

CLASSIC DRIVER

A Safari Porsche Cayenne is this automotive photographer's family adventure wagon

Lead
When it came time for automotive photographer Filip Blank to buy a family car, he did what any true enthusiast would do and built a Safari-converted 955 generation Porsche Cayenne. We sat down to chat for the latest episode of The Classic Drivers.



Filip, thanks for sharing your amazing C124 Mercedes and 955 Porsche Cayenne with us. Please tell us where your love of cars came from - was it inspired by family or friends?

"For as long as I can remember, I've been passionate about cars. As a child, I collected toy cars and loved car adventures. One of my earliest memories is sitting on my dad's lap while driving along the beach in Rømø. My grandparents lived in a small town near Stuttgart, so that city and the cars produced there have always been close to my heart. My wife also preferred helping her dad in the garage rather than playing with dolls, so when we met, we immediately knew that we wanted to continue this journey called life together."



Tell us some of the cars you've owned, how did you come to create your ultimate two car garage?

"In my youth, I traveled quite a lot. After high school, I moved to London and later to the U.S., so owning a car was never a priority for me. While in the States, I had a Plymouth Grand Voyager III just to get from point A to point B — mainly school and work. When I returned to Poland, I didn't need a car at first and got around everywhere on a fixed-gear

bike.

"As an automotive photographer, I gradually gained more access to press cars. It wasn't until we started a family that we decided it was time to have something of our own, and that's when we chose the "family" Mercedes C124. After the birth of our second child, we began looking for something bigger, which led us to become the happy owners of a first-generation Porsche Cayenne."



You're right on trend with your Safari-build 955 - can you tell us about what sparked the idea and the build process?

"We love spending time in nature and try to escape the city as often as possible to keep our sanity with our two small kids. We were looking for something that would let us go off the beaten path and explore new places. Cayenne is the perfect car for this kind of adventures. It's a future classic, very reasonably priced — super comfortable, great to drive, capable off-road, and, on top of that, just plain cool."



We certainly agree with you there, the 955 looks better by the day! What advice would you give to someone wanting to do the same?

"Of course, we dream of owning a V8-powered car someday, but for now, we took a very practical approach. We chose the reliable 3.2L VR6 engine — not a speed demon, but it offers a very comfortable ride and it sounds pretty nice. We chose a car with the spring suspension because we wanted a solid base for future upgrades, which is key to success."

When it comes to equipment, it's best to start slow and see in practice what we actually need and use during our adventures. My recommendation for the beginning is a suspension lift and all-terrain (AT) tires, which improve both the car's look and its off-road capabilities. Only after that should you consider overlanding accessories like a roof rack, additional lights, recovery boards, etc."



You probably made the right choice — the VR6 is a great engine! How reliable has your Cayenne been since it's conversion? Have you taken it on any exciting adventures?

"We've had the Cayenne for over a year now, and we haven't had any breakdowns. We topped up the refrigerant to improve the air conditioning, dealt with minor corrosion, and fixed a small exhaust leak. Apart from these routine maintenance tasks—completely normal for an almost 20-year-old car—nothing bad has happened.

Last year was mostly about developing the project and traveling around Poland. This year, we took it to the FAT Ice Race in Austria and already have several more trips planned. Next year, when I turn 40 and our Cayenne turns 20, I'd love to take it on a trip through the Alps, passing through Stuttgart for a mandatory photo in front of the Porsche Museum, and finishing the route with a view of Mont Blanc."

That sounds like an excellent plan, you'll have to let us know how it goes! Tell us about your W124. Many agree that this is the pinnacle of Mercedes build quality, but what attracted you to this car in particular?

"I've always had a soft spot for cars designed by Bruno Sacco. The lines of all the models he created are truly timeless — even the W220. You could easily say that the W124 is not only the best Mercedes ever made but also one of the greatest and most important cars in automotive history. Despite its boxy shape, the C124 has a certain lightness and elegance that I've always loved. So when the opportunity to buy one came up, we didn't have to think twice."



Bruno Sacco was an absolute master, his designs have all aged incredibly well. You're clearly a family man, have your kids shown signs of car obsession too? Have you been on any memorable family trips in your cars?

"Our oldest son is obsessed with cars. He loves traveling, and whenever I get the chance, I let him sit on my lap and steer. Since he was little, we've been guessing car brands on the way to preschool, and his Hot Wheels collection has already grown to nearly 300 models.

"Our daughter loves cars too—as long as they're pink. On the way to daycare, we practice slaloms and refine our racing lines, and when taking corners a bit more dynamically, we hear giggles from the back and enthusiastic cheers: "Go, Daddy, go!"

"We try to make every trip memorable and each time show them and teach them something new but the most memorable and the longest trip was not in our car, but in a Grand California driving to Italy for our friend's wedding. Johan was about 3 and Petra was just a couple months old, but they made it so easy and fun! We're so lucky to have kids who love to travel."



It's great to hear that you're passing the passion down to the next generation. Now that you've got experience with your Cayenne, what would your dream Safari build be?

"I fell in love with Cayenne and would love to build another one someday and go crazy with a 955 Turbo or 957 GTS with a classic 911 on the trailer behind us. My wife dreams about a Bentley Continental GT on AllTerrain tires... so I guess I'm gonna have to build one for her someday!"

That sounds like a perfectly reasonable wish from your wife, you need to make it happen! To end, please tell us your ultimate driving song.

"We drive German cars, so it goes without saying that we listen to German Techno music from the 90s! Joking aside, we loved driving the empty streets in our C124 during the pandemic and we listened a lot to an album by Tom Misch called "What Kinda Music" released in 2020. It's still our favourite driving music to this day."

Photos by Filip Blank and Szymon Adamczyk

Gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/cars/a-safari-porsche-cayenne-automotive-photographers-family-adventure-wagon>
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.