Raising the roof: 911 with roof tent

23/10/2020 Brock Keen's realisation of a 911's potential with added accommodation.

Brock Keen has become an accidental cult figure, inspiring Instagram followers around the world to join him, metaphorically at least, on a new kind of automotive adventure. Combining his passion for Porsche with a love of the great outdoors, his road trips have become a social media sensation – and so has his unmistakable 911.

The journey began for Keen when he tracked down a 996 to use as his daily driver. The Atlas Grey Carrera 4S had covered just 60,000 miles when the young entrepreneur bought it from a friend's dealership in Oregon, and it needed little more than a once over to return it to the road.

The smart and understated 911 was duly put into daily driving duty, both for mundane commuting and longer journeys into the mountains where Keen and his wife went regularly to ski and snowboard. "We have a lot of rain up here so all-wheel drive is nice to have," he explains. "Driving these great roads between the coast and the mountains is perfect for a Porsche."

The outdoor lifestyle meant the couple were also frequent visitors to a local camping store in Portland where Keen spied a discounted roof tent for sale; ideal, he imagined, for their classic Range Rover. As luck would have it the tent didn't marry up with the roof bars of the old SUV, but the rack Keen had recently fitted to the 996 to carry their mountain bikes was perfect.

"On my drive home I was getting a lot of funny looks," Keen recalls. "Every stop light I hit people were throwing their hands up in the air in disbelief. When I got home I immediately opened the tent up, mostly to convince my wife that we should keep it."

The decisive moment came when the couple attended an open-air concert in the Porsche and camped out in the tent for the first time. A picture on Instagram caught the public imagination and the tent's manufacturer got in touch. They were, as Keen explains, both excited to see their product on so unlikely a car, but also concerned that it might not be strong enough.

"They invited us to their headquarters and had their team do a full stress test and weight test on the roof rack and on the car itself. And it passed with flying colours, even though it was triple the weight limit set for the roof rack. Once they had certified it," Keen says, "that was the moment I decided to keep it on the car."

A few subtle modifications were made to the 996, including a cold air intake, rally lamps and lowering the suspension by about an inch. "Which is totally insane," Keen laughs, "because of the places I take it, and I've definitely smacked my oil pan on a few rocks, but it keeps the centre of gravity low. I've had the car on track with the roof tent on top, up on three wheels in a corner, so it can definitely handle it now."

The car's first proper road trip with the tent in situ would be to the Rennsport Reunion at Laguna Seca, the country's largest and most highly regarded Porsche meet. "There were a lot of purists there who thought it was madness," he recalls, "but also there were the guys who understand the real Porsche brand and how useable these cars are. So there was great appreciation for it."

Keen has been racking up the miles with road trips all around the country ever since, taking his 911 ever further off the beaten track. "Remote places usually have great roads that lead to them," he explains simply. "So it's canyon carving by day, a billion stars by night, and I get to do it all over again the next day. I just get out and go to the sort of places you would never really expect to see a Porsche, let alone one with a roof top tent."

Keen's regular car camping companions are his wife and dog Lucy, but friends have been tagging along more recently and the ripple effect has gradually gone global. "It's becoming a thing," the 40-year-old admits. "We did a rally with a group of sports cars in the Fall and drove a bunch of gravel and dirt roads in the mountains around the Pacific Northwest. One of my buddies has an '88 Carrera that we put a tent on as well. Now there's probably at least a dozen more doing it, in Russia, in China – they're popping up all over the world which is pretty cool."

Prior to the pandemic Keen had his sights set on an international road trip, taking in every European round of the 2020 Formula E championship. With that idea shelved until next year, his most recent undertaking was a two-week tour of Porsche's west coast landmarks, visiting Sonoma Raceway and Willow Springs while rubbing shoulders with the likes of Rod Emory, Magnus Walker and Patrick Long en route.

Now something of a celebrity in his own right, Keen continues to explore the US in his trusty 996 come sun, rain or snow, taking a simple message to the wider Porsche community. "Don't be afraid to drive your car," he says. "We've just clocked 126,000 miles in ours. They're meant to be driven, so just get out there and do it!"

Info

You can follow Keen's adventures on Instagram via @996roadtrip.

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