

A Porsche journey of adventure: “Passion" meets “passione"

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29/12/2023 German and Italian fans of air-cooled locomotion embark on a journey of adventure together in Apulia.

“To hell with the timing. This is more important,” Wilfried Reinhardt says to himself. He hesitates for just a moment, then brings his 911 Targa (G□series) to a stop on the racecourse through the southern Italian city of Manduria. He should be maintaining the exact specified time, which is the goal of the nighttime regularity rally. But what about all those kids lined up along the edge of the road cheering and waving at him out of sheer joy? Reinhardt briefly comes to a halt, reaches his arm out the window and hands his white flag with Porsche emblem to one of the boys. “That screwed up the timing – but it was worth it,” he will say with a grin later on. “Experiencing all that enthusiasm is a highlight.”

Passion for the Porsche brand

They call it “entusiasmo” here. You hear the word often when Amleto Della Rocca talks about his passion for the Porsche brand, followed closely in second place by “emozione.” It’s all down to Della Rocca’s enthusiasm that nearly 30 Porsche fans have gathered down here in the Apulia region, at the heel of the Italian boot, with their polished sports cars. Based in Weissach in the state of Baden-Württemberg, “Freunde Luftgekühlter Boxermotoren” (Friends of Air-Cooled Boxer Engines – FLB) accepted the invitation extended by “Porsche Luftgekühlt Gruppe Italia” (Porsche Air-Cooled Group of Italy – PLG) and headed down south. Even if very few of the Italians here speak German, they all know what “luftgekühlt” (air-cooled) means. Amleto Della Rocca founded PLG in 2017, which now has 70 members. As the driving force behind this special event, he is referred to as “The Boss” by his club friends. “Whatever I do, I do it at full throttle,” explains Della Rocca, as he puts up a barrier tape around the Porsche sports cars lined up in the evening light at the large Piazza Garibaldi in Manduria.

This includes the FLB’s delegation of ten classic 911 cars. Established as Porsche AG’s company sports and recreation group in 2010, it brings fans of vehicles with air-cooled boxer engines together. The FLB now has 700 members, all of them either current or former company employees. In addition to a clubhouse in Weissach, the group also has a hall with six lifting platforms – and a whole lot of expertise, developed over many years of membership. “We’re something of a Porsche culture club,” says FLB cofounder Bernd Stadler. “But also an insider club.” The FLB doesn’t do tours like these very often. But for their Italian brothers and sisters in spirit, they made an exception.

It’s all down to Della Rocca, who organized everything, including local police and civil defense, which are now looking after the cars, the tour and all its stops, appearances by mayors, local civil servants and other representatives, overnight accommodations, and gourmet meals, which are an absolute must in a culinary country like Italy. He even designed a logo for the German-Italian event, with the heading “Destinazione Primitivo.” A red wine as a destination? Certo! Long known beyond the region’s borders, Primitivo di Manduria is the city’s pride and joy. And the Cantina Produttori di Manduria winery located on the city outskirts conveniently also doubles as the PLG clubhouse. That’s where the Luftgekühlt group gets together once a month, and where they’re gathering today with the visitors from Germany.

The smell of gasoline blends with the bouquet of pressed wine, creating a mix that for Amleto Della Rocca is the aroma of life. The future of his hometown is just as dear to him as his historical air-cooled car. He himself has been driving a black 911 Targa (G-Series, built in 1976) for 17 years. On the first evening, he introduces the nonprofit organization Olivami, which is committed to replanting the olive trees destroyed by the Xylella fastidiosa bacterium in southern Apulia. Event speakers also include engineering students from the University of Salento, whose Salento Racing team builds emissions-free race cars.

“I want to show our German guests the tradition and potential of my hometown,” says Della Rocca. He’s quick to point out that the idea of getting both groups together came about after reading a 2018 *Christophorus* article entitled *One of Us*, which talked about the FLB club. Della Rocca was all ears. He

sent out countless emails before the get-together. He and a few fellow travelers even visited the FLB club in Germany with their vehicles the year before. And now the Weissach delegation is finally here. “The Porsche brand has managed to spark friendship over a distance of 1,500 kilometers,” says Bernd Stadler, whose primary responsibility is managing small-series projects at Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur. “The Porsche community knows no borders, which is unique.” And you can see just how quickly the participants build new relationships. During meals, pictures of Porsche cars are passed around like family photos.

There it is again, “entusiasmo.”

Using online translators, participants talk shop, share stories about the history of the sports car, discover what they have in common, share vehicle identification numbers, and compare registration documents. Like Andreas Baier from Bietigheim, Vito Russo from Milan also drives an original 911. Russo purchased his, which is Sepia Brown, from the first owner, who picked it up in person in Stuttgart. “Then yours must have an oil flap too, right?” asks Baier, who owns a 911 T Coupé. “Sì, sì,” nods Russo, once the word has been translated. “Tappo dell’olio esterno.” At the next table, Mario D'Ayala, a count and retired doctor from the Taranto region who has a castle and his own beach, explains how he ended up with his 911 (964). A few chairs over, Thomas Herold, who has a good command of the Italian language, is telling his neighbor about how he managed to secure the front lid on his 1972 Targa and keep it from popping out of the latch on rough Apulian streets. His leather tool roll bag always within reach, the avid amateur mechanic can often be seen standing at his 911 during the day, surrounded by curious observers.

“People are more enthusiastic about these cars in the south,” says Russo, the logistics entrepreneur in Milan, describing the audience. He goes on to say that people in northern Italy tend to be more reserved. Here, passersby usually wave and drivers often honk their horn in approval. Even the police will pull out their smartphones for a quick photo. As the motorcade arrives at the beach resort of Santa Caterina in Nardò at noon on the second day, pedestrians stop to take videos and photos. Teenagers marvel at the shiny sports cars or pose in front of them for selfies. There it is again, “entusiasmo.” Is it just the country?

Amleto Della Rocca shakes his head vigorously. No! It’s also the car, of course. “You Germans might be a little cooler than we Italians are,” he explains, having already won over a few people for the Porsche brand and his PLG. “But when it comes to Porsche sports cars, you tend to warm up – and experience the world of engines with unbridled passion.” With so much air-cooled passion at the rear, you can flout the timing with confidence in the regularity rally – for the sake of “emozione.”

Info

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Image Sublines

Path: A Porsche journey of adventure: “Passion” meets “passione”/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Bernd Stadler, Amleto Della Rocca (l-r), classic 911, Italy, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Two countries, one passion: Bernd Stadler (left) and Amleto Della Rocca climb out of a black Porsche 911 Targa (G-Series) in Manduria, Apulia. A shared enthusiasm for the brand has forged a new friendship.

Path: A Porsche journey of adventure: “Passion” meets “passione”/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Classic 911, Italy, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Imposing: The air-cooled cars from Germany and Italy line up at Piazza Garibaldi in Manduria's old town – to the absolute delight of passersby.

Path: A Porsche journey of adventure: “Passion” meets “passione”/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Bernd Stadler, Amleto Della Rocca (mid, l-r), Porsche Clubs, classic 911, Italy, 2023, Porsche AG
Subline: Stop at the Nardò Ring: A visit to the Porsche-operated Nardò Technical Center is one of the highlights of the journey together. In the photo foreground: Bernd Stadler's 911 Carrera (left) and Amleto Della Rocca's 911 Targa (right).

Link Collection

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