

Ruby and The Wanderettes

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19/10/2021 First time off-road racers Abby Bassett and Beth Bowman take on the Rebelle Rally – a navigational and endurance challenge through the California and Nevada desert, in a stock Cayenne S.

After a week in the desert for the 2021 Rebelle Rally, the Porsche Cayenne S with the race number 209 – piloted by Abby Bassett and Beth Bowman – emerged from the dust and debris with a fresh layer of grime over the Transsyberia-inspired orange and yellow wrap.

The driver and navigator team – christened The Wanderettes – came out of the experience with an exhilarating new chapter in their long friendship and a greater appreciation for Porsche engineering.

2,500 kilometres through the desert in a stock Cayenne

"We're just returning to the grid after 10 days of total contact blackout and exceedingly challenging

off-road driving in our bone stock Cayenne S," says Bassett, the driving half of The Wanderettes. "Together, Beth and I pushed more than 2,500 km through cold, heat, snow, rain and sleet, survived a massive sandstorm and scorpions, and earned nearly 1,000 points in our first rally. What a wild and amazing thing."

The team's Cayenne S was still on a road set-up – 20-inch wheels and "impressive" General Grabber A/Tx tyres – yet tackled every obstacle with aplomb. Ruby, the name given to the SUV by The Wanderettes, took the torture in stride without suffering any damage or puncturing a tyre. "Our third teammate, Ruby, was simply jaw-dropping. There's no other vehicle I'd have chosen," continues Bassett, noting she's already missing the car, which was provided by Porsche for the event.

"From Big Dune to Dumont to Glamis, we were never once stranded in a dune, and we even pulled a team out of a tricky spot in Glamis. Every single morning Ruby purred to life, kept us warm and safe, and did the work without a single complaint or hiccup. Over gnarly rock crawls and super soft washes, the Cayenne performed again and again, that melodious twin-turbo ringing off the canyon walls."

The X-Cross Class competitors navigated their way through checkpoints and endurance stages, relying on each other for support in the tough times, and connecting with other teams at the all-women event to swap tips and stories from the route.

"To say that the Rebelle Rally changes you is an understatement. To say it teaches you how to conquer things that you never thought you could is to shortchange the entire experience," says Bowman. "In one word, my time competing in the rally has been downright epic."

Bassett and Bowman's first foray into off-road rally racing saw them finish seventh. The training sessions the team put in beforehand helped the Cayenne improve its points total each day and finish the rally unscathed, and for The Wanderettes, they leave the event with much more than bragging rights.

"For now, I'm grateful, exhausted and still a bit dusty and dirty," smiles Bassett. "I'm shot and still recovering from one of the most challenging things I've done in the last two years, both mentally and physcially. I can also say I am now officially a Rebelle."

Scenes from the Rebelle Rally

Pre-rally

You expect to see a Porsche at a track day. You may not expect to see one making tracks through the sand. The proving grounds aren't always paved with asphalt, but the driving duo were prepared to learn what exactly a standard Porsche Cayenne S is capable of over eight days in the desert during the 2021 Rebelle Rally.

The first ever women's off-road rally raid in the US, the event blends the love of driving with the ultimate challenge of precise navigation all while covering 2,500 km of stunning terrain across Nevada and California. This year marks the first time that Porsche Cars North America, Inc. (PCNA) has sponsored a vehicle in the rally.

"We thrive on competition – it's ingrained into who we are – and by pushing ourselves and our cars we learn fast," explains Shelby Akin, Product Communications Specialist for the Cayenne. "More importantly, events like the Rebelle Rally serve to inspire and to ignite interest and curiosity in a new generation of drivers. We're proud to have supported Abby and Beth with the Cayenne – a phenomenally strong and capable car – and we knew they'd give it their all and have an amazing experience along the way."

Porsche has an off-road racing pedigree dating back to introduction of the Porsche 911, with early models taking an overall victory at the European Rally Championship in 1967. The Porsche 953 – a rally-spec, all-wheel-drive 911 – and Porsche 959 would capture wins at the 1984 and 1986 Paris-Dakar Rally, respectively, while wearing the now famous Rothmans Porsche livery. Off-road success influenced the decision to begin offering all-wheel-drive variants of the 911, and the Carrera 4 debuted with the 911 Type 964 in 1989.

Neither Bassett nor Bowman had ever completed in a rally, but their vehicle was ready for the challenge. The Porsche Cayenne launched in 2003, and in 2006 a first generation Cayenne S, powered by a 4.5-litre V8 engine, won the Transsyberia Rally across Russia for the first time. The 2020 Cayenne S Bassett and Bowman drove produces 434 PS from a twin-turbocharged V6, 94 more PS from the factory than it did in 2007, and 405 lb-ft of torque compared to 310 lb-ft in the past. The only true modifications made to the Rebelle Rally Cayenne S were larger, terrain-specific tyres for the loose sand and dirt, as well as added safety and recovery equipment for the time spent overlanding. Bassett and Bowman competed in the X-CROSS™ Class with other road-legal two-wheel drive or all-wheel drive vehicles with no low-range gears or two-speed transfer cases.

Cayenne S x 2021 Rebelle Rally

Before the team made the trip to base camp for the rally's start on 7 October, Bassett and Bowman travelled to Ridgecrest, California for Rebelle U, a comprehensive training programme offered by the rally with a curriculum focused on the skills needed to compete. The duo also spent time with the Cayenne S at Pismo Beach on California's Central Coast for driving instruction in the Oceano Dunes. During the Rebelle Rally, The Wanderettes faced a plethora of challenges, ranging from compass and map navigation and hidden checkpoints, to 12-hour days and an overnight marathon stage. Temperatures in the desert can drop below freezing overnight and top the 100s during the day, which tested the stamina of both the driver and SUV.

Ruby x Rebelle Rally

The rally was the reason to drive the Cayenne to its limits, but the journey was for the community that the Rebelle Rally has built. Bassett is a freelance journalist who previously attended the rally on assignment and was drawn to the shared passion of those in the race.

“Last year, I spent three days at the end of the competition with the teams participating and absolutely fell in love with Tribe Rebelle,” she explains. “It felt like coming home to a group of women who shared similar passions for the outdoors, adventure and vehicles. They were incredibly supportive of each other and I really wanted to experience the adventure myself.” It wasn’t difficult for Bassett to convince her longtime friend Bowman, an avid adventurer and photographer, to travel across the country from her Tennessee home to get in the Cayenne with her.

“I love a good adventure and love encouraging women to push their boundaries and realise how capable they truly are,” says Bowman. “It takes a lot of trust and I am so excited to have shared this experience with Abby. Something tells me we’ll be talking about it for the rest of our lives.”

There were some final bits of business sorting out the SUV. Bassett and Bowman weren’t doing this alone, and felt it necessary to give the Cayenne a name – they chose Ruby as a reference to the black and Bordeaux interior of the vehicle. And while Ruby looked good in Jet Black Metallic, it didn’t quite capture the moment. The car was instead wrapped in Gulf Orange, and a swooping stripe now flows down the sides of the Cayenne, accented with a geometric pattern laid over the Racing Yellow.

The team had the backing of superior Porsche performance and engineering to make light work of the obstacles in the field, and leaned heavily on each other to carry them through the tougher mental hurdles that can arise in such an event.

“At least in our experience, there is a part of almost every adventure where you think, ‘I don't want to do this anymore’,” says Bassett. “That is often when you need to push through because some really amazing things are about to happen. Stick with it. Push through. And don’t forget to take some pictures along the way."

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