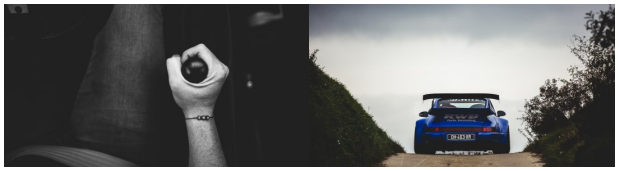
# From lager beer to craft Champagne with France’s first RWB Porsche

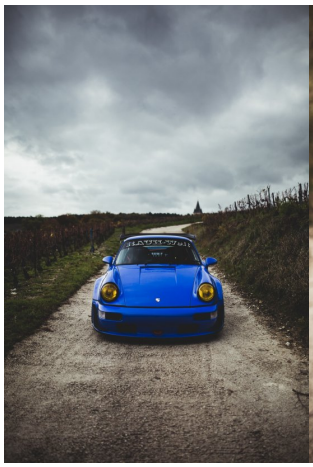
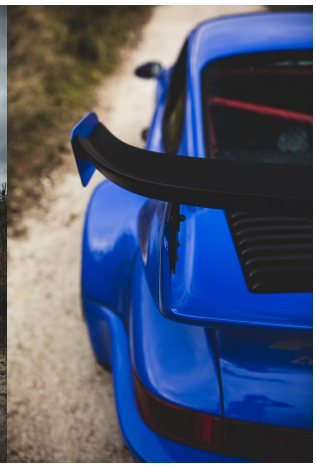
**Lead**
Akira Nakai’s unmistakeable RWB Porsches have come a long way since his very first 930, affectionately dubbed ‘Stella Artois’ after his favourite beer. Like it or loathe it, his ‘rough-world’ approach to Porsche modification has garnered worldwide recognition — meet ‘Champagne’, France’s first RWB…

Rauh-Welt Begriff has been leaving its idiosyncratic mark on air-cooled Porsche 911s around the world for over 15 years. You can spot one of founder Nakai-san’s wild Porsche 911s from a mile off. With their comically wide and beautifully riveted wheel arches, gigantic wings, and ground-scraping bumpers, they’re brazen machines symbolic not just of Nakai-san’s freethinking philosophy but also the burgeoning and wonderfully diverse global craze for modified air-cooled Porsches.



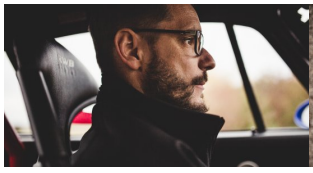
So how did three modern Porsche dealers in the Champagne region — Mathieu Bonnefond, Hervé Catrin, and Adrian Collot — manage to bring RWB to France? “While not a Porsche fanatic like me and Hervé, Adrian loves personalised and modified cars,” explains Bonnefond. “He saw what RWB was doing and asked why no one was building them in France — naturally, we were interested.” After visiting Profusion Customs, RWB’s British branch, the trio was introduced to Nakai-san (you don’t just contact him directly) and the rest, as they say, is history.

In order to demonstrate the breadth and tailor-made nature of RWB's projects, the first car — which will be retained by RWB France as a demonstrator — had to be bold. With 993 prices through the roof, and having considered the 930 a little too 'old school', the trio settled on a 964. Although much of the specification is down to the customer, from the outset, Nakai-san is involved in the process. The shade of Maritime Blue on this car, for example, was chosen over the original suggestion of red, because, to quote Nakai-san, "I build too many red cars."

Of the varying extremes of wide body-kits handcrafted by Nakai-san for clients' cars, a *slightly* less audacious one was chosen, so as not to alienate the French purists. But Adrian did go to town on the mechanicals, implementing revised suspension, a 997 braking system, and a bespoke valve-operated exhaust system. On the inside, the saddlery was entrusted to Reims-based specialist Sellerie Rémoise, and similarly, the local Carrosserie de Cormontreuil completed the paintwork.

The most exciting (and signature) part of any RWB's build process, though, is when Nakai-san personally visits to install the bodywork, alone and by hand. "To use Nakai-san's services is to be welcomed into his family," Bonnefond comments. "Above all, this is a human adventure — he wants people not to speculate on his car but rather to get back to the essentials of driving pleasure and meeting with like-minded friends."



And even if the styling isn't to your tastes, it's hard not to be impressed by the way Nakai-san, almost always with a cigarette pursed between his lips, perfectly cuts away the donor car's bodywork entirely by eye. Even the way he applies the finishing touches, such as the windscreen decal or the white script on the tyres, is done with an enviable and impressive sense of effortlessness — YouTube it, we guarantee you'll be mesmerised.

Given the car's divisive looks, the trio had expected a barrage of negative responses, particularly in a country so rich in traditional automotive culture. "Surprisingly, we only had a few bad remarks when we streamed the video of Nakai-san cutting the wings on our Facebook page," recalls Bonnefond. "A lot of people suddenly became coachbuilding apprentices that day, saying that there appeared to be no rust-proofing and that the quality of the work was poor. But people who were here and really saw his work have a different point of view."

In fact, a number of renowned coachbuilders visited Reims to see the RWB 'show' and found Nakai-san's way of working extraordinary. "He is very precise in his moves and doesn't need to make any twice — I challenge anyone to do the same in such a short period of time." Once Nakai-san had finished the car with his finger signature, its reception was reportedly fantastic. "We couldn't find anywhere to park in Paris because we got mobbed with people wherever we went," says Bonnefond. "Funnily enough, even the French television chef Cyril Lignac stopped us to praise the car and ask what it was."

Rauh-Welt Begriff, Magnus Walker, Liberty Walk, and even Singer Vehicle Design — other than their popularity, these modification maestros all share one thing in common, and that's that they divide opinion, particularly in Europe. But that's sort of the point. Nakai-san doesn't care for critics. He cares to see his unique cars being driven and enjoyed by their owners. Needless to say, RWB's order books are open.

Look closely at this RWB and you'll see a small Champagne cork affixed to the license plate — a nod to the car's namesake. Well, the ring from a can of Stella Artois just wouldn't have looked the same, would it?

*Photos: Mathieu Bonnevie for Classic Driver © 2017*

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