



A real love story

20/07/2015 The American success story spans over 60 years, and the love knows no end. No country in the world has more admirers of the Porsche mystique.

The USA is the world number one. Last year, Porsche sold more vehicles there than in any country. The brand continues to excite its customers in every way. Americans love Porsche for its feeling of "everyday magic." Whether in daily traffic, along fabled dream routes or on the race track.

A unique worldwide fan club scene brings added excitement every year, with thousands of events centred on "Fascination Porsche." We accompanied two extraordinary people – representative of the entire Porsche community in the USA – for a short spell in their way of life with Porsche. Nice to meet you: Brenda Spence from Knoxville, Tennessee and Bob Ingram from Durham, North Carolina.

A late autumn day in the Smoky Mountains between Tennessee and North Carolina. Traveling with Brenda Spence along Highway 129. The blonde lady from Knoxville skims, surges and corners through the Tail of the Dragon. The legendary stretch along the southern Appalachians seems to be tailor-made for her Cayman. Once a centuries-old secret route of the Cherokee Indians, now a paved, eleven-mile wonderland peppered with 318 curves.

The 30 most spectacular of those turns bear names like Rebels Revenge, Gravity Cavity and Porsche Pulloff. Brenda is unflappable: accelerating, shifting and braking. No bucking, no stuttering. Woman and vehicle are one. Pure pleasure. The asphalt strip through the Appalachian Mountains holds a truly special meaning for Brenda. After all, the Tail of the Dragon was the start of a real love story.

It's where she took her first-ever ride in a Porsche. Ross, now her husband, gave her a turn at the wheel the first time they went on a drive together three years ago. A drive with lasting consequences. An instant fixation. An absolute delirium. "I fell in love with the brand on that day – my love for Ross came later," Brenda laughs. Ross gushes about his wife and how she drives. "She's got it in her blood. She only needs a couple of minutes to understand how a vehicle needs to be handled. She's an outstanding driver."

Race track in the morning. Opera in the evening

Brenda's other side becomes clear the next day on the way from her suburban home down to the Knoxville city centre. Pure relaxation for the employee of the local chamber of commerce. She flows regally amidst the other rush hour commuters. The highlight for Brenda comes at the end. "The engine's echo in the parking garage is simply fantastic."

Brenda Spence may be an extraordinary driver, but as a Porsche owner she's actually somewhat typical for a new generation of drivers in the USA. People who get behind the wheel of their Porsche almost every day, wherever they're driving. "More and more of our customers appreciate that our vehicles are built for everyday life," says Detlef von Platen, President and CEO of Porsche Cars North America (PCNA), Inc. The phenomenon he describes extends far beyond the storied back routes of America – he's referring to the feeling of joy that a Porsche gives its drivers every time they grip the wheel.

This idea that a sports car from Zuffenhausen is a ride for every occasion has become a firm tenet in the beliefs of the Porsche community. The reason: Porsche is a multiple-time winner in the annual quality surveys by J.D. Power, a market research company. Taking the 911 out onto the circuit on a Saturday morning, and then gliding over to the opera at night – it's a unique experience that only owners can appreciate. This feeling of "every day magic" has been winning the hearts and minds of a growing circle of customers. In 2014, the USA ended up as Porsche's strongest market in the world, with more than 47,000 delivered vehicles sold.

1950: Successful launch

Porsche's success as a company is unimaginable without America. In 1950, the first models were displayed in one single showroom in New York. Five years later, one out of every two Porsches sold was in the USA. The first dealer, a man named Maximilian E. Hoffman, was Austrian by birth and looked back on a successful career as an amateur car racer. This experience gave him a good feel for what his customers wanted: extremely light racing cars. The 356 America Roadster was precisely that kind of

radical vehicle.

With an aluminium chassis, a cloth roof and plastic slip-in windows, the car weighed “only” 600 kilogrammes, a full 170 kilogrammes lighter than the base model. The reward for this uncompromising model strategy: a string of racing successes. “Win on Sunday, sell on Monday,” was the dealer’s unofficial motto. The spectacular victories were the most pulse-pounding – and effective – advertising of the young sports car brand. “To identify chances and seize them, that’s what distinguishes Porsche,” says Bernhard Maier, Member of the Executive Board – Sales and Marketing, in describing the company’s practical philosophy, especially in the USA.

