

Sunday Drives: Switzerland

21/02/2021 In the latest of Newsroom's Sunday Drives series, international photographer and kilometre-crunching Porsche enthusiast Stefan Bogner describes his annual pilgrimage to the Swiss Alps.

Where

Five famous passes in the Swiss Alps

Length

230 kilometres

Type

High-altitude pass after pass, with tunnels, waterfalls and incredible views to complement the hairpins

There are few members of the Porsche community better qualified to talk about great drives than Stefan Bogner. The renowned photographer and founder of Curves magazine has dedicated the last decade to documenting the world's very best roads, more often than not from the driving seat of his own air-cooled 911.

For someone so connected to the subject, picking one perfect road trip might have been a tough task, but for 52-year-old Bogner there will always be one that stands apart: "My favourite drive, the one I try to do at least once a year, is made up of five of the best passes in Switzerland. It's a killer thing to do and when I have visitors from abroad I have to take them there. It's one of those 'must do' trips."

Bogner is based in Munich, southern Germany, and will set off from home as early as 04:00 to make the first pass before the crowds, pointing his air-cooled 911 southwest along the empty motorway towards Lucerne before turning south to start the route in earnest on the Susten Pass. "Most of these passes were built for military transportation and can be very narrow," Bogner explains, "but the Susten Pass was built for sightseeing, so it's a beautiful, wide and winding road up to the Stein glacier."

This particular pass is a familiar stomping ground for Bogner, and has served as a backdrop for numerous photo shoots he has undertaken for Porsche in recent years. "I'd recommend driving the pass east to west and west to east if you have time because both sides are beautiful. But the real highlight is the tunnels. There's a huge waterfall over one of them so you actually drive through it, which is always kind of exciting!"

Susten Pass

The 2.2 km high Susten Pass takes about 45 minutes according to Bogner, or an hour if you're taking it easy. Once at the bottom, amid a dramatically changing landscape of lush Swiss pastures, you immediately pick up the Grimsel Pass, the second of the five, and begin to climb again. "The road takes you past a 200-year-old hotel, so if you have the chance to stay the night I would definitely recommend this place," says Bogner. "You drive over a little dam to an island on a lake, at the edge of which is the hotel. It's truly breath taking."

Grimsel Pass

The Grimsel Pass carries on to an elevation of 2,164 metres, and from its summit offers a spectacular view of the third leg of Bogner's epic alpine adventure, the famous Furka Pass. But before you get there, another intense series of sharp but scenic hairpins must be negotiated, bringing you to the bottom of the Grimsel Pass before you begin ascent number three.

The Furka Pass was the stage for James Bond's unforgettable driving duel in 'Goldfinger', and is a popular destination for movie and motoring fans alike. "The road gets very narrow at the top," Bogner says, "and it's pretty crazy. You drive for around 30 km along the mountain, turning left and right

constantly, and you always have snow up there, even in July and August."

Furka Pass

Descending from the Furka Pass you arrive at the little village of Andermatt, which serves as a useful base camp for many of the surrounding passes, and from there bear right onto Gotthard Pass, described by Bogner as "one of the world's truly great roads". A vital trade route across the Saint-Gotthard Massif connecting northern and southern Switzerland, the Gotthard Pass has roots as far back as the 13th Century but has been spared the worst of modern day traffic by a 17 km tunnel that opened beneath it in 1980.

"There are actually two roads to go up and down," Bogner continues. "One is the very old hand-paved road which they started building in around 1600. You can still drive on it though and it's an adventure you shouldn't miss out on. The photos look absolutely amazing!

Gotthard Pass

The fifth and final leg of Bogner's high altitude road trip is the Nufenen Pass, Switzerland's highest paved road at 2,478m elevation. "It's another really nice climb," Bogner says, and a very steep descent that brings you back to the Susten Pass. So you can go round again if you want!"

Nufenen Pass

Despite having cause to drive some of Porsche's most historic and important cars on these passes, including the original 911 R, the 906 Carrera, and 918 Spyder, it is Bogner's own car that is his go-to for the trip. "I always take my 911 S/T," he says. "It's a 1970 911 that I rebuilt exactly like the original, with the wider body, 2.5-litre twin-spark magnesium engine and completely stripped racing interior. That's my favourite car for the drive. It's very intense!"

After so many years in these mountains, Bogner is well-placed to pass on some useful local knowledge for anyone keen to try his road trip. He points out, first and foremost, that the passes are closed between May and November due to the snow, and have been shut as late as mid-June in his experience. But when open, they all enjoy a superb infrastructure with plentiful fuel stops and numerous charging points for electric vehicles. "There are also a lot of places where you can stop for a drink or a snack," Bogner adds. "On top of the Gotthard Pass there's a guy who sells homemade sausages cooked over a wood fire which are just so good. You don't need to worry about going hungry!"

10th anniversary of Curves magazine

Bogner has a busy year ahead, with a second 'Cars and Curves' due out in April, celebrating his specialist subjects of mountain motoring and Porsche. It's also the 10th anniversary of Curves magazine, which has prompted production of a 600-page book of aerial photography. On top of that, Bogner will be editing the three regular editions of Curves for 2021 and producing a new book about the 550 Spyder. But rest assured, he will still make time for his pilgrimage to the passes.

"Every pass has its unique character," he says in summary, "and I think that's what makes this drive so exciting. I don't think you will find such a concentrated area of spectacular scenery anywhere else in the world."

Sunday Drives

With travel restrictions limiting the opportunities for road-trips, Porsche Newsroom's new Sunday Drives series sets out to quench readers' thirst for adventure by discovering the world's most beautiful driving roads through the eyes of Porsche people around the globe.

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