

VWGA

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF VW

THE EARLY DAYS



In 1935, the Studebaker Export Corporation, operating in the American town of South Bend, Indiana, began investigating the feasibility of setting up a vehicle assembly facility in South Africa. However, amid the Great Depression and political uncertainty, their plans were shelved. Over a decade later, after the Second World War had ended, the company resumed negotiations, and in October 1946, Studebaker signed an agreement with the South African company of Industrial and Commercial Holdings. The new facility, which would be used to assemble Studebaker cars and commercial vehicles, would be called South African Motor Assemblers and Distributors - SAMAD for short.

A 20,2 hectare site was purchased for R2 500 on the outskirts of a town called Uitenhage. SAMAD, operating as a public company, released 1,2 million shares at 50 cents each. The first Studebaker leaves the production line in November 1948, before the factory is even fully built. When it finally does open officially in 1949, the SAMAD factory has 320 employees and a production volume of 14 to 16 vehicles per day.

SAMAD quickly diversified its business: in 1950 the Uitenhage factory began assembling Austin vehicles as well, and

towards the end of the same year, the company begins negotiations with a German company called Volkswagenwerk to build a brand-new model in Uitenhage.

So began the story of the Volkswagen brand in South Africa, with the first unit of the iconic Beetle rolling off the production line on 31 August 1951 - widely considered the "birthday" of Volkswagen South Africa. In fact, this year marks the 75th anniversary of Volkswagen building cars in South Africa - still at the same factory in Uitenhage (now called Kariega).

75 years of 