Lara, the „Porsche girl“

26/10/2020 On Instagram she's known as @thatporschegirl – in Hollywood she's a precision driver. Take a trip with Lara and her Porsche 911 T along the Pacific Coast Highway.

The job:precision driver for Hollywood.
The car:a 911 T from 1969.
The road:the Pacific Coast Highway.
The woman: Instagram star @thatporschegirl.

Anyone who drives across Los Angeles will want some wide open horizons after all the congestion. To the south, an expanse of glittering waves appears as the road lives up to its famous name of the Pacific Coast Highway. To the right, white beaches nestle against the asphalt like pearls on a string, eliminating the need for a navigation system.

Off in the distance, whales send spray shooting up into the blue sky. Eighty kilometres on, we reach Newport Beach. Two piers extend out into the water, flanked by one of the largest yacht harbours on the West Coast. When a traffic light turns red, a surfer sprints barefoot across the highway with her board. Welcome to @Lara's world.

Virtual mission

“Hi! I'll be right there.” Lightweight sweatshirt, sunscreen, subtle lip gloss, a quick brush of her hair, smartphone, car key — and off we go. The house in which Lara lives with her son and boyfriend is as streamlined as the Porsche Girl herself. “We're outside most of the time, anyway,” she says. “I'm more interested in cars and travel than home decorations.” The term “girl” needs a quick explanation. It's her name in the virtual space, because for the last year and a half she's been spending a lot of time online. For Lara, @thatporschegirl is a digital way of sharing her passion for Porsche. Part of her mission consists of updating the image of women in the world of sports cars. On spotting photos of scantily clad models draped over engine hoods, she comments, “I'd like to see women at the wheel and on the registration documents.” She herself posts cool Porsche photos, answers technical questions, and maintains contact with the community. She's followed by around 20,000 fans — so far.

The Porsche Macan S in her garage is the car for family road trips. Right next to it is Lara's 930 generation 911 Turbo 3.3 from 1982. This collector's item exudes power. But we just want to cruise. For that, Lara selects her Porsche 911 T from 1969. It has a radiant “Lee Green” paint job.

“The colour is our creation,” she says. Her boyfriend Lee invested a lot of time in the restoration. This find from the East Coast was in a miserable condition when it arrived under the California sun. More repairs were needed than she'd hoped to do. But she wasn't deterred. “That's always the case because I can't afford the cars I want in perfect condition.”

Lara starts up the air-cooled boxer engine, rolls down the window, accelerates and merges into traffic on the coastal road. Her classic vehicle immediately attracts attention, even though luxury cars and European brands are an everyday sight in Newport Beach. People also notice the woman at the wheel. “Most of the men think I’ve borrowed the car from my dad,” she says, stepping on the gas and moving into the passing lane. “I’m always friendly and keep my thoughts to myself. But it never ceases to amaze me that people are bowled over by a woman at the wheel of a classic Porsche.”

Precision driver in Hollywood

Lara was 12-years-old when she knew she wanted to drive a Porsche. That was the day she saw a friend of her mother’s — unmarried, with a management position — drive up in her own Porsche. Up to that point, all the adult women she knew were housewives driving station wagons. Lara started saving money and studying car ads. In the evenings she practiced driving her mother’s car on the empty streets. Keep practicing!

Persistence and determination are two of Lara’s strengths. When she got her driver’s licence at 16, she bought a Beetle: “super-cute, but pathetic in terms of power.” The Beetle couldn’t provide everything, but it did offer freedom. With music on and the windows down, Lara drove through California. After graduating from high school at 17, she moved to New York.

At nearly 1.80 metres tall, and slender, with long blonde hair, she spent two and a half years there working as a model. Hoping to advance her career in Hollywood, she moved back to California but she was bored by jobs as an extra. She became a precision driver — the more refined version of a stunt driver. “No flips in burning cars,” she remarks. “It’s more about dynamic precision, and not running over the cameras or putting anyone in danger.” She takes the wheel for Hollywood stars who aren’t very good at parallel parking, are afraid of driving, or don’t have a driver’s licence. In her mid-20s she doubled for people like Julia Roberts, Jennifer Connelly and Mary Louise Parker, and more and more often, got her own mobile home on sets. “I could change diapers at the wheel,” she says and laughs, “but don’t do that, of course. My kids are out of that age.” Lara’s daughter and son are now grown, and she continues to work in the modelling industry. As a fit model, her figure is a benchmark for patterns and designs of swimsuits, sweaters, pants and evening gowns.

She speeds up and we surf down the highway. “Wait till we hit the curve up there, it’ll take your breath away,” she shouts to the passenger seat above the competing noise of the engine and the wind. Indeed. Ochre-coloured cliffs reflect the sunlight. Silver-grey sage bushes and pink bougainvilleas blanket the slopes. Pelicans glide in formation above surfers waiting for the perfect wave. Lara, too, savours the anticipation — of the next bend in the road, every detail of which she knows. “You have to enjoy the moment, and make the most of your life!”

First Porsche 911 as consolation

She doesn't reveal any personal information in public, not even her last name. Shortly after launching her @thatporschegirl Instagram site, there were some unpleasant experiences with bothersome fans so she scrubbed all the particulars from the web. But she does recount one story from ten years ago. When her boyfriend at the time left her, she decided to console herself with a more reliable companion: a silver 911 cabriolet.

The used-car dealer greeted her with the question, "Hey, are you going to go on my wall?" Lara was a little nonplussed and asked him what he meant by that. "You know, my collection of people who look but don't buy." What was he thinking? At the next dealership she spotted her consolation, a three-year-old 911 in black. "We have to wash it first," said another less-than-inspired car salesman. "Well then," Lara responded, "just bring the car around dirty." After the test-drive, Lara offered a lower price — and brought her first Porsche home. The two were together for seven years. She can laugh about the experience today, but is still irritated when men don't take her automotive expertise seriously.

You could call her a lobbyist for female sports-car drivers. She and other women seek out Cars and Coffee events — an institution for fans of classic and other automobiles and a clearinghouse for hard-to-find replacement parts.

@thatporschegirl is now on the radar of authors, podcast hosts, and event organisers. Lara wants to launch her own talk show for sports-car enthusiasts. At the latest California Festival of Speed — held online this time — she faced the cameras as a host.

Let's see what the future will bring. "I'm taking things easy and am going with the flow to my next surprise," she says. Maybe not right at the moment though: a sharp bend inland demands a firm hand on the wheel. Lara takes the curve with pleasure. Downshift to third gear, second gear, racing line, back on the throttle. With absolute precision.

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