

50 years on the race track: the Porsche Track Experience

16/09/2024 Porsche takes driver development, technical expertise, and racetrack adventure and turns them into unique experiences. Fifty years ago, this triumvirate led to the founding of the "Porsche Sportfahrschule."

t's always the same with sports cars from Zuffenhausen: they're easy to start and well suited for comfortable travel. But with this style of driving, what a Porsche is capable of in terms of driving dynamics is often left unexplored. True appreciation of the engineering expertise can be felt more intensely during more spirited driving. Fritz Huschke von Hanstein and Herbert Linge recognized this as early as in the 1950s. Back then, von Hanstein was both race director and chief press officer. Linge made history as a works and development driver, then subsequently as the initiator of the ONS safety crew and as operations manager in Weissach. According to his records, the first driving training to officially involve Porsche was held in Lugano, Switzerland, on April 8, 1954.

The initial concept remains unchanged to this day: first, a track inspection with instruction regarding the racing line and the braking points. Second, driving with professionals. Third, practice, and fourth,

analysis.

The first training session was held in the USA back in 1956. There is a record of how Linge described the clientele: “80 percent of the participants were average American drivers used to huge engines and automatic transmissions. Our delicate sports cars with manual transmission, a clutch, and comparatively highly developed engines were completely new territory for them.” But the enormous learning success of those who participated generated enthusiasm – as well as reports.

The “Porsche Sportfahrschule” is founded

In the 1960s, demand for driving events for the sales staff of new dealer organizations in Germany and abroad increased, as did demand for such events for the media and Porsche Clubs. But the huge potential of regular customer training as practical market research and for sales promotion was not yet being leveraged. This all changed in 1974 in the same year in which the first 911 Turbo was launched. Not only did its performance (power of 260 PS, 343 newton meters of torque, a top speed of more than 250 kmh) stand for a completely new dimension in street-legal sports cars – the turbo technology successfully put to use in racing was also incorporated as standard for the first time. However, the turbocharger’s thrust set in so abruptly and with such brute force that it could be more challenging for the inexperienced to cope with, especially when cornering on a wet road or when calculating overtaking maneuvers. These demanding driving dynamics provided further arguments for the institutionalization of driving and safety training. Even before the 911 Turbo went into series production, the “Porsche Sportfahrschule” was founded. The first four training sessions took place that same year on three different racetracks in Germany, Belgium, and France.

The press release back then read as follows: “The training staff consists of test drivers and active sports drivers from Porsche – a mixture of driving technicians and driving professionals who provide the participants with deeper insights into the vehicle technology and the driving technology.” An awkward sentence that would be broken down for simplicity these days. But the crux of the matter is nevertheless still accurate – these days, Weissach developers and world champions convey their knowledge in the context of the Porsche Track Experience. Porsche condenses the talent of instructors and engineers, creating the new portmanteau word in German of “Instrukteure.”

Courses on international racetracks

It was decided in the Sportfahrschule’s founding year to hold the courses on international racetracks in order to enhance the value of the experience and to take the strain off the Weissach test facility. For a long time, participation was conditional upon having your own vehicle, although third-party vehicles were also allowed. This openness remains a USP to this day, and is frequently rewarded with participants attending their second or third course with their own Zuffenhausen product. “It was always great to experience the customers’ feedback regarding our vehicles’ capabilities so directly and – importantly – to then take that feedback back to the company,” recalls Claudia Schäffner. She

influenced the development of the Sportfahrschule from 1980 to 2009.

As a project manager, she was soon managing a dozen courses a year. In the analog age, this meant a lot of paperwork for her as initially the Sportfahrschule's only full-time employee. Postcards and checks for more than a thousand registrations landed on her desk. She expanded the network of "Instrukteure" and competitors. A team uniform sharpened up their joint appearance. Paper cups were replaced with porcelain mugs featuring vehicle motifs that became collector's items and formed a merchandise collection. A course was aimed exclusively at women for the first time in 1986. The first winter training in Austria followed in 1990 and, in 1993, rally world champion Walter Röhrl debuted as an "Instrukteur." A star with charisma – just like Formula 1 driver Wolfgang Graf Berghe von Trips, whom Linge hired back then. "There was a very friendly atmosphere," Röhrl says, recollecting his deployment in Mugello, Italy. "And the perfect program in terms of driving physics and technology made the participants even more loyal to the brand."

The accompanying measures also became more and more sophisticated. When winter training was relocated to the Arctic Circle in 1996, snowmobiles and brand-new 911 Carrera 4 vehicles were put to use in Rovaniemi, Finland. On one occasion, Claudia Schäffner even organized a trip on an icebreaker – including wet suits for the participants to take a dip in the Baltic Sea. In 1997, Rauno Aaltonen made a guest appearance as an "Instrukteur." The project manager recruited the Finnish "rally professor" when she bumped into him at a restaurant. In Imola, Italy, Porsche works driver Bob Wollek served as a 911 GT1 taxi driver. Training on the Magny-Cours racetrack in France featured Formula 3 race cars. The first course for acquiring a racing license was created. When the model range was expanded with the addition of the Cayenne shortly after the turn of the millennium, the team, which had since grown significantly, developed off-road events.

New and innovative ideas for individual customer requirements and situations were therefore constantly being created. Now obviously also including ideas for customers with all-electric sports cars. Looking back, it is plain to see that the Porsche Sportfahrschule motorsport school, founded in 1974, served as the nucleus for the whole world of the present-day Porsche Track Experience.

Consumption data

911 GT3 RS (WLTP)*: Fuel consumption combined: 13.2 l/100 km; CO_2 emissions combined: 299 g/km; CO_2 class: G

*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

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Subline: In a time lapse: In 1974, the “Porsche Sportfahrschule” was founded. In the 50 years since then, an extensive world of experiences has been developed under the name Porsche Track Experience.

Path: media/Images/img_4.jpg
Title: Walter Röhrl, Porsche Track Experience, 2024, Porsche AG
Subline: Walter Röhrl

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