Road-tripping with the President and CEO of Porsche Cars Canada

31/08/2021 Discover the incredible, and literal, lengths to which a dedicated Porsche CEO will go.

In January 2018, Marc Ouayoun was appointed CEO of Porsche Cars Canada. The 50-year-old Frenchman had been whisked across the Atlantic to grow Porsche's presence there just as he had at home, with a passion for the brand and a hands-on, face-to-face approach. This was something Ouayoun had achieved by racking up countless kilometres behind the wheel of his beloved Panamera GTS, meeting colleagues and dealers all over the country to better understand their individual needs and bring that vital, personal touch to the business. But now there was one major obstacle. Canada is fully 18 times the size of France. There was some serious driving to be done.

This summer, in the aftermath of the pandemic's travel restrictions, Ouayoun hatched a plan to visit seven of Canada's Porsche Centres, all by car on one mighty road trip from company headquarters in Toronto to Vancouver in British Columbia, traversing some 5,000 km of Canada's vast and dramatic landscapes. For the busy CEO, the journey would need to be meticulously timed to make important meetings and appointments, while hopefully allowing for some essential sightseeing along the way.

"It has a certain meaning when you drive to see people," Ouayoun reflects today. "It's not just a business trip, it's a journey, and my first intention was to proactively visit our Porsche Centres, but the other idea was to discover what Canada really means. When you drive through the country you understand it a little more."

Ouayoun set out from Toronto in a new Panamera GTS on 23 July, with the first day requiring a demanding 700 km of solid driving to Sault Ste. Marie, a city on the St Marys River in Ontario. He would repeat the distance the following day and add a further 500 km on the Sunday, teeing up an early start and a 2.5-hour drive to Porsche Centre Winnipeg for the Monday.

"It is difficult to imagine the diversity of landscapes you encounter," Ouayoun says. "It can be similar for hundreds of kilometres then change entirely in just a few. The roads in Ontario are curvy and beautiful, following Georgian Bay around Lake Huron, but when you leave Ontario you're quickly into the Prairies, where it is so, so flat and you have a completely different atmosphere. But this was one of my favourite parts of the trip. To be completely Canadian, sometimes you need to be in the middle of nowhere, and driving in the Prairies, where you feel really alone, is definitely part of that experience."

The next stage of Ouayoun's journey would see him head northwest towards Yorkton in Saskatchewan and a busy series of Porsche Centre visits, first in the regional capital of Saskatoon before heading straight on to Edmonton and Calgary in Alberta. The Kelowna region of British Columbia would then offer some welcome rest over the weekend before Ouayoun hit the road once again with another

packed schedule of Centre visits. After the Kelowna Centre itself, another five-hour drive to Porsche Centre Langley would precede the last overnight stop and final destination at Porsche Centre Vancouver, just shy of 5,000 km added to the Panamera's odometer.

"The schedule was ambitious but with the right preparations for the journey I was able to arrive on time to every appointment," Ouayoun says. "There were a few challenges of course. You have to plan ahead for refuelling, as you can go 150 km without a gas station. And you have to watch your speed. The limits vary from between 90 and 120 km/h, and the roads can be tempting, but I didn't get any tickets! Then there's the weather. One day in Ontario it was five degrees centigrade, with heavy rain and fog. The next day it was 30 degrees and sweltering sun."

Another motive behind such a long and arduous journey was Ouayoun's desire to demonstrate his own belief in the Porsche product. "The trip was a way to show that our cars are meant to be driven, that they are a part of the journey," he says, "and the Panamera GTS was incredible – so smooth and comfortable, but with lots of character and an incredible sound. It was a huge part of the experience."

The Panamera received a warm welcome in the most far-flung parts of the country, revealing to Ouayoun a hugely positive perception of the brand, even in places where Porsche cars are very rarely seen. And within the Centres themselves, he discovered that reassuring sense of community that unites Porsche wherever you find it.

"Canada is a big country. Head west from Toronto and it is 2,400 km to the next Porsche Centre in Winnipeg, but arriving there you see the reach of the brand. You talk with the team and it feels like they're your next-door neighbours because they share your passion and are just as engaged and invested. Everywhere I went I found the same welcome and hospitality, and saw a real pride in representing the brand. And arriving by car underlined my part in that I think."

Travel restrictions since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity for Ouayoun: driving would allow him to visit seven Porsche Centres, five new construction builds and the latest installation locations for the Destination Charging programme. But not only did his Canadian odyssey give him the opportunity to touch base with so many colleagues – it also presented the chance to really get to know his new home, to understand its nuances and appreciate its sheer scale, variety and history. To do that through the medium of the Panamera GTS elevated the entire journey into something very special: a tribute to a vast and unique country and a personal connection with the people who represent the Porsche brand from coast to coast.

"It's so important doing a journey by car because of the sense of freedom, the connection you make with the country you have crossed and with the car itself," Ouayoun says. "Travelling by car gives you ability to go where you want, to stop as you wish and to really discover where you are. And that's a big part of the Porsche brand – making cars with such versatility that, whatever the distance, the weather or the road conditions, you can carry on, keep exploring, meeting new people and creating great memories."

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