

CLASSIC DRIVER

[These four friends from St. Moritz share a love of the Porsche 996](#)

Lead

Underestimated, unloved, misunderstood – the 996 generation of the Porsche 911 had a hard time with purists from the start. But suddenly, the fried egg headlights and water-cooled engine have become hip! So, we set up a summit meeting with four Swiss enthusiasts and their young classics in the Alps.

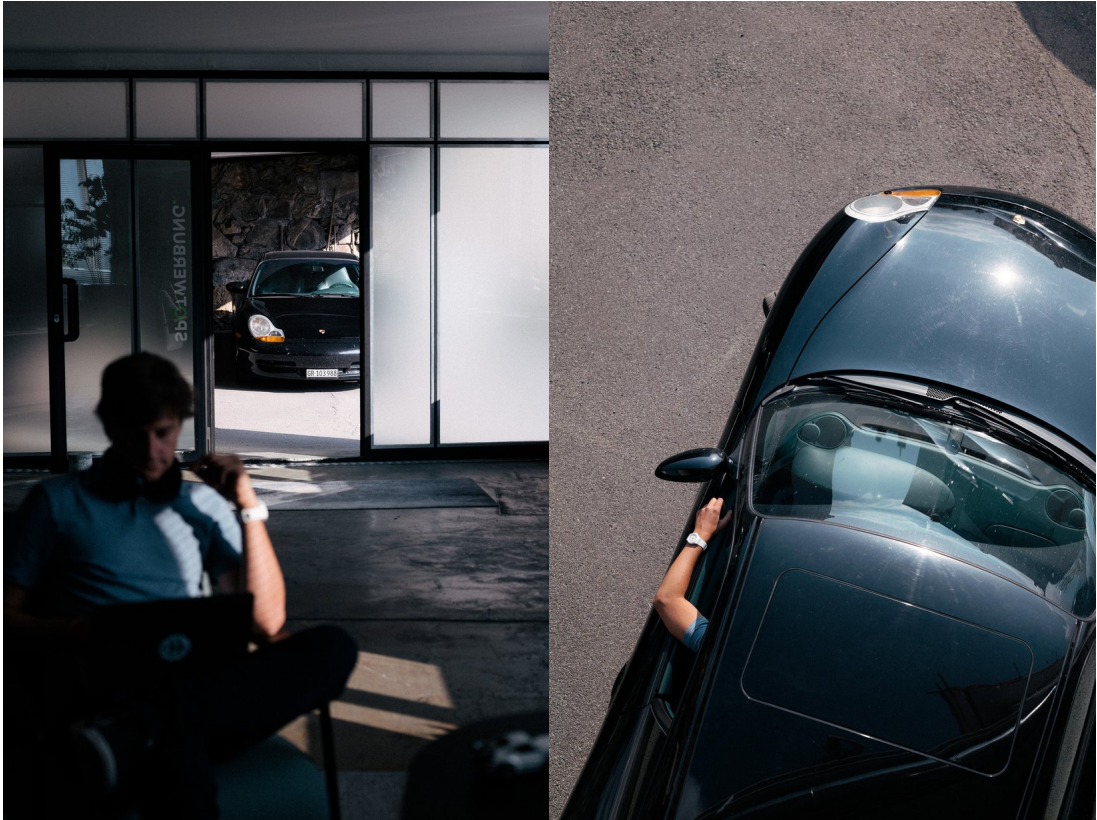


Timeless, coveted, revered – the Porsche 911 is the iconic sports car that almost everyone can agree on. In fact, Porsche only managed to polarise people once with the 911: when the fifth generation with a water-cooled boxer engine and fried-egg-style headlights hit the streets in 1997, Porsche purists were briefly turned on their heads. And although the 996 generation sold brilliantly and put the company back on the road to success, the criticism resonated in the collective consciousness. While prices for the classic, air-cooled 993 generation of the 911 have skyrocketed over the past ten years, the water-cooled successor has remained affordable – making it interesting for younger enthusiasts between the ages of 30 and 40. Enthusiasts like Andrea, Nico, Silvano and Ted.





If you want to feel the pulse of automotive culture and the latest car trends in Switzerland, you will often not find what you are looking for in Basel, Geneva or Zurich, but in the small mountain town of St. Moritz. After all, the international jetset with the trendiest grand tourers and off-road vehicles have been showing up in the sophisticated Alpine destination for decades, while the rarest sports cars romp about on the Engadine Alpine passes. Even the latest classic trends are often born in St. Moritz. And so it is that recently, between the Albula and Julier passes, one increasingly sees the characteristic headlights of a Porsche 996 with Graubünden license plates in the rear-view mirror. In the evenings or at weekends, the local Porsche community comes together here to roam the Alpine territory in packs with their young classic cars from Zuffenhausen. But why are the once so polarizing 911s currently so popular with the young creative minds of St. Moritz? A meeting with four friends and their sports cars at the Bernina Pass was supposed to clear things up.



"I've always had a soft spot for underdogs," laughs Andrea Klainguti. "Two years ago I was finally able to fulfill my dream of owning a Porsche 911." The creative director and photographer was born in the Engadin and his father instilled his passion for fast cars at an early age. He earned his racing license at the wheel of a 1982 Porsche 911 SC at the Hockenheimring. During the day, Andrea works for a communications agency in St. Moritz, but after work he prefers to fly his black Porsche 911 Carrera from 1997 with the nephrite-green sports seats over the Bernina Pass. "My Carrera already had more than 200,000 kilometers on the clock and was sitting in a garage covered in dust when I found it, but the sound of the open exhaust convinced me. Since then, I've enjoyed every day behind the wheel - regardless of whether I'm driving the Porsche to go shopping, to pick up my son from daycare, on family holidays or on my way to go snowboarding."