For generations of Americans, the 356 and 911 models are tied to images and stories of their idols. Racing the 1979 Le Mans, Paul Newman drove his Porsche to a second place overall finish. James Dean, Steve McQueen and Robert Redford were or are high-profile Porsche drivers. “Porsche was always rebellious,” Bernhard Maier says. “This image of coolness, forged in America more than anywhere else, helped make the Porsche brand cool in Europe as well,” Maier emphasizes, drawing attention to the importance of Porsche’s sports car success in the USA. For PCNA President and CEO, von Platen, it’s the “fusion of famous German high-quality workmanship and the primal American urge for freedom.”

The latest example is the new 911 Targa. The original Targa celebrated its premiere over 40 years ago, and interest from the USA in particular paved the way for the classic model’s comeback. “Anyone who wants to succeed at the global level has to be successful in the USA,” says Bernhard Maier. Von Platen is perpetually interested in redefining coolness and freedom as sales arguments. One example is the new U.S. headquarters in Atlanta, where the architecture centres on a racing track, not the administrative building itself.

The Experience Centre in this southern metropolis, scheduled to open in May. The sister facility in Carson, California, is expected to open at the end of 2015. Von Platen notes: “By driving to the limits, our customers experience the Porsche magic in a radical and intensive way. They also learn just how safely the cars handle in these extreme situations.” Porsche North America was at the forefront of the movement to harness this customer enthusiasm. All the way back in 1971, Porsche was already offering driver training sessions at tracks on New York’s Long Island.

Passion binds

The transatlantic success has another unique element in its favour: The Porsche Club of America. Legend holds that twelve Porsche drivers came together in 1955 at a steakhouse in Washington, D.C. – with a VW Beetle driver politely but firmly sent on her way.

This intimate get-together was the start of a fan culture that has proliferated incredibly over the years. Today there’s nothing like it in the automotive world. One club has dubbed itself “Riesentöter” (Giant Killer) – a blunt play on the high-powered, large-engine models from American manufacturers. The lightweight, almost delicate models from Zuffenhausen clearly tapped a strong desire: the customer’s

wish for a technologically advanced sports car made in outstanding quality and head-turning aesthetics.

The brand's loyal fans are a powerful block today. The club currently numbers 115,000 members at its 60-year anniversary in 2015, spread out across 143 regions under the aegis of the Porsche Club of America (PCA). Based on those numbers, the PCA is the world's largest single-marque auto club. Enthusiasts from every state are celebrating their vehicles, and themselves. The PCA even runs a custom series of amateur races with over 2,200 licensed drivers, letting contestants test their mettle at 30 different tracks scattered around North America.

There are an amazing 3,500 different events that draw the fans year after year, including rallies, races, parades, the "Concours d'Elegance" and events out in the open countryside. "A truly classless society," says PCA President Manuel "Manny" Alban. "At the get-togethers and over the course of the club's everyday doings, the professional backgrounds of the members are irrelevant. The talk is all about the individual models, the tires, the best polish and the right oil."

History and high-tech

"The cars are the stars, not the drivers," is Bob Ingram's motto. A well-preserved man in his mid-70s, Ingram seems in fact like a tailor-made big-time car guy. The retired executive from the pharmaceuticals industry and long-time CEO of a global corporation has put together a relatively unique collection of historical Porsches in recent years. Few if any collections can compete with the quality of the Ingram collection, is the verdict of many aficionados – sorry: "carrerados."

The Ingram trove is well hidden in the Durham, North Carolina city centre. There are 80 vehicles in this star parade, lined up in a custom show space whose red brick facade gives no indication of the prizes inside. It is a breathtaking review of automotive design history, reaching from the 918 Spyder back to the third oldest 356 model still in existence, built in Gmünd in Austria's Kärnten region.

