

Threads of time: how the 911 Turbo wears its heritage

10/12/2025 From Anatole Lapine's 'Black Watch' trousers to Ferry Porsche's company car, the story of Porsche's tartan interiors comes full circle in the Scottish Highlands – with a visit to the spiritual home of the Mackenzie tartan.

As the door of the Porsche 911 Turbo 50 Years opens and reveals its interior trimmed in Weathered Dress Mackenzie tartan, a huge smile lights up the face of 38-year-old Viscount Tarbat, the heir to the clan chiefdom of the Mackenzies. "I suppose that means that we're now officially the fastest clan," he grins.

Colin Tarbat, as he is more normally known, is standing outside Castle Leod, his family home and possibly the oldest continuously occupied building in Scotland. Alongside him are his three-year-old son Roddy and his father John, 77, who is the current clan chief and Earl of Cromartie.

The Earl looks thoughtful when asked what tartans and clans mean these days: "We can't just march down the A9 brandishing swords and muskets anymore – but we can show that we belong to a clan in

our tartan. Clans unite people regardless of race, religion or politics."

Tartan patterns in Porsche sports cars

The use of tartan for Porsche interiors was legendarily inspired by the choice of the then chief designer, Anatole Lapine, to wear his tartan (or plaid, as they are known in US English) trousers to work one day. Tartans were first used on one-offs, such as the original 911 Turbo RSR concept of 1973, which featured seat centres and bolsters in the black, blue and green of the iconic Black Watch tartan. The rather bold red and blue Maclachlan tartan was used in the very first 911 Turbo, which was presented to Louise Piech in 1974 for her 70th birthday.

Dorothea Müller-Goodwyn, who was part of the styling team at Porsche from 1970 to 1975 and again from 1978 to 2003, remembers: "We had a Scottish colleague in our team who recommended two traditional tartan fabric makers from his homeland to me. Unfortunately, the Scottish fabric makers were unable to supply us with the qualities that we required for the interior of the sports cars: lightfast and abrasion-resistant." As a result, the later production vehicles utilised materials from an automotive textile manufacturer located in the Swabian Alps.

Three different tartan upholstery options could then be selected by customers of the 911 Turbo from 1975. As Müller-Goodwyn later noted, "Following the success of the exclusive tartans in the Turbo, in the next model year we also used them in the 911."

A notable example of one of these three tartans was the Mackenzie tartan featured in Ferry Porsche's Oak Green Metallic 911 Turbo. Now, an evolved version of the clan's tartan, with more muted greens, browns and whites, has been used in the 911 Turbo 50 Years – an example of which is rolling up the long driveway to Castle Leod, a place perhaps best known these days as the inspiration for Castle Leoch, home of the Mackenzie Clan in the 'Outlander' television series.

Tartans represent identity

"My job is as an explosives consultant but my destiny has always been to be the slave to a castle," laughs the Earl. "We re-roofed the place in 1990. The last time it had been done was in 1616. But for members of the clan, it's a bit like coming home. There are two million members of the Mackenzie clan worldwide, with many of them in Scotland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. But there are also members in Russia, Argentina, Germany, France and Switzerland. People are looking for something that outlasts the transient, that has a real sense of history – not unlike a Porsche really. And wearing a tartan gives you a sense of identity. It's not so different to wearing a football shirt."

To learn even more about tartan and its history, our next stop is at Kinloch Anderson in Edinburgh, arguably the home of tartan in Scotland, and supplier of tartan to the British royal family since 1903. John Kinloch Anderson is the sixth generation of his family to run the business: "In the old days, cloth

was coloured with vegetation that was found where you lived. Different weavers used different dyes, based on what tree roots and so on that there were to use locally." As time went on, these woven patterns became associated with the clans that came from those places.

"Clan tartans were outlawed after the Jacobite rebellion in 1745, but British monarchs the next century made them very fashionable, and they started to be codified. Now there are more than 2,000 tartans commercially woven and a further 10,000 registered with the Scottish Register of Tartans, an official government-run organisation." As it is not the Scottish way to show off, Kinloch Anderson doesn't mention that his mother was instrumental in setting it up.

Tradition and variety: Kinloch Anderson's tartan legacy

"People can choose a clan to belong to – if they have ancestors from Scotland, or there's something that means something to them after a visit to Scotland, even sometimes a Scottish friend. And tartan doesn't have to be connected to a clan. We make house tartans or there may even be a whisky or a golf course with a tartan that you like."

On the wall in the Kinloch Anderson showroom and factory are priceless ancient tartan uniforms and clippings from newspapers all over the world. At one point, Kinloch Anderson was exporting 100,000 tartan skirts annually. "Tartan was very fashionable in the seventies, and we may have produced the Black Watch tartan trousers that Anatole Lapine wore to the Porsche design studios on that auspicious morning. They were the days of the Bay City Rollers and Rod Stewart after all!"

Porsche approached Kinloch Anderson to discuss the tartans for their first upholstery. "And we're now looking forward to producing notebooks for Porsche in the three key tartans. Countless designers including the likes of Vivienne Westwood and Ralph Lauren have made their own interpretations of tartan. It really is one of Scotland's great gifts to the world."

Tailor-Made: Porsche Sonderwunsch

And it is through the work of Porsche's Sonderwunsch (special request) programme that customers can choose to turn dreams of their own tartan-trimmed cars into reality. Almost anything is possible when it comes to the creation of a custom Porsche by Sonderwunsch. It is far from uncommon for part of the individualisation process, often assisted by the Porsche Museum archivists, to include the choice of a tartan for the seat centres and door trims. In addition, the sports car manufacturer has recently started offering original fabrics for the restoration of historic Porsche models. The so-called delivery certificate serves as a reference for the vehicle's original condition.

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