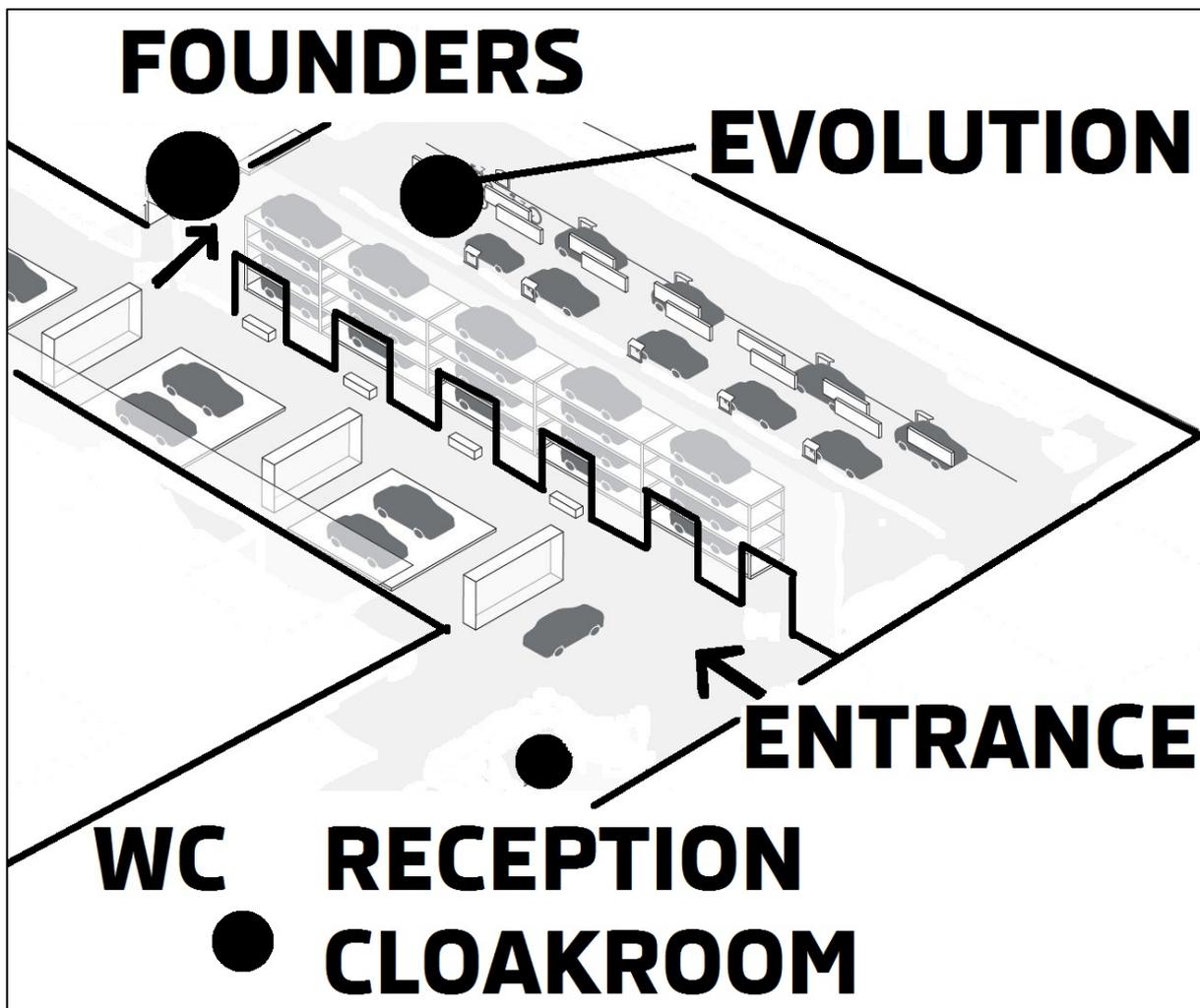


# ŠKODA MUZEUM

## FOUNDERS OF THE BRAND



*'IF I WANT TO SHOW OTHERS THE WAY, I MUST FIRST WALK IT MYSELF.'*

VÁCLAV KLEMENT

# VÁCLAV KLEMENT

16. 10. 1868, Velvary - 13. 08. 1938, Mladá Boleslav

Václav Klement was of humble origins. Instead of becoming the village blacksmith, he was presented with an opportunity: he completed his apprenticeship as a bookseller. As a young man, he took over a bookshop in Mladá Boleslav, which he also transformed into a general store, a bicycle shop and sold spare parts for bicycles.

