

Project 356 World Rally Tour: Antarctica

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26/10/2021 Renée Brinkerhoff has rallied her Porsche 356 around the world for an important cause, and now she'll drive her re-engineered sports car on skis through the harsh conditions of Antarctica.

After a delay of nearly two years, Renée Brinkerhoff is preparing for the final stage of her Project 356 World Rally Tour with her faithful 1956 Porsche 356 A. The amateur rally driver has already raced the classic sports car on six continents, on every type of terrain – an extreme endeavour for any individual, let alone one driving in a classic 65-year-old racer. She is now looking to check off the final land mass by putting the Porsche to the ultimate test, traversing 587 kilometres – 356 miles – in Antarctica.

"While we are extremely proud of completing each endurance rally we've entered, our true mission has been for our racing efforts to become a worldwide visual that supports our vocal pursuit to end child trafficking," says Brinkerhoff. "We've had a goal to break barriers and set new records and we're hopeful

our Antarctic expedition will do just that."

The 356 is already in transit to Chile via ship from its workshop in the UK and, upon arrival, will be air-shipped to the extreme conditions that await at the Union Glacier in Antarctica. Brinkerhoff and the Valkyrie Racing team will rendezvous in Chile at the end of November, and if the weather cooperates the subzero sprint will begin in Antarctica on 5 December and should be completed before the end of the year. The long-awaited journey was pushed from late 2020, and the more than 18 months of planning has also allowed the naturally-aspirated flat six 356 to undergo a complete re-engineering for the treacherous terrain.

"Success for Renée and her car will come from the thoughtful balance of appropriate technology we've added, and the mass reduction implemented," says Kieron Bradley, Senior Chassis Design Engineer for the project and a practiced extreme explorer in his own right. Bradley replaced the rear tyres of the vehicle with snow tracks, and a pair of skis were attached to the front along with a specialised brace and suspension system. For stabilisation, the 356 will use a single-arm suspension with coilover shocks for both the tracks in the rear.

While the addition of skis and tracks has increased the overall mass of the 356 – an issue because a low weight is key to driving over the ice rather than sinking in – the mass per square inch, or footprint, has been reduced to less than four per cent of the standard wheel displacement. "The ski we've created must do 40 – 50 per cent of the work, by compacting and prepping the snow for the track unit to follow over, with the underside blade guiding the direction. This ensures the tracks will not submarine under the light snow," explains Bradley.

Snow tracks and a pair of skis

An extra thought that Bradley had to consider was that the skis and tracks must be easily removable so that spiked ice tyres can be re-fitted with no wheel alignment changes necessary. A pneumatic inflatable jack will be used to make the change. Joining Brinkerhoff in the 356A for the polar trek will be British explorer Jason de Carteret, who will act as navigator. De Carteret has led more than 50 expeditions, including to both the North and South Pole, and together with Bradley he has claimed two world records for the fastest overland journey to the South Pole travelling in the Thomson Reuters Polar Vehicle, which they designed.

"As often has been the case when taking on a new terrain in my 356, I have had no opportunity to test the car," says Brinkerhoff. "The test will come when we are at Union Glacier and we are very hopeful the new design will prove itself in spades. As I have been told by Jason and Kieron, there is no terrain on earth like Antarctica and therefore no place where a true test can be taken."

An expedition and a humanitarian effort

The Project 356 World Rally Tour is both an expedition and a humanitarian effort, and the December 2021 challenge completes the ultimate endeavor by one woman, one car and one global mission to help end child trafficking. Through Valkyries Gives, the philanthropic arm of her racing team, Brinkerhoff has raised close to half a million dollars, with 100 per cent of the proceeds benefitting victims of trafficking around the world. By its conclusion, Brinkerhoff will have driven close to 32,000 kilometres over all seven continents, partaking in endurance rallies such as Peking-to-Paris, the East African Safari Classic Rally and La Carrera Panamericana.

Prior to starting her rally career in 2013, at the age of 57, the Coloradoan attended classes at the Porsche Track Experience where she had the Chief Driving Instructor – and America's most decorated endurance racer – Hurley Haywood in the passenger seat. "He kept me out there and kept taking me around the track, and that was such a confidence booster," remembers Brinkerhoff.

UK-based Tuthill Porsche has played a technical preparation role in nearly all of Brinkerhoff's endurance rallies, and Valkyrie Racing has also prepared sustainability measures, such as solar panels on the crevasse bar, to ensure the entire Project 356 World Rally Tour is carbon positive.

Info

More about Valkyrie Racing and Valkyrie Gives.

Valkyrie Racing/Valkyrie Gives would like their supporters worldwide to join them in Antarctica and be part of a 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience. For a minimum donation of 356 US Dollars, supporters can have their name inscribed inside the hood of the classic racer. Donations can be made directly to www.valkyrieracing.com/donate356.

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