

Family matters

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22/12/2018 The Klein family has a special relationship with Porsche: Lea Klein has made a career in racing, son Julian has become a Porsche mechanic, daughter Isabelle is enthusiastic about historic rallies. The Kleins' pride and joy: the green Porsche dragon "Elliot".

“Mama” was Julian’s first word. So far, so normal. But then his childhood somehow took a different path. Porsche was and is the guiding principle of his life. As soon as someone mentions the Zuffenhausen-based brand to the trained Porsche mechanic, the towering figure lights up. No wonder that he has the magic number “911” tattooed on his upper right arm. Porsche is his life. Julian Klein is Lea Klein’s youngest son, and anyone who meets Lea immediately understands why Julian is the way he is. Lea Klein loves driving Porsche cars, loves driving fast, and has had a life not a million miles away from that of street racers. This has rubbed off on her three children – one daughter and two sons. “Well, on two out of three,” she winks. The third, oldest son Mario, is not all that different, but he works in real estate – as did his mother for a couple of years.

This is a very special family, and one that we got to know only by chance. But what kind of family? What about Lea's husband? "The father of my children was no longer with us at some point," explains Lea abruptly and convincingly. Not because of what she says, but because there are many things she doesn't say. Being a single mother and her three children is part of the Kleins' normal everyday life. Lea is a very young mother: "I grew up with my children. You couldn't hope for anything better. It was just right – not always easy, but right."

Nothing in life is easy – for example, becoming a racing driver

Strictly speaking, nothing in life is easy. For example, becoming a racing driver. At just four years old, Lea sat on Daddy's lap at the steering wheel of a BMW 2002 and announced with conviction that she intended to do exactly that. What a cutie! Everyone laughed. No one believed it would happen. Then at six or seven years old, she saw the first Porsche 911 she had ever seen drive past the schoolyard of her elementary school schoolyard and she knew: "One day, I will drive one of those." From then on everything was clear. For her. Those around her sometimes reacted with irritation to the teenage female petrolhead who spoke so matter-of-factly about automotive technology.

After school, she took an apprenticeship at VAG Knebel, a Volkswagen/Audi dealership in Siegen, Germany. There, as part of the Motorsport Knebel team, Lea got a taste of the racing atmosphere. She first drove the *Nordschleife* in a Corrado G60; learned from Jürgen Alzen; drove a Suzuki Swift at the VLN Endurance Championship, followed by a Lotus Elise Cup for Auto Becker Düsseldorf. More positions followed – until she changed sides in 2003 and became a Team Leader.

Julian was about 13 years old by this point and disassembling his first engines. He quickly learned how to put them back together and even how to get a motor running again. Lea was responsible for three to four cars, made arrangements, met many people and had a lot of fun – but three kids (Isabelle, Mario and Julian) and the stress of the racing track motivated her to find a quieter course in 2006. Since then she has worked in real estate business and is in great demand as a guide at motorsport events, where she takes groups of VIP visitors on behalf of large companies into the pit lanes to meet and greet the teams, drivers and mechanics. But she still dreams about racing.

"If you come across a really good 911 along the way..."

In the meantime, Julian began his career of tinkering at Porsche, and received an instruction from his mother: "If you come across a really good 911 along the way, think of me." And when he called in 2013 talking about a 1978 911 – a reimport from California, repainted black, with no interior fittings, no roof – sliding or otherwise – an original SC with just a few miles on the clock and a sound body – Lea knew: Julian had found her dream car.

An old, run-down car from the US as a dream car? Of course! After all, the Klein family plan was to build a rally car. It would need to be light, so no sliding roof would be a bonus. The interior fittings were also unnecessary. A steel cage made by Stein in Dortmund and racing seats would be brought in – along with some extra-lightweight carpeting and as little equipment as possible. Within a year, Julian conjured up the exact Porsche vehicle his mother had always wanted. Visually, you would think you were looking at a 2.7 Carrera. The engine flap is, for example, an original for this model.

But under the slimline body, a 3.0-litre engine – with increased power thanks to Julian's skill – is hard at work. The engine ticks over at a relaxed 6,500 rpm, and delivers even more power via its sintered metal clutch than a normal 911 transmission. Julian does however still want to make some changes: the fifth gear needs to be longer. He'd like to fit front brakes from a 964. It would be perfect for the 7 x 16-inch Fuchs rims and front wings, as something on the front left-hand side has a habit of scraping. But it's different now – thanks to a Facebook competition by Bilstein and Porsche Klassik, Lea's Porsche now has a perfectly tuned suspension. The whole story will be featured in in the Porsche Klassik special edition "1 Million Porsche 911", with a summary on the right.

A family of racing enthusiasts

So this was how we got to know Lea and decided that we had to write about this family of racing enthusiasts. With her daughter Isabelle or her good friend Nicole Jentsch, Lea has already earned several trophies in historic rallies. For example: Second in her class at the 2017 Mittelrhein Classic.

The idea was born at the Bilstein stand at the Techno Classica motor show. And only because there was a black 911 in excellent condition at the motor show, owned by an acquaintance of Bilstein Marketing Manager Florian Hagemann. People talked, considered, and then the decision was made: We will organise a competition together on Facebook. The winner would receive a Bilstein suspension, including installation. Porsche Klassik reported the competition in their "1 Million Porsche 911" special edition. No sooner said than done! We were astounded by how many Porsche fans participated via the Porsche Klassik and Bilstein pages. In the end, we narrowed the pool down to five vehicles and messaged each owner simultaneously – minutes later Lea Klein was on the phone.

An appointment was quickly arranged in Ennepetal at the Bilstein training centre. Lea had already driven a Bilstein before: a *Sportlich/Straße* ("sports/street") version. For rally sport, Lea would have preferred a slightly firmer suspension, and the rear axle seemed a little too spongy to her. The experts at Bilstein specially adjusted the new gas suspension and also found the reason for the sponginess at the rear and the roughness at the front: the rear track was wrong, and the spring strut at the front was lacking lubrication. Now Elliot drove better than ever before.

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