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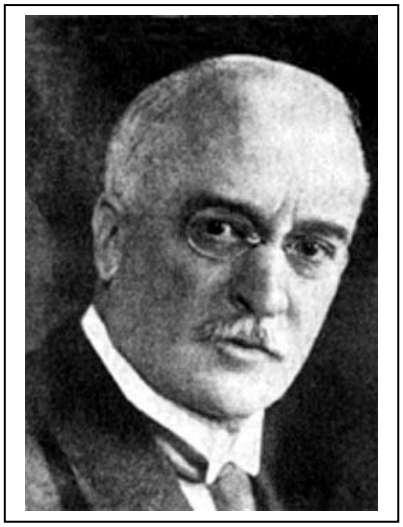
Rudolph Diesel (1858 - 1913)



An engineer and the inventor of the type of internal combustion engine.

Born in Paris. His parents went to England after the Battle of Sedan (1870). They lived in poverty. He went to stay with an uncle at Augsbury. He attended school there until, in 1875, he went to Munich for studying thermodynamics. After graduation he worked as plant manager in a firm. He became interested in the design of an expansion engine based on ammonia. It was unsuccessful, but it paved the way for his latter developments. He envisioned an engine in which air is compressed to such a degree that there is an extreme rise in temperature. Diesel designed his engine in response to the heavy resource consumption and inefficiency of the steam engine.

In 1893 he published an account of a heat engine, and persuaded two great firms to support him in its development. His work was displayed in the Munich exhibition in 1898, and interest in it was worldwide. Diesel early became a millionaire. In 1899 he found a new factory, but owing to Diesel's ill health it was a failure. His experiments with the engine nearly killed him when an early model exploded.

At Augsburg, on August 10, 1893, Diesel's prime model, ran on its own power for the first time. Diesel spent two more years at improvements and on the last day of 1896 demonstrated another model with the spectacular, if theoretical, mechanical efficiency of 75.6 percent, in contrast to the then-prevailing efficiency of the steam engine of 10 percent or less.

Diesel died before his invention was fully exploited. He died under mysterious circumstances in 1913. Some considered a possible political motivation. Diesel did not agree with the politics of Germany and was reluctant to see his engine used by their Naval fleet. With his political support directed towards France and Britain, he was on his way to England to arrange for them to use his engine. He vanished during an overnight crossing of the English Channel on the mail steamer Dresden from Antwerp to Harwich. Whether by accident, suicide or at the hand of others, the world had lost a brilliant engineer and biofuel visionary.