Before long, a keen "velocipedian" transformed his passion into a business and, together with Václav Laurin, established a bicycle factory. His insatiable curiosity, great creativity and good business sense made Klement a great partner for the rather meticulous Laurin.

# VÁCLAV LAURIN

16. 10. 1865, Kamení - 4. 12. 1930, Mladá Boleslav

Václav Laurin did not have wealthy parents though they enabled him to do his apprenticeship as a machine fitter. Even afterwards he continued to educate himself and searched for new challenges - this is how he learned to operate steam engines. Once one business relationship fell apart, Laurin settled down in Mladá Boleslav, where he established a bicycle factory with Václav Klement. As an excellent technician and visionary, who could tinker around with an idea, contemplating it to the final detail, he proved to be the ideal counterpart to the enterprising and sometimes even quick-tempered businessman, Klement.

# FROM "GERMANIA " TO "SLAVIA "

As a young man, Klement became interested in an up-and-coming, new type of sport: cycling. He became one of the first "Velocipedists" in the region. As an apprentice, he borrowed a bicycle from the chairman of the local cycling club but would soon own his own. In 1894 Klement was ready to make his purchase and had decided on a "Germania" model from Seidel & Naumann, a company from Dresden.

Instead of an outstanding Saxon piece of craftsmanship, Klement received a bicycle of very poor quality; the frame was warped, and the chain kept falling off. He sent the bicycle off to be fixed together with a short letter. However, instead of a repaired bicycle, he received a snobbish request; that he write his complaints "in an intelligible language". This was a great insult in a time when bitter discussions were taking place about whether German or Czech should be the national language.

Klement focused his anger productively and decided to build his own dream bicycle. Together with Laurin he established the "Laurin & Klement" company and "Germania" passed into the history books. The first product of the new company was a bicycle proudly named "Slavia" - Slavic.

# UP AND RUNNING

Bicycles were once luxury goods. For a craftsman, the price of 110 guildens for a "Slavia" bicycle was the equivalent of a two-month salary. Laurin and Klement had to come with an idea to attract customers. Therefore, they developed a whole range of ideas.

As a member of the local cycling team, Klement had direct access to potential customers. However, he also saw to it that those who had nothing in common with the trendy sport started to think about owning their own bicycle. He wrote a "Guidebook for Cyclists and All Who Want to Become One" and published it on his own.

Furthermore, arranging the capital and sales was cleverly devised: complete bicycles were delivered directly to a pawnshop. This is how Laurin and Klement received money without being dependent on when their new customers purchased the bicycles. In addition, they also offered to pay by instalments, and guarantee repairs.

Furthermore, they attracted their customers through new products: while Klement devised unusual advertising methods for the current models, Laurin was working on a delivery bicycle, motorcycle, threewheeler and other interesting visions.

# BOHEMIAN PRIDE

A small leaflet is addressed to patriotic customers. Laurin and Klement passionately persuade customers to purchase Czech products: "A sin against our national economy is committed by everyone who spends their money abroad for what they could purchase at home."

Laurin and Klement proudly refer to their own product, which "successfully rivals renowned foreign brands", because this young company does not invest money only into advertising, but into high quality work. Both founders guarantee this and describe their company as "the first company that, based on its perfect products, provides them with a two-year guarantee."

Their efforts pay off. Laurin & Klement experience success both in their homeland and abroad. The Seidel & Naumann company, whose poor quality product made Klement found his own factory, started to manufacture motorcycles under the L & K licence, selling them under the name "Germania". The circle is closed.