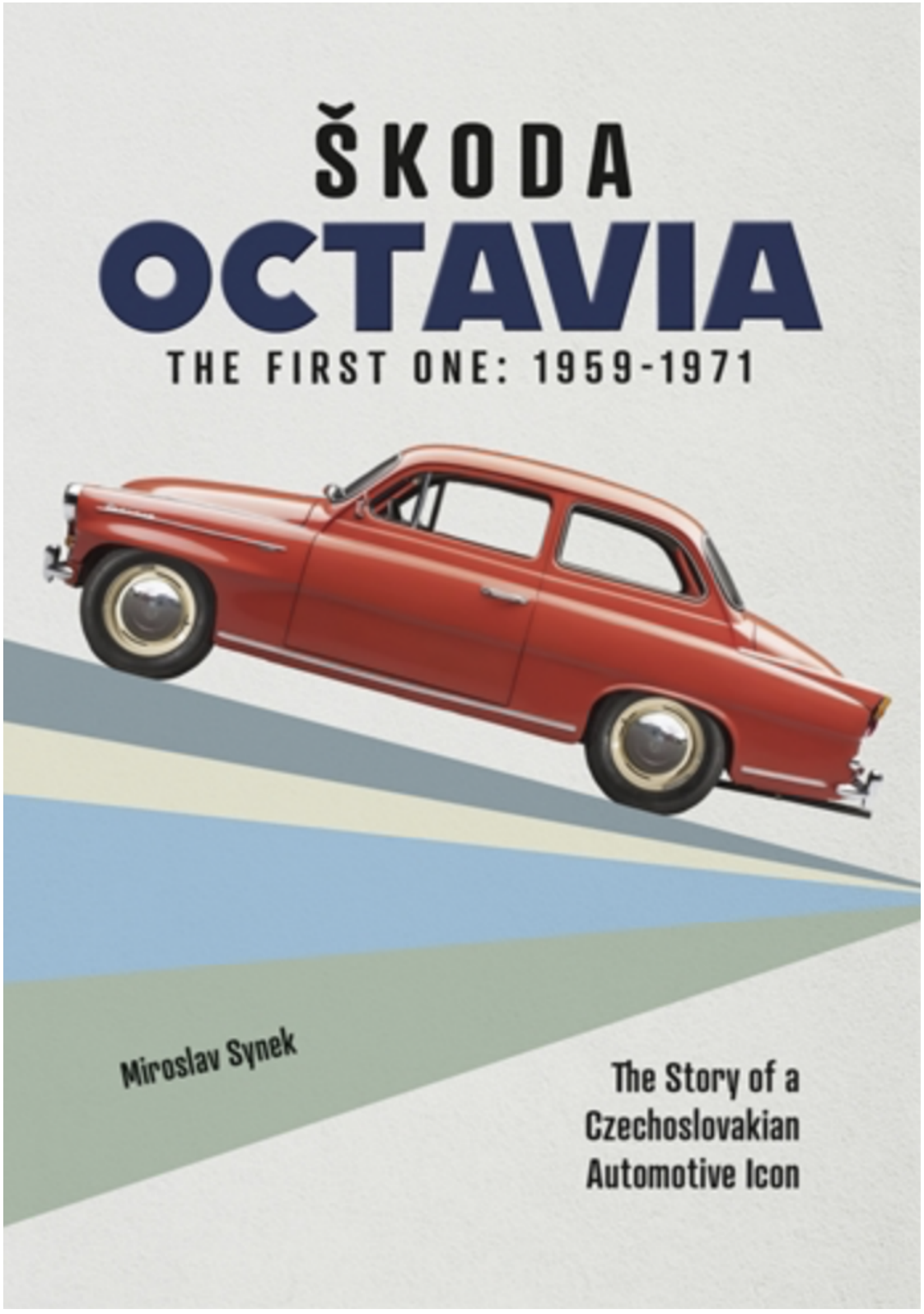
# For Your Bookshelf: Skoda Octavia – The First One: 1959–71 (The Story of a Czechoslovakian Automotive Icon)

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ŠKODA
OCTAVIA
THE FIRST ONE: 1959-1971
Miroslav Synek
The Story of a
Czechoslovakian
Automotive Icon

# Book Review by Kim Henson: Skoda Octavia – The First One: 1959–71

Author: Miroslav Synek

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I always find it interesting to learn more about cars that here in the UK we seldom see, and to find out more of the history behind them.

Skoda's Octavia is a case in point. I knew of the model, of course, and indeed back in the early 1970s a friend owned one – and it proved to be a dependable vehicle. Indeed the Octavias are renowned as well-engineered family cars of the 1960s.

However, I have to confess that I was unaware of much of the model's story, including many of the Skodas that were produced before it.

Enter Miroslav Synek's book about the Octavia, and at the outset Miroslav wrote that his interest in the Octavia stemmed from his parents buying one in 1960 as their family car, of which he has very happy childhood memories (and indeed he owns a similar vehicle today!).

This is, of course, a book about the Octavia as a motor car (of which, some 360,000 were built), but in addition it sheds fascinating light on the political situation in Czechosovakia in the Communist post-war era and how 'the party' dominated 'everything', including making it

difficult for car makers to build their vehicles and for the population to be able to buy one. For many people, car ownership seemed an impossible dream, in terms of qualifying to buy one, as well as affording the vehicle.
I found this aspect of the book, putting the Octavia story in perspective and including Miroslav's personal account based on his own family's experience, enlightening, and made it especially interesting.

In fully descriptive words plus a multitude of colour photographs, which help tell the story, he guides readers through the models that came before the Octavia, outlining them in detail and including facts and figures relating to each, starting with the 'Popular' models from 1934 onwards. He also, of course, covers the Octavia in 'close-up'.

Although a devotee of the Octavia, Miroslav openly accepts and talks about less positive aspects, including in the later years of the model when European rival cars were forging ahead in terms of technical progress, as the Octavia aged and development by the company was hampered due to political dictates.
Shining through the text, it is clear that the dedicated teams of designers, engineers and production people within Skoda worked very hard to ensure that the Octavia and associated models were as good as they possibly could be, given politically-imposed constraints on materials and how production could operate.

Miroslave describes contemporary rival models from the UK and from mainland Europe, comparing the vehicles objectively.
He looks in detail too at the 1000 MB and 1100 MB (cars that replaced the Octavia) and the Type 720, which he describes as 'The car that should have replaced the Octavia', an attractive model that sadly was killed off by political interference before it could make it into production. Miroslav explains that it would almost certainly have been a game-changer for Skoda, had the project been allowed to survive and thrive.

Included too within the book are variations on the Octavia theme, including (for example) the attractve Felicia.

I found the text comprehensively-researched, well-written, concise and great to read, helped by an excellent variety of photographs that perfectly illustrate the styling differences in the various models that Skoda produced before the Octavia, plus variations on the theme built in later years.

## VERDICT

**A terrific and absorbing read; I thoroughly enjoyed this book.**

**Kim Henson**