
Media information

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Volkswagen mourns the loss of Sally Perel

- **“Europa Europa” Sally Perel died at the age of 97 on 02 February 2023**
- **The man persecuted by the Nazis was known around the world as an ambassador for respect and tolerance**
- **Sally Perel is a key figure in the remembrance work at Volkswagen**

Wolfsburg, February 3, 2023 – Sally Perel passed away in Tel Aviv yesterday, aged 97. Volkswagen AG mourns the loss of an important eyewitness who, until his death, never tired of warning against false ideals. Sally Perel consistently campaigned for respect and tolerance, for a peaceful coexistence, and for respect for all human beings. Into advanced age he travelled throughout Germany, Europe and the world, primarily to call the younger generation to critical, independent thinking, and to fight against exclusion and violence.



Sally Perel during a reading in the Group Archive Forum of Volkswagen Aktiengesellschaft

Born as a Jew in Peine in Lower Saxony in 1925, Sally Perel survived 1943 and 1945 using an alias and wearing Hitler Youth uniform. In the outwork of the then Volkswagenwerk GmbH in Braunschweig, known as “Jupp”, he was trained as a toolmaker and received an education aimed at turning him into a staunch Nazi. Many decades passed before he spoke about this period of his life, sharing his story with young people on his lecture tours.

With Sally Perel’s death the world has lost one of the last few eyewitnesses of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, and a survivor who shared his memories with others with great reflection and in a way that was very personal. His own experience of living in mortal danger and with a false identity, “living as the enemy” as Perel called it, was the driving force behind his strong desire to show young people in particular the value of democracy and unconditional respect for human rights. Sally Perel consistently took a vehement stand against violence, racism and anti-Semitism, with his rousing speech in front of thousands of people on 30 November 2019 during a demonstration at Schlossplatz in Braunschweig being an example of this. His message: “The youth of today is not responsible for the atrocities committed by the Nazis, but they will be if they are ever repeated.”

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He was tireless in facing up to this responsibility and was always extremely clear about what he considered to be a danger: hate, racism, anti-Semitism and violence. Sally Perel caused offence, in Germany and in Israel. His story of survival was uncomfortable, not only for him. Respect and tolerance, two fundamental values that he always saw as the direction for his actions and that he called on others to observe, were the principles that guided him through life. He travelled into old age and sought and found contact with young people in Israel and in Germany, as well as in many other countries. He wanted to use the example of his own life story to help young people be able to resist the temptations and promises of far-right ideologies in particular. He hoped that enlightened, informed, discerning young people would become responsible citizens who would leave no room for hate, persecution and exclusion.

“In Sally Perel, Volkswagen is losing someone who held out their hand in reconciliation. He urged us to take responsibility for a peaceful coexistence, and always hoped for the good in people. Volkswagen is incredibly grateful to him and will keep his name and message alive. We mourn with his family and will miss Sally Perel!” – Gunnar Kilian, Member of the Board of Management for HR at Volkswagen AG.

The Chairwoman of the General and Group Works Council, Daniela Cavallo, added:

“Sally Perel will be missed. It was not only the dramatic circumstances of his survival that made him so valuable as a unique eyewitness. Above all, there was this gift of regularly sharing his story of life and suffering, and in doing so he often built bridges to his audience with ease – especially to young people, many of whom were our apprentices. We bow down to Sally Perel’s lifetime achievement with the utmost respect. And we, as the Volkswagen Family, see it as our duty to continue Sally Perel’s legacy of democratic vigilance and tolerance.”

Sally Perel’s detailed biography

“Live – and never forget who you are!”

Sally Perel was born in Peine on 21 April 1925, as the youngest of four children to a Jewish family who had emigrated from Poland in 1918. Confronted with anti-Semitic hostility, in 1935 his parents moved to Lodz in Poland, where some of their relatives lived. After the attack on Poland, the Jewish Perel family was forced to move to the ghetto. The parents sent their youngest son and his oldest brother Isaak on the run eastbound, into the Soviet Union. Sally’s mother’s parting advice was to “Live!”, while his father urged him to “never forget who you are!” Both sentences made a lasting impression on the young boy. While making the journey, the brothers got separated crossing the border river, the Bug, and Sally was taken to an orphanage in Grodno. The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941

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triggered a chaotic exodus of primarily Jewish orphans. Sally was caught by Wehrmacht soldiers, and on questioning claimed to be an ethnic German called Josef Perjell and invented a life story.

