

Model behaviour

16/08/2022 Meet the Porsche PR Manager who turned his passion for the brand into a unique solo exhibition.

For the last three months, the Porsche Experience Centre Shanghai has played host to a vast and unique exhibition of model cars, ranging from the very first 356 'No.1' Roadster right up to the latest 99X Electric Formula E racer. And what makes this sprawling three-dimensional retelling of the Porsche story all the more remarkable is that it is the responsibility, and property, of just one man.

Kiwi Zhou has been working for Porsche (China) Motors Limited for nine years and in that time has become utterly immersed in the history of the brand, carefully documenting Porsche's road and racing evolution through the medium of highly detailed 1:43 and 1:18 scale models. "I started collecting model cars quite by accident nine years ago," he explains. "When I first came to Porsche China it was the 50th anniversary of the 911 and they held an internal competition for employees, the prize for which was a model of the 911 50 Jahre Edition. That was my first model car and it triggered something in my heart."

Zhou started gradually, collecting interesting examples of road and racing cars and reading up on the

history of each model wherever he could find information in books and online. But when Porsche won Le Mans in 2015, the collection began to grow exponentially. “That victory inspired me to collect all the Le Mans-winning models from 2015 all the way back to 1970,” Zhou says. “All 17 of them. And then of course, the next year it became 18. And then 19!”

As Zhou's collection grew he began to share images on social media and with colleagues, using them to tell the story of Porsche's incredible racing endeavours to anyone who would listen. Reading up on unfamiliar chapters in the marque's history would often lead him to new cars and, wherever possible, the relevant model. And conversely, sometimes seeing an unfamiliar model for sale would lead him to explore that car's historical origins. “There are two ways to my collecting,” Zhou explains with a smile. “Either I learn the story and buy the model, or I buy the model and then learn the story.”

Having started his career at Porsche in the sales department, his superiors in Shanghai soon saw that his enthusiasm and knowledge could be better used elsewhere and he was promoted to PR Manager, a role that now sees him handling brand communications covering Porsche's history on road and in motorsport. And the models remain an integral part of his working practice, with parts of the collection being used for media presentations to illustrate the evolution of certain model lines.

The idea for the latest, and by far the largest, exhibition came about last year when the PEC Shanghai realised its supply of cars would be significantly depleted while the Centre supported the Porsche Ice Experience in the north of China. The head of the Centre was keen that visitors would still have something to enjoy and suggested to Zhou that he might fill the empty space with some of his collection.

An innovative and elaborate display was soon designed using the ‘PORSCHE’ letters in seven large three dimensional dioramas depicting everything from desert rallies and race tracks to urban landscapes. On one wall, 480 of Zhou's models offered a fascinating technicolour timeline of Porsche's journey from humble Gmünd sawmill to the twin pinnacles of sports car design and international motorsport. In total, the exhibition contained around 700 of the near 900 cars in Zhou's growing personal collection.

“There's no limit to my collecting now,” Zhou says, “but adding around 100 cars to the collection every year is my target. There will always be something I'm missing, and I'm actually expecting some new models to arrive tomorrow. This is my ninth year with Porsche and I will get to 900 cars. So maybe next year I can reach 1000!”

Forced to pick a favourite, despite his diverse knowledge of, and evident passion for, so much of Porsche's road and race history, Zhou doesn't hesitate. “I have one car, which is a very detailed 1:18 scale model of the 917/30 Can-Am car. You can remove all the covers to see the chassis, engine and turbochargers. It's the pinnacle of model car making, and because I didn't study engineering, it really helps me understand the mechanics of Porsche's race cars. I can look at that car for half a day and not get bored!”

MEDIA ENQUIRIES



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