

CLASSIC DRIVER

Minimalist, functionalist: The influential designs of Dieter Rams

Lead

Being a lifelong fan of the Porsche 911 (not very original, I know), my favourite story about Germany's celebrated industrial designer Dieter Rams concerns the fact that he, too, is a long-standing admirer of Zuffenhausen's rear-engined rockets...

It might be an urban myth - and I'm sure we'll hear about it if it is - but Rams was supposedly once asked by a journalist why, of all the cars available to him, he chose to drive a 911. With a degree of surprise, but little emotion I expect, he is said to have responded: "Quite simply because it is the most efficient means yet devised of travelling from A to B in the shortest possible time."

The 10-point ethos



On reflection, Rams would obviously drive an early 911 because it seems to fit almost perfectly with his famous 10-point design ethos (briefly, a good design should be: innovative, useful, attractive, understandable, unobtrusive, honest, long-lasting, thorough, not 'over designed' and - this is where it goes a bit wrong - environmentally friendly). Well, nine out of 10 isn't bad.

As well as his choice of cars, something else I've always admired about Rams is the fact that he isn't just a designer who can draw nice shapes. He knows how things work and how to make them, too.

Heritage of carpentry



He is said to have become interested in design as a result of watching his carpenter grandfather and initially followed him into the profession as an apprentice, before completing his studies at art school and taking a job with Frankfurt architect Otto Apel.

Within a couple of years, however, Rams had been recruited by Braun which, at the time, specialised in audio equipment and slide projectors - and had recently launched the electric shavers for which it became especially famous.

Braun and beyond





By 1961, Rams was Braun's chief designer and the firm's products had become instantly recognisable due to their uncluttered, almost austere appearance, user-friendly controls and robust engineering. Indeed, I recently saw someone using one of the company's distinctive, orange-coloured KSM2 coffee grinders which is still going strong more than 30 years after it was originally purchased.

The fact that it is still in service will come as no surprise to Rams, who has always regarded obsolescence as a crime. Sadly, today's throw-away society would have us believe that such sensible thinking is completely out of date.

But didn't they once say that about the 911, too?

Gallery

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