The soldiers believed the likeable young lad who spoke very good German, Polish and Russian, and put him to work as an interpreter on their march towards Moscow. In the summer of 1943, Sally Perel arrived at the outwork of the then Volkswagenwerk GmbH in Braunschweig as Josef Perjell, known as Jupp, where he began an apprenticeship as a toolmaker. The role of the outwork was to train the skilled workers for the new factory at the Mittelland Canal. The young apprentices came from all over Germany, and in addition to their specialist training for their profession, they also underwent ideological training aimed at making them staunch Nazis. They lived in a community run by the Hitler Youth on the factory premises and the Nazi rulers' plan was for them to be a role model for others in everyday life, not only in the Volkswagen factory, but also in the National Socialist model city planned for that location in a National Socialist post-war Germany. The ideological training included ethnogeny, which was almost unbearable for Sally AKA Jupp, who was living with a false identity and great inner turmoil. As Jupp, he was enthusiastic about the Nazi slogans during the day. While at night Sally was haunted by fears and doubts. Wondering what had become of his family was another source of constant tension.

Jupp AKA Sally experienced the liberation by the Americans as part of the Volkssturm. It took some time for him to be able to return to his Jewish identity, however Jupp remained a part of him for the rest of his life. "I owed my life to him," said Sally Perel. Jupp's ability to be seduced showed him just how easy it is to manipulate people. His time as Jupp enabled Sally Perel to later understand why so many young people fell for the Nazi slogans. "It was great being on the side of those with the power," he once said. Yet his time living with a dual identity pushed him to "the limits of self-hatred".

In search of his family, Sally Perel set off for Lodz in the late spring of 1945, but only made it as far as Oebisfelde. There, he was employed by the Russian command as an interpreter and spent a few months in the small border town at the checkpoint between the British and Soviet zone, until the summer of 1947. Sally's brothers Isaak and David survived the Holocaust, and the brothers made contact through mutual acquaintances. His parents and his sister Bertha were murdered. Since his brothers had resolved to go to Palestine, Sally decided to join them. Having barely arrived in Israel, he found himself caught up in the war that had begun immediately after the proclamation of the State of Israel. After brief military training Sally took part in the fight for Jerusalem in 1948.

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At the end of his military service, he found work and married Dvora, with whom he had two sons and three grandchildren. Following the advice of his brothers, he kept his story of survival in Hitler Youth uniform to himself, instead maintaining that he survived using false papers. He only shared his story with his own family in the mid-1980s, when he needed a life-threatening operation. The unusual story was published in a book shortly afterwards, and the film “Europa Europa”, directed by Agnieszka Holland – entitled “Hitlerjunge Salomon” in Germany – made both him and his story world-famous. After publication of the book in Germany, Sally Perel travelled to Germany several times a year, and to other countries, to share his story of survival and to make contact with the younger generation in particular, aiming to motivate them to think critically.

Perel received international recognition for his dedication. He was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit in Germany in 1999 and the honor ring for his birthplace of Peine in 2000. The Volkswagen plant in Braunschweig has been awarding the Sally Perel Prize for respect and tolerance since 2013. The city of Oberhausen made Sally Perel the wearer of its honor ring in 2016. Sally Perel became an honorary citizen of the city of Braunschweig in 2020. In Braunschweig the first of now three schools in Lower Saxony was named after him in 2018; as of 2022 these include the primary school that he attended in Peine. The Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem worked with Sally Perel last year to produce a teaching unit so that every young person in Israel will be aware of Sally Perel and his story in future.

Sally Perel will be missed; his life’s work remains and with it the task and call to continue working on it. His message remains a warning and an incentive: respect, tolerance and a peaceful coexistence are the cornerstones of us living together – at home and in the world.

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About the Volkswagen Group:

The Volkswagen Group, with its headquarters in Wolfsburg, is one of the world's leading automobile manufacturers and the largest carmaker in Europe. The Group comprises ten core brands from seven European countries: Volkswagen Passenger Cars, Audi, SEAT, CUPRA, ŠKODA, Bentley, Lamborghini, Porsche, Ducati and Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles. The passenger car portfolio ranges from small cars all the way to luxury-class vehicles. Ducati offers motorcycles. In the light and heavy commercial vehicles sector, the products range from pick-ups to buses and heavy trucks. Every weekday, 672.800 employees around the globe are involved in vehicle-related services or work in other areas of business. The Volkswagen Group sells its vehicles in 153 countries.

In 2021, the total number of vehicles delivered to customers by the Group globally was 8.9 million (2020: 9.3 million). Group sales revenue in 2021 totaled EUR 250.2 billion (2020: EUR 222.9 billion). Earnings after tax in 2021 amounted to EUR 15.4 billion (2020: EUR 8.8 billion).
