CLASSIC DRIVER

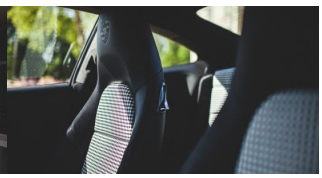
One in a million – driving to Le Mans in a very special Porsche 911

Lead
Of course, there are a million ways to travel to Le Mans, but perhaps none as special as in the one millionth Porsche 911. Classic Driver embarked on an unforgettable journey...

No pressure...

As I nestled down into the houndstooth seats and twisted the key – painted the same shade of Irish Green as the exterior – as the turbocharged flat six barked to life, the enormity of the task ahead of me sunk in. Classic Driver had been asked to deliver the millionth Porsche 911 from Eimeldingen, just north of Basel, to Le Mans, where Dr Wolfgang Porsche and Mark Webber would parade the car in front of 200,000 spectators. No pressure, then.

The perfect pairing



One can't think of Le Mans without instinctively thinking about Porsche, such is the marque's relationship with the legendary endurance race. It's won outright at La Sarthe a staggering 18 times, and while it's the spaceship-like prototypes that normally make it onto the posters, the 'humble' 911 has also made its voice heard, scoring numerous successes. That's why, although the millionth 911 has, to this point, ventured only to Scotland, this journey felt like a homecoming.

Far more than the sum of its parts

There’s nothing extraordinary about the millionth 911. Porsche could have chosen for it to be a bewinged RS model with a zillion horsepower, but no. This is a ‘normal’ Carrera S with iron brakes and a good old-fashioned manual gearbox — a fine representation of the 54-year-old formula that’s become Porsche’s lifeblood.

Of course, the myriad details — and the ever-present feeling of sheer disbelief that you could possibly be in the presence of *the* millionth 911 — add to its allure. Aside from the numerous plaques placed around the car, nods to the very first 911 built include the Irish Green paint, gold badges and lettering, houndstooth upholstery, wooden steering wheel and dash trim, chrome rings around the dials, and light green digits. There’s also a very smart houndstooth holdall filled with cleaning equipment, a special cover, and a retro tyre-pressure gauge from Porsche Classic. It’s the little things...

Ample opportunity

Our 800km or so journey to Le Mans took us via the picturesque towns of Dijon, Auxerre, and Orléans, providing ample opportunity to not just get a real feeling for this most special of Porsches but also reflect on the global impact of the 911. To some, it’s the best all-round sports car money can buy. To others, it’s life.

Progress on the road was good, save for some shudder-inducing standing water north of Dijon — having read all about the certain handling characteristics of the 911, I wasn’t going to take any liberties, even if that meant crawling at 50km/h. It’s true what they say — the 911 really is the best real-world car. Whether you’re howling along a twisting country road or munching mile after highway mile in seventh gear, it does so with a level of competency that never fails to impress. This, rather proudly, being my first drive in a modern 911, I can definitely see the appeal.

Very Important Porsche

In Switzerland and eastern France, we slipped largely under the radar, but as we neared Le Mans, it was an entirely different story. Have you ever felt like a fully paid-up celebrity? Because whenever we arrived at the Circuit de la Sarthe, be it at the main entrance, the Mulsanne Straight, or on the Bugatti circuit, we were flooded with people, all of whom know exactly what this car was and what it means. Understandably, it’s the Germans who seem to gravitate most, taking frenzied selfies or simply shaking my hand. It was remarkable.

Milestone moment

Making the pilgrimage to Le Mans, be it for the Classic or the 24 Hours, is always such a special and evocative occasion. But to have done it in a car of such significance — what is arguably the most important production Porsche in the world right now — is an honour beyond measure. After its world tour, ‘our’ Irish Green beauty will retire to the Porsche Museum, where hundreds of thousands of others will be able to admire and appreciate it. But for the time being, we’re rather proud to say that Classic Driver has spent more time and put more miles on the millionth 911 than anyone else. Thank you, Porsche.

Photos: Mathieu Bonnevie for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery

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