

CLASSIC DRIVER

[The Brock Keen Survival Guide to Camping in your Porsche](#)

Lead

Brock Keen, better known by his Instagram handle @996roadtrip, practically invented the art of Porsche-based camping with his roof tent-equipped 996 Carrera 4S. We caught up with the intrepid Porsche explorer during a recent European road trip.



Where did your obsession with cars begin? Was there always something about Porsches that appealed to you?

I didn't grow up in a family that was all about driving and cars, but we did do tonnes of roads trips in our 1985 Volkswagen Jetta turbo diesel. Those experiences triggered something in me, I just enjoyed being in cars. After that, it realized that there are more fun cars to drive than a Jetta, which is basically a tractor.



When did you fall in love with Porsches?

I was seven years old, and I went over to a friend's house in Lynn County, Oregon - "the grass seed capital" of the world. In the corner of his barn was always this sleek-looking thing under a cover. One day, her mom said, "Let's go for a ride to a theme park nearby!" And it turned out to be a Porsche 928. I can remember looking over her shoulder and seeing we were doing over 100mph. I'm sure my parents wouldn't have appreciated it at the time, but that was probably the trigger moment for me. Then later down the line, a the father of a great high school friend of mine had a RUF-tuned 964 Turbo and that was my first ride in a 911, which was quite a place to start.



When did the journey with your current Porsche 996 begin? Was that always your dream car?

We found the car in 2017, or I should say it found us. It had been sitting at a local Mercedes dealership in their wholesale warehouse for months. It had two flat tyres and a dead battery. Frankly, I wasn't looking for a 996. I was looking for a 964 to replace my Audi S4 for road trips, but when this car fell in my lap the price was too good to pass up. It had low miles, it was just as I would have spec'd it: Atlas Grey, sports seats, carbon fibre package, and sports exhaust. I just couldn't not buy the car.



So you took it for a drive...

Yes! We got up early and went and test drove it, it was half an hour of really pushing the car, and I simply couldn't give the keys back. That was in summer of 2017. It didn't take me long to put a roof rack on it, as my goal was just to continue using it as I had my Audi. I put my road bike and paddle board on there as well and just enjoyed it.



And what made you decide to put a roof tent on it and go camping?

I wish I could claim the brilliant idea of camping on top of a Porsche 911, but the roof tent was a bit of an accident. We were at an REI garage sale, where everything that is returned over the year is put up for sale at a really deep discount. I had always talked trash about rooftop tents, I thought they were ridiculous and completely impractical. So my thought process was: I'm gonna buy it and sell it to one of these suckers who overpays for these things. I bought it for a third of the original price; it was returned because it "smelled funny".

And the Porsche just felt like the perfect fit?

I first put it on my Range Rover Classic to get it home, but it didn't fit. As I couldn't return it, I brought the 911 and I had to convince one of the employees to help me put it on the car. They wouldn't even let me do it at the store because they were convinced it would crush the roof, so we had to go off the property. Anyway, I got an employee a six pack of beer and it was fine.



It's not every day that you see a Porsche 911 with a roof-mounted tent...

On my way home, the amount of looks and reactions I got was crazy. Thumbs up, one guy gave me the finger, thumbs down, everybody was reacting. I thought that was interesting, but I don't blame them: It's a big square box on top of a curvy car. So I got home, and opened the tent up on the driveway. As soon as that happened, my dog Lucy just wanted to get in. We helped her up, and my wife decided she wanted to get in too and I took a picture. The photo was too cool, so we decided to just leave it on and go camping. That's really the origin story. Ironically, the car is lowered on H&R sports springs, which personally I think helps offset the weight of the tent. It's not ideal for going off-road and camping, but I make it work.



How long has Lucy been joining you on your adventures? What are the pros and cons of having a canine sidekick on your travels?

She's been with us since day one of the whole experience, we actually bought the Range Rover Classic for Lucy, but the hilarious thing is the Porsche is more her car than the Range Rover. We brought her home at 8 weeks old from the breeder in the Porsche and before we got the roof tent, my wife and I went on a 3000 mile trip in the Range Rover and Lucy came with us the whole way. She goes everywhere with us, the only thing we really have to think about is having a little extra food and water in the tent for her. She's a big teddy bear so it's just super cozy.



You've probably camped in more Porsche 911 models than anyone on the planet. Can you rank the 911 variants from worst to best?

If we're talking about Porsche 911 camping, I personally think the 996 is the favourite, and that's not just because I'm a big 996 guy. I camped on top of a 1980 Porsche 911 SC, and on top of the Taycan Cross Turismo. While you'd think that would be great because it has so much more room, you have a little bit of range anxiety, which isn't super conducive for going out in the wilderness. The neat thing about the 996 - and especially C2s which don't have the front diff - is there's so much room in the frunk. It's cavernous. You can store so much stuff in there, two chairs, a table, a hatchet, usually a bundle of firewood. I can put two gallons of water behind each seat, a dog on the rear shelf, and our backpacks go under the shelf, while everything else just gets folded up into the tent, which means we don't have to sacrifice comfort. We don't have to sleep in sleeping bags, we have a memory foam mattress, a down duvet cover and comfortable pillows. People like to think if you're camping in a Porsche you're glamping, but really it's closer to backpacking, so you still have to be conscientious of what you pack. I've got well over 150 nights on top of the 996, which has helped me to refine that process.



How do you think the perception of the 996 has changed since you started your account? Has it graduated from being the ugly duckling it once was?

I do. I think that people are starting to realise that the 996 is as much of a 911 as any other model. It just happened to be the line in the sand for the brand. Everyone always complains about the headlights, not that it's water-cooled. However, the beauty of the front end of the 996.1 and 996.2 is that it's a defining moment for Porsche. You can look at it and see this is the moment they made the transition from air to water-cooling. I think that's something that was frowned upon early on, and if you have something that stirs the pot it always turns out that way. But in the long term it becomes an important piece of history. I think the prices of 996s right now prove that, they're just getting more and more expensive.



You and Lucy get to choose one car and one road to drive, where are you going?

We would definitely take our 996, that's the no-brainer there, but there are so many good roads. Sam Fane (of 'Seen Through Glass') came through Oregon during his big world tour. We went out for a day of driving and camping, and he set up a Go Pro in the back of the 996, and we realised Lucy can anticipate corners, so she leans into the bends, it's the most wild thing. We were both blown away. So she's good in the corners, but we're better on the big sweeping turns. Highway 395 is in the eastern Sierra Nevada mountain range. I would drive down the Oregon Coast, from seaside Oregon down all the way to San Francisco. Then from San Francisco east to Yosemite, and I would drive over Tioga Pass, it's a seasonal pass, then I'd get on highway 395 and drive south to the Alabama hills. That's my favourite road trip ever, we've done it many times, but that's what I'd do. By the way, Alabama hills are not in Alabama! A lot of people don't realise how good the Oregon Coast is compared to Highway 1 or the California Coastline.



What’s next for you and Lucy? Are there any big drives you have planned in the future?

Next up is Rennsport Reunion 7, which is the anniversary of our first long road trip in the 996 with the roof tent; our first big trip was Rennsport 6. Then, I'll probably be going to Thailand in December for 'Das Treffen' and I'll be doing a road trip in Northern Thailand. Had anyone ever told me that if you put a roof tent on a 996 your life is going to change, I would have laughed them out the door. But it changed everything in my life, everything, and I'm basically living my dream!

Photos by Luca di Blasi

Gallery

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