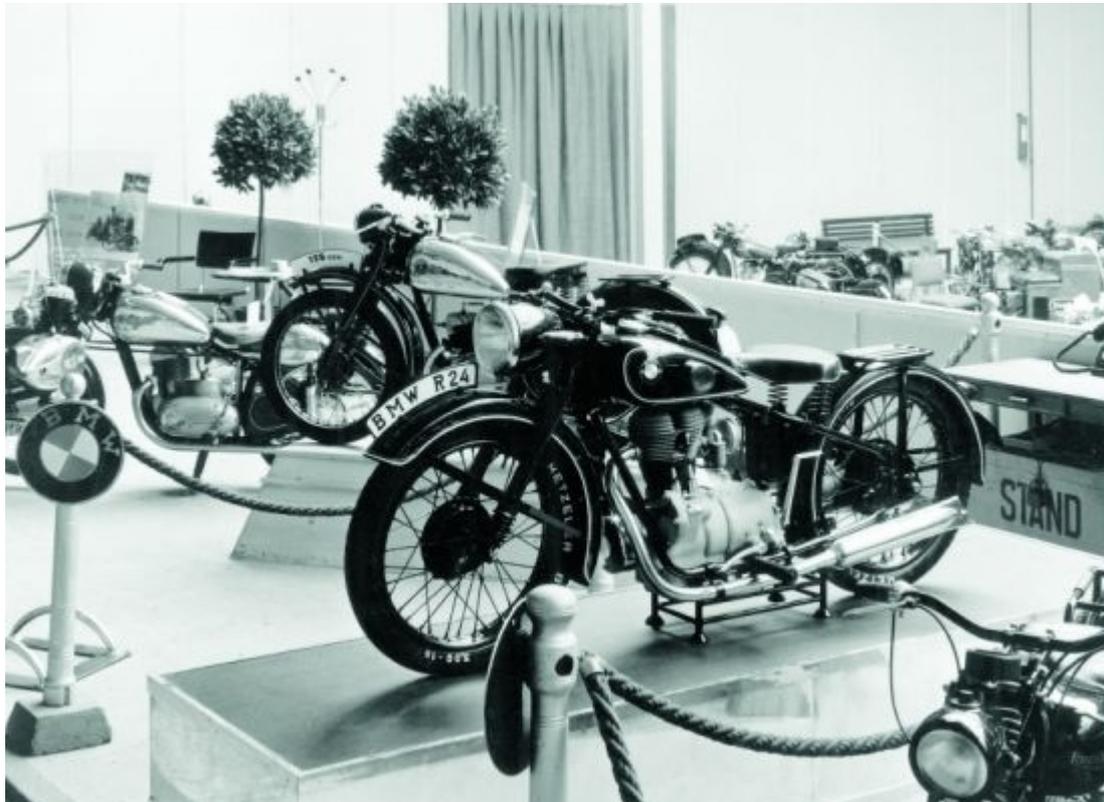
At the end of WWII Germany lay in ruins with industry destroyed and the population dislocated and dispirited. BMW plants were badly damaged and there was an Allied plan for the company to be broken up. The future looked bleak. However the American army was in need of a vehicle maintenance base and BMW had a trained workforce, some buildings and equipment, so the company was given the contract. This arrangement would keep the Americans mobile, give much-needed employment to the German people and give BMW time to work on a future.

Under Director Kurt Donath, BMW gained a manufacturing licence to produce pots and pans, agricultural equipment and bicycles but behind the scenes, company management was working on plans to return to motorcycle production.

In 1946 BMW was given approval to produce motorcycles up to 125cc. Work began on the creation of a two-stroke Boxer and the R 10 was quickly developed to a running prototype. Donath, believing that the capacity restriction would be lifted to 250cc, had Alfred Böning and his engineering team secretly begin work away from Munich on a new motorcycle.

This would be a difficult task as all the production plans and technical drawings were either destroyed or located at the Eisenach plant, which was in the Soviet-controlled sector and out of BMW control. A pre-war R 23 was located and it was disassembled and every part measured in order to produce new plans.

The restriction on capacity was increased to 250cc and work on the new model continued at an increased rate. Designing the motorcycle was only the first step; there were other problems to encounter such as sourcing production equipment and the raw materials needed for manufacturing, as both were in short supply and rationed. Donath went about gathering all the much-needed machinery from businesses in worse condition than BMW.



In March 1948 the R 24 was unveiled at the Geneva motor show and the initial reaction from the press, public and motorcycle dealers was positive. In May the R 24 was again on show in Hanover and by the end of the exhibition there were over 2,500 forward orders for the new single. There was now a sound economic basis for the rebirth of BMW.

The R 24 looked very similar to the R 23 but there was considerable redevelopment in the M225/1 motor and – for the first time – a four-speed gearbox. Much of the technical improvement came directly from the wartime R 75 as well as the two-piece rocker cover, giving a clean and up-to-date style. The 12 hp R 24 was a quality motorcycle.

The first R 24 was not destined for life in a museum. There was a draw from within the BMW workforce to see who would own this historic motorcycle. The winner was Mr Erdinger but unfortunately nothing more is known of him or the fate of the first R 24.

The R 24 was the most expensive motorcycle available in Germany but by 1950 when the R 25 replaced the model, 12,020 had been sold. It was an undoubted success and paved the way for the return of the Boxer in 1950 and the restarting of car production in 1951. **December 17** is indeed a day to celebrate.