As a car from the first year of production, his 911 only has simple traction control. At the same time, the puristic Carrera is even 30 kilograms lighter than the GT3 of the 996 generation. "In theory, my Porsche drives like it's on rails, but the 300 hp on the rear wheels need to be mastered. For a 25-year-old car, it's really amazingly fast!" It's the combination of analogue driving experience and the right dose of modern technology that appeals to Andrea. "My favorite design details are the lights that Pinky Lai designed back then, and which some purists resented. But they distinguish the 996 from all previous and later 911 generations - that's what makes them so cool in my opinion." Although the prices for "Fried Egg Porsches" have been rising since the 25th anniversary of the model, Andrea doesn't see his Carrera as an investment. "I'm not thinking about selling. I'd rather drive it until the wheels fall off!"



Ted Gushue, Editor-in-Chief of Type 7 and founder of ERG Media, also had a passion for Porsche in his family. The American media entrepreneur spent his childhood in the back seat of a silver 1976 G model that has been in the family since the early 1990s. In his second home of St. Moritz, Ted can usually be seen behind the wheel of his Porsche 911 Turbo with the X50 performance package. "I never understood why this 911 polarized people so much. When it came out I was a teenager and I adored it. The Porsche 996 Turbo from the video game Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed was the object of my desire. When I was finally able to afford it, I was delighted at how cheap it had become."

Ted's Turbo was built in 2001 and is painted in the color Seal Gray Metallic, the interior is upholstered in black leather - just like the first Carrera GT. "I love this color combination, it really flatters the lines perfectly," explains Ted. "I particularly like the air inlets in front of the rear wheels: they are both elegant and incredibly concise."



Ultimately, however, it was the combination of aesthetic understatement and almost unlimited power that convinced him of the Turbo: "The car is a cruise missile – especially with the X50 performance package. You're gliding along the German autobahn at 250 km/h and you're just happy." In the Swiss mountains, the journalist, editor and photographer travels a little more slowly. And yet he was fascinated by the switchbacks around St. Moritz: "These are simply the best roads in the world. But here in the mountains the weather can change in a flash, so you need a car that you can rely on in all conditions." A car like the Porsche 911 Turbo with its all-wheel drive.



Silvano Vitalini also trusts the turbo trump card. The restaurateur, tailor, athlete and entrepreneur grew up in the Engadine and lives in St. Moritz. He also fell in love with the omnipresent car culture of his homeland at an early age. His Porsche 911 Turbo with manual transmission rolled off the assembly line in 2002 and is painted an elegant dark blue. The leather seats are cream colored. "Mid-thirties is exactly the right age to finally afford a Porsche 911 Turbo," says Silvano with a wink. "I just couldn't resist those hips and air intakes. And isn't this color combination perfect?"



The equipment, the performance and the design of the top 911 model from the early 2000s completely won him over. Today he uses the Porsche on a daily basis. "The 996 Turbo just offers incredible value for money. And for a 20-year-old car, it's amazingly modern and reliable. You can get it out of the garage in any weather." When Silvano isn't skiing down the slopes, he prefers to drive his Porsche on the Bernina, Albula or Maloja Passes. Often, he is joined on his pass tours by a friend in a second 911. And what could be nicer than following the deserted bends and hairpins back-to-back on the ideal line?



It almost seems as if the young 911 friends from St. Moritz had infected each other with their love for the 996. For Nico Camenisch, who grew up in St. Moritz and runs a workshop in Pontresina as an automotive mechatronics and diagnostics technician, it is even the third of its kind. "I've always dreamed of a Porsche 911. The 996 was simply the only classic 911 I could afford as a young guy. And the more I dealt with it, the more I enjoyed it."



After a Carrera 4 and a Carrera 4S, he now drives a black 2002 Porsche 911 GT3. "The car actually came from the factory as a Carrera," explains Nico. "Later, however, Porsche converted the main components to a GT3 at the customer's request. Compared to the 'original' GT3, the interior has remained comparatively comfortable. There are no racing seats, no roll cage. I also like the delicate shape. It's sort of an early GT3 with a touring package."



Nico's Porsche 911s were all manual. After two all-wheel-drive 911s, however, he had to get used to driving a 911 with rear-wheel drive. "It's significantly lighter and doesn't forgive that much when you push it to its limits." The GT3 wants to be mastered, especially on its favorite road, the steep and winding Maloja Pass. Nevertheless, Nico is out and about in his purist 911 all year round, even in the snow or on a hunt – another passion he shares with Andrea and Silvano. "As Ferry Porsche said: 'You can use a Porsche 911 for pretty much everything'."



If you think about it, the reasons for the alpine Porsche community are obvious: while in Zurich, Milan or Paris people meet for an aperitif at the bar after work, in St. Moritz they just do a quick spin around their alpine serpentine circuit before dinner. And the agile, light, analogue and affordable Porsche 996 is simply the perfect sports car for this. "After all, here in the Engadin we have the most beautiful passes on our doorstep, and we meet up all the time to ride. That welds you together." And when the tyres and brakes are a bit more stressed after a quick spin over the Julier and Ofen Passes, Nico in his workshop makes sure that his friends' 911s are in perfect condition for the next after-work ride. And who says you have to be home for dinner anyway? After all, the Ristorante "Albergo Cambrena" on the Bernina Pass is said to have the best pizzoccheri for a pit stop. Or maybe you would prefer Rösti with a fried egg on top?

Fotos: Fabrizio D'Aloisio

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