The 918 Spyder super-sports car has only been placed inside the brick hall a few days ago. Purple metal finish. Purple? Sure, it's his wife Jeanie's favourite color. The combination with the green "hybrid" script makes for a truly unusual color combination. What Bob Ingram values in particular is the technological leadership that his new acquisition encompasses. "When it comes to the 918 Spyder, Porsche has achieved a technological breakthrough. The full dimensions of this breakthrough will only be clear in ten to twenty years," gushes the new owner. "And for this reason I agree unconditionally with Ferry Porsche's statement that the next Porsche is always the best Porsche."

History and high-tech are for Ingram the elements from which his passion flows. Porsche is the sole premium manufacturer to offer three plug-in hybrid vehicles in the premium segment, a fact Ingram singles out for praise. Even a car guy like himself goes with the times. He'd be willing to buy a hybrid 911.

Some things in life are worth working hard for

The man was hardly born with a silver spoon in his mouth, nor was he predestined to a career as a serious collector. He grew up as the lone son of a single mother who eked out an existence running a mom-and-pop store, enough to pay for a college education for her son. Ingram was 31 when his friend and professional mentor, a father figure in his life, let him drive his brand-new 911 S. After 45 minutes behind the wheel in Florida, Ingram knew that some things in life are worth working hard for.

While Brenda from Tennessee caught the Porsche bug in an instant, Bob's incubation time for Porsche Fever lasted over 20 years. It wasn't until 1993 that he could finally stick his own key into the ignition of a 911. "Up to that point I hadn't had any time at all to drive Porsche," says the former top manager, who moved almost 20 times over the course of his professional career.

The long-dormant virus then slowly began to gain ground with the entire Ingram family. His oldest son Rory manages the collection, while the youngest scion Cameron, known to all as "Cam," has made a reputation as one of the USA's finest Porsche restorers. Interestingly enough, the youngest son seemed to be immune to the bug that bit his father so hard. "I couldn't do anything at all with the passion of my father," Cam notes with a grin.

It wasn't until the first joint father/son trip to the racetrack in Laguna Seca for the 50th anniversary of the Porsche brand that the trained artist, a specialist in "metal sculpture," finally got hooked. "At one point there was a silver 356 Coupe out ahead of us on the track," Cam remembers, "and all at once I was entranced with the iconic design." So entranced that he went on to specialize in the restoration of historical Porsches.

Porsche Club community

National Club President Manny Alban considers the chance to view these perfectly restored rarities as the highlight of the annual parade, an event that is borne by the same pure idealism as the work and organization of the PCA itself. Throw in the chance to talk with a member of the Porsche family, and it's enough for any PCA member to declare it a perfect day.

In many of the 143 PCA regions there are close ties between the Porsche Company and individual members of the Porsche family, forged over six decades. "The engagement of the family radiates down into our clubs. Our members are always thrilled when they get to meet Peter, Wolfgang or other members of the family," says Manny Alban by way of describing a perfect parade day. In the past four decades, Hans-Peter Porsche has been to almost every parade.

Blood may be thicker than water, but a love for Porsche appears to form a very solid bond of its own. His own family "has grown even closer through Porsche," says Bob Ingram. However full his event calendar might be, the Saturday morning club meeting over "Cars and Coffee" at a simple cafeteria is always

circled in red. Talking shop in front of a typical American rest area.

A Styrofoam cup of coffee and a donut are all the refreshments needed. It's all about the conversations. Experts swapping ideas, not fancy cooking. The biggest concern is finding a parking lot that's big enough. And by 9 am the meeting breaks up for the ride home. "That's how things work for most Porsche drivers," says Bob Ingram with a smile. "I'd better be home on time for breakfast with my wife." Porsche turns one person into an early riser and another couple, Brenda and Ross Spence, into delayed newlyweds. The highlight of their honeymoon was to be the 24-hour race in Le Mans. "To fit Le Mans into our travel plans, we had to push back the wedding date by almost a year," says Brenda. Ross counters: "Although if I'd known that Porsche would be heading to the 2014 starting line in Le Mans in the LMP1 class, we'd have waited another year for the wedding too."

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