

Ties that bind: the Ingram family and their magnificent Porsche collection

16/03/2021 Two generations, one passion: the Ingram family's Porsche collection in North Carolina is magnificent for many reasons – not least for how it has been rebuilt following a heartbreaking calamity.

There are places where magic happens; places that carry a piece of the past within them and places that seem like a future promise, as if their day has yet to come. If you ever have the good fortune to behold the Ingram family's Porsche collection, you'll feel a bit of all that: magic, a glimpse into history, and the hint of a grand future. Since the late 1990s, Bob Ingram and his wife Jeanie have assembled a collection of 80 exquisite Porsche models, representing a fascinating cross-section of the sports-car brand's past seven decades. The couple, from Durham in North Carolina, share their passion for Porsche with their sons, Rory and Cam.

The magic of Porsche

A tour of the collection is like taking a journey through time. Starting with one of the early Coupés from

the production in Gmünd, Austria, it spans the decades to some of the latest masterpieces to come out of Zuffenhausen, such as the 991 generation Porsche 911 Speedster. “We are incredibly proud and at the same time feel very honoured that we are allowed to take care of these cars,” says Ingram.

The 78-year-old describes, with shining eyes, how he always has the cars’ former owners, their pride and enthusiasm, in mind – especially when it comes to the older models. “It is in that spirit that we want to preserve the cars for the future,” he says. “There is no other company in the world that can draw on such a loyal fan base.” As his son Cam puts it: “The most exciting thing is the stories behind the cars.” It could be the famous racing history of a vehicle, or the moving biography of its previous owner. “Through our collection, we become part of contemporary history, of the cars and the people,” he says.

The Ingrams want the collection to be a living thing, and that manifests itself in two ways. First, the cars are driven regularly, whether on weekend family outings or at club meetings and racing events. “It is important to us that our collection pieces are ready to drive,” says Bob Ingram. All of them, even racing cars like the Porsche 906 Carrera 6 from the 1960s, have been registered for the road – with just one exception: the exclusive new edition of the Porsche 935. Only 77 examples were produced and the car can only be driven at club sport events or training sessions on private racetracks. Second, the collection serves as a setting for charity events.

The Ingrams enjoy the opportunity to not only cultivate their passion personally, but also to share it with others. “Our goal,” Jeanie Ingram explains, “was to create a place where people could feel comfortable: with art, a beautiful setting, and many memories.”

The origins of the collection

Whenever Bob Ingram is on the road in one of his many Porsche cars, he feels transported back to the year 1971, when he had the chance to ride in the Porsche 911 S of an acquaintance for the first time. It was an experience that left a deep impression on him: “When it started, a symphony of mechanical sounds began,” recalls Ingram. After three-quarters of an hour, young Bob was allowed to take the wheel himself. “I was completely nervous; I stalled the engine at first,” he recalls with a chuckle. “But the feeling of the space, the smell, and the sound were unlike anything else.” When he got home later, he said to Jeanie: “One day I’ll drive a Porsche.”

It would be some time before the aspiration became a reality. Other things were more pressing for the young family. Ingram comes from Charleston, a small city in rural Illinois, and he grew up in what he describes as “humble circumstances”. He earned his first money next door to the schoolhouse in the corner shop run by his single mother. “I saved it all up to buy the coolest ride in town when I finally got my licence,” he says with a smile. He had always been a “car guy” – an enthusiast who would drive to the races in Indianapolis or Sebring, and run the occasional drag race against friends.

Career-wise, things were looking up: after his studies, Ingram began working as a pharmaceutical sales representative – a job that would take him to the highest echelons of the industry. For many years he

was CEO of one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, with all the consequences that the life of a top executive entails. “We moved 19 times over the years,” he says. “I still thank my wife and sons for putting up with it.” Today, his wife looks back on it all with equanimity: “It was a wild time,” she says, “but sticking together as a family has always been the most important thing.”

Though he eventually retired, Ingram by no means went into retirement – he is still a partner in an investment firm in the pharmaceutical sector. But giving up the day job meant he could finally make more time for his passion: Porsche. A dark blue 964-generation Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet was soon joined by a 993-generation Carrera Coupé in Amethyst Metallic, and in the late 1990s a 993 Turbo S Coupé was added to the burgeoning collection. “The rest is history,” says Bob Ingram, beaming. “The best part of it, as always, is being able to share the passion with the whole family.” And that’s in a rather extended sense as well: “As a family, we’ve made many friends within this wonderful fan base, worldwide.”

The next generation of Ingrams is now adding its own touches. Son Rory manages the collection and created the Ingram Driving Experience, which brings motorsport enthusiasts together for private racing events with friends such as former factory driver and brand ambassador Mark Webber. Younger son Cam also devotes himself to automotive rarities.

But not everything has been plain sailing. In April 2019, the family experienced a nightmare when a gas pipe exploded in front of the warehouse where large parts of the collection were housed. Two people died, the neighbouring building was completely destroyed, and the roof of the Ingrams’ hall collapsed, badly damaging about half of the precious cars below. “It was the saddest day of our lives,” Bob Ingram recalls. “Our thoughts are still with the people who were hurt and the families who lost loved ones.”

The rebuilding after the nightmare

The toll after the first clean-up operations was steep: four vehicles were so badly damaged that they seemed irretrievably lost, including an extremely rare Porsche 356 B Carrera GTL Abarth, which came from Sweden. Vehicles of this model made their mark in legendary races such as the Targa Florio and at the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the value of that particular jewel was in the millions. But it was a date on the calendar that stressed the family all the more: the Abarth was scheduled to take part in the world famous Concours d’Elegance competition in Pebble Beach. It was barely four months until the illustrious, invitation-only event. “It was a great honour for us,” explains Ingram. As he stood in front of the severely fire-damaged wreckage, he looked at his son Cam and wondered aloud: “Can we get this done in time?” “And I had to admit to him that I didn’t know,” Cam Ingram says. “That was hard on all of us.”

In the weeks that followed, Ingram and his team practically lived in the workshop, putting in 16-hour days and more to rebuild the car from scratch. As Cam Ingram notes: “We were lucky that despite its extensive racing history, it never had any serious damage from accidents or anything like that. The aluminium body was still in excellent condition, as was the chassis. It’s only because it didn’t have the

damage typical of racing cars its age that we were able to accomplish in four months what would otherwise take years."

The 356 B Carrera GTL Abarth at Pebble Beach

The repairs were completed just in time for a perfect appearance at Pebble Beach. "It was a very emotional moment," admits Bob Ingram. "The whole experience brought us even closer together as a family." Cam's father had taught him to ask himself a question: "What are my goals and what am I willing to do for them?" Here the goal was clear: to preserve the magic of the collection – for the family, for the future, and for the love of Porsche.

The heroic effort was rewarded at the Concours d'Elegance with a class win for the perfectly restored 356 B Carrera GTL Abarth. It was "almost surreal," says Cam Ingram, recalling how he drove with his father in the winning car across the grass of Pebble Beach to receive the trophy. "This will to persevere is absolutely typical of Porsche; it comes from the brand," says Bob Ingram in summary. "You don't ever give up while you still have a chance." And the memory of that 911 S from 1971 was no doubt along for the ride.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Thomas Ammann

christophorus@porsche.de

Ty Milford

christophorus@porsche.de

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Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart