Trans mission: a Porsche enthusiast's inspirational campaign for inclusivity

12/03/2023 From a hard-won seat of power, campaigner and Porsche collector Antonia Belcher is working tirelessly to improve the lives of trans people around the world.

In 1995, Antonia Belcher took delivery of her first Porsche, a Lapis Blue 993-generation 911 Carrera 2. It was a milestone moment for the driven and successful chartered surveyor and the start of a lifelong love affair with the brand. But over the next few years, Antonia's life would witness far greater moments of change. Ones that would lead through heartbreak and self-discovery to an encounter at Windsor Castle with the King of England.

Antonia's passion for cars came early, modifying a classic Mini with her younger brother at the age of 17, before a series of company cars introduced her to the world of high-performance German engineering. "By the mid-1990s I'd had this itch to own a Porsche for some time, and my first was a 993 Carrera 2, leased through the chartered surveyors I worked for," she explains. "Lapis Blue with a

pale blue interior, it was a fantastic car that just opened my eyes to Porsche."

An enviable collection

Antonia owned that car for three years before moving in quick succession from 996 C4 and C4S to a Basalt Black, six-speed manual 996 Turbo S, one of fewer than 60 such examples ever delivered in righthand drive and a car she still has to this day. It would later be joined by the first of several GT cars in an enviable collection that now includes a 991 GT3, first- and second-generation 991 GT3 RS and a head-turning 691 hp Guards Red GT2 RS with Weissach package. Bookending her eight-car Porsche fleet today are a rare US-only 1976 air-cooled 912E, noughties flagship 996 GT2 and a 718 Spyder that will soon be sharing the mid-engine limelight with a Guard Red GT4 RS.

"I love driving all of my cars and will grab the first opportunity to get behind the wheel," Antonia says. "I don't have a planned rotation though. It usually comes down to what takes my fancy on the day. We're fortunate enough to own a house in southern Italy so I drive down there a lot and most of my Porsches have done that journey."

Antonia also enjoys the annual pilgrimage to Le Mans, takes part in classic rallies in the UK and has explored the limits of all of her GT cars on track days at the Porsche Experience Centre at Silverstone. But there was a period in her life when there was little time for such adventures, when Antonia's own work/life balance was an all-consuming mental battle.

For in her early 40s, as a highly successful partner in a busy London surveying firm, Antonia was still living as Anthony, a happily married man and father of three children.

Gradually uncovered the person she would later refer to as Antonia

"I knew from a very young age that my gender identity wasn't 100 percent binary," Antonia explains, from her home in the South of England. "But I came from a conventional working-class background, my father was a builder and I thought I couldn't voice my worries, so I simply internalized them."

Antonia's way of coping with her confusion and anxiety as a young man was to throw herself into work, long days in the office filling her head with business in order to exclude the thoughts she felt unable to process. But, ironically, the reward for her successes at work was more time to reflect, at which point Antonia realized she was suppressing a deep-rooted unhappiness. "I suddenly found myself thinking about my own mortality and this person that I'd buried inside me. Someone I'd essentially locked away for years."

She began to explore the female part of her personality for the first time and gradually uncovered the person she would later refer to as Antonia. After living a double life for several years, transitioning in the evenings and returning to 'Anthony' at work and at weekends, Antonia decided to tell her partner,

Andrea, and her colleagues. Anthony became Antonia for good, and with that, everything changed.

After five more years with her firm, Antonia announced that she was setting up her own practice. In response to the news of her departure, Antonia's entire 19-strong team decided to go with her. "It was an amazing moment," she says today, "because all my people, who I'd worked so closely with, wanted to come with me and share the journey I was now on. It had really motivated us all, and that was such a powerful message about authenticity, about being who you are."

In 2010, angered by one-sided media coverage of trans issues, Antonia decided to share her story publicly for the first time to demonstrate the possibility of transitioning happily with the love and acceptance of your family and peers. Soon she was giving talks and being invited to speaking engagements for a wide variety of city industries while also sharing her experiences with the parents of trans children and the trans community itself.

"I started talking to businesses about how they needed to be more trans aware," Antonia says, "because if 1 percent of the working population is trans, in a company of 1,000 people you'll have several people working with one hand tied behind their backs because they're not being their true selves. We need to be taught not to stigmatise difference, whether its LGBTQ, race or faith."

Awarded an Order of the British Empire

Following several years of public speaking engagements, Antonia was awarded an OBE, or Order of the British Empire, for her services to equality in business. In February, this highly regarded honor was bestowed upon her by King Charles III at a formal ceremony at Windsor Castle. Antonia and her partner have also started a charity in the meantime, The Antonia and Andrea Belcher Trans Fund, which raises awareness and financing for trans communities all over the world.

Between her public engagements and charity work, it can be a struggle for Antonia to find time for her beloved Porsche collection, but a road trip is never far from her mind. "There are so many drives I want to do," she says. "I'd love to experience the Mille Miglia, and a vintage rally like Peking to Paris really ticks my box. A friend and I are seriously toying with that idea. Driving gives me freedom," she adds, "the freedom to go wherever I like. But I also see these cars as works of art and get a buzz out of just sitting in any of my Porsches. I haven't quite got to the level of bringing them into the lounge, but it wouldn't take a lot to get me there."

More information about the Antonia and Andrea Belcher Trans Fund can be found here.

Link Collection

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