

Road-tripping in the Tuscany of Thailand

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25/01/2019 During his recent Southeast Asian Porsche odyssey, Curves Magazine's Stefan Bogner discovers driving nirvana in northern Thailand.

A look at the popularity of *Das Treffen* in Thailand will quickly dispel the myth that America and Europe are spearheading the burgeoning global obsession with Porsche. The young Bangkok Porsche meetup is the brainchild of Sihabutr Xoomsai, the Executive Editor of *GT Porsche Thailand* and Film Director of Triton Film, known to his friends simply as Tenn.

Following the third and most successful *Das Treffen* yet late last year, Tenn invited Stefan Bogner – the Munich-based photographer and founder of *Curves* – to join him on a road trip in northern Thailand with a group of like-minded enthusiasts in a bid to discover some of the world's best driving roads and further understand the subtle nuances of Southeast Asia's vibrant Porsche community. Porsche is a

brand best enjoyed shared, after all – something Tenn has known ever since he was thrown the keys to a 964 as an impressionable child.

400km journey across mountainous hinterland

The invitation's timing was apt for an altogether different reason, for it arrived just after the covers had been peeled off the new Porsche 992 some 8,000 miles away in Los Angeles. What better time to reflect on the virtues of the timeless machines that preceded the eighth-generation 911?

Naturally, Bogner didn't need asking twice and promptly headed to the start point in Nan. The two-day, circa-400km journey across northern Thailand's mountainous hinterland would take him and the group westward towards Phayao, passing through Chiang Rai and finally ending in Chiang Mai, the former legs encompassing both the Doe Phu Ka and Phu Sang national parks.

"I knew Thailand had good roads, but I couldn't have imagined it would make for such a great road-trip destination," says Bogner, who commandeered a Cayenne E-Hybrid for the journey. "Sure, a Cayenne would be most suitable for traversing such a mountainous region, but that's not to say the guys in the 911s were not having a blast!"

It's telling that Bogner, a man who's driven dream roads right across the world, was so taken with the curves of Thailand. He even likens the north of Thailand to Tuscany in Italy. "Bangkok is a mega city that's so noisy and chaotic and escape to such an oasis was a welcome surprise," he recalls. "I would call the area east of Chiang Mai the Tuscany of Thailand because there are rolling hills, the roads are flawlessly surfaced and largely deserted, the weather is perfect, and the food is awesome."

Bogner: "The roads are like a never-ending series of Nürburgring carousels"

With regards to the roads themselves and their surrounding environment, Bogner notes the positive camber and overwhelming greenness as unique. "The roads are like a never-ending series of Nürburgring carousels flanked by steep walls of green. Coupled with the thick and tall forest canopy that renders it impossible to view the entire landscape from any one spot, it feels like you're driving through a giant tunnel."

Given the almost insufferable level of humidity, even the older Porsches in the group were equipped with air-conditioning for the sake of their owners. While the new 911 Carrera T, 964 RS, and Carrera 3.0 RSR replica were all fabulous, no car charmed Bogner more than Tenn's sensational 911 SWB from the 1960s. "That is such a special car because of its rarity," Bogner continues, "and to see one here in Thailand is so surprising, especially given the ultra-high tax rate on classic and luxury cars."

It just goes to show the devotion shown by the Thai enthusiasts for Porsche as a brand. As Bogner states, the passion for Porsche in Southeast Asia is 'deep and in no way superficial'. Among both the group on the road trip and the hundreds of owners at *Das Treffen* back in Bangkok, this much was plain to see. "Unlike events such as *Luftgekühlt* in California, where the vibe is relaxed albeit a little commercial and in-your-face, everything is more restrained in Thailand," he comments. "The people are friendly and down to earth and couldn't have been more welcoming." The remarks only serve to reinforce Porsche's place as a wholly inclusive brand. Simply put, that's 'simply Porsche'.

911 with a stunning Italian leather

In letting their cars do the talking, Bogner suggests Thai owners take greater pride in the finer details that distinguish both them and their Porsches. "There is unrelenting passion and deep knowledge among the Thai Porsche community and if you look closely, you'll find some exceptional details, from vintage watches to the materials used in their cars. There was one guy at *Das Treffen* whose 911 interior was trimmed with a stunning Italian leather I'd certainly never seen before!"

If there was sense of community at *Das Treffen* , then Bogner felt more like part of a family on the road trip with Tenn and his friends. "The entire journey was simply a thoroughly pleasurable experience," he says. "The people welcomed us so warmly, the vistas were spectacular, the roads were great to drive, and the cars behaved impeccably. A good time was had by all."

But above the dawning that Thailand should be a road-trip destination on everyone's radar was the fact that this very point appears to be lost on the Thai people themselves. In fact, Bogner suggests the actual concept of a road trip – of getting out with your friends and driving to exciting places, eating well, and generally kicking back and taking it easy – is not yet commonplace in Thailand as it is in Europe or America. "We always imagine Thailand as a beach vacation country rather than a driving country, but the idea of a road trip is largely a new one to the Thai car community," he remarks. "One of the guys on our trip described it perfectly as 'me time', which I thought was spot on."

Thailand is so much more than idyllic beaches

So, there you go – the secret's out. Thailand is so much more than idyllic beaches and Bangkok's hidden shopping delights. It boasts a Porsche community as vibrant as the greens of the rainforest, and in the north especially, you'll find soulful driving nirvana far quicker than you'd imagine. And you needn't be driving a rugged Cayenne, though as Bogner came to appreciate over the course of his Southeast Asian odyssey, the SUV is a true all-rounder, a loyal filming friend, and the perfect car with which to stay among the pack.

"I'd like to say a special thank you to Tenn, Porsche, and everyone involved with the trip. From the first

second after touching down in Bangkok to the time we arrived in Chiang Mai after an unforgettable few days, there wasn't a dull moment." If you're thinking of heading to Southeast Asia and Thailand in particular in 2019, remember: pack your driving shoes in addition to your beach towel!

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