

From Sea to Sky

Text by Sean Cridland

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Deutschland Mit Den Autoliebhaber

GERMANY MEN'S TOUR 2026

By Sean Cridland

This past April I was fortunate to be included in a group of ardent Porsche 356 enthusiasts for the 2026 edition of John Willhoit's invitational, Germany Men's Tour (GMT). Though my work has taken me to the "fatherland" a few times before, this was my most pleasurable, but also the most professionally valuable of my trips so far. Though I almost always travel alone, this 11-day trip earned me several rich experiences and 14 new friends from diverse backgrounds.. We had a surgeon, a Hollywood director, a landscaper, a couple of architects, a dealer in fine cars, a small-scale industrialist, businesspeople in various fields, automotive craftsmen, Mr. Willhoit, and this incredibly lucky writer, all bound together by a love and deep interest in the world of Porsche.

After landing in Frankfurt on Thursday, April 9, we loaded our gear into three vans and drove north to the small city of Heuchelheim, for *Kaffee und Kuchen*, prepared by Mr. Willhoit's wife Sabine, along with friends Renate and Helmut. A short sit-down for coffee, cakes, and pastries in Sabine's family home—a time capsule of early



Our first stop was at Mrs. Willhoit's family home where we were treated to *Gebäcke, Kuchen, and Kaffee*.

On the cover: The photos for both the cover and contents page of this issue come from the lens of David Witty, and from the recent 356/912 Rendezvous. The cover is from a scenic drive on the Blue Ridge Parkway, while the photo on this page is from a special visit to the Bristol Motor Speedway in Tennessee. Usually a venue for NASCAR races, David says that many of the 356s there that day needed a lot of throttle to stay up on the track's corners, which are banked as much as 28 degrees. For more on this gathering, turn to page 26.



Udo Scharf welcomed us to his shop.

20th century German life—was the perfect respite after a long plane ride before continuing to our lodgings for the night, the Hotel-Amical. Located in Wuppertal, a small industrial town known for its Schwebebahn suspended monorail, our base for the next three days was interesting for its somewhat spartan but artful décor, decorated throughout with graphics and sculptures inspired by modern artists Jeff Koonz, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and others.

Once settled in, we took a short jog across town to visit the small shop of Udo Scharf, a diehard enthusiast of air-cooled Porsches. Udo treated the group to beers and good stories, then accompanied



It's always good idea to try the local specialties, in this case the wiener schnitzel with white asparagus and local potatoes.



Every hardcore Porsche enthusiast has heard of the Schwimmwagen, but we got to see a real one up close.



The vast Retro Classics show in Essen had everything one could imagine, and more.

us to dinner at the restaurant Aposto. Though a few of the guys had been on the GMT before, some of us were still settling into the pace of the tour. Ice-breaking conversations ensued, after which everyone was ready for some sleep and the first of our big adventures.

Friday, April 10, started with a wonderful German-style breakfast of bacon and eggs complemented with freshly baked rolls of various grains, several varieties of cheeses, local jams, and excellent coffee before loading into the vans for a 40-minute drive to Essen for Retro Classics. We spent the day taking in several large buildings of cars, wares, sights, sounds, and people. If you can think of something—

This Roy Lichtenstein print was just one of the many modern pop art pieces decorating our lodging in Wuppertal.



anything—car-related you want or would like to see, it'll most likely be at Retromobile. While there I was able to meet up with a couple of friends, René de Boer and Rüdiger Mayer. You may have seen René's articles or reviews in various automotive magazines and websites. And if you haven't seen the cookbook *Racing and Recipes* that Rüdiger wrote with Jürgen Barth several years ago, check it out. It's one of the cleverest Porsche-themed books I've come across and belongs on every enthusiast's shelf. The recipes are quite good, too!

After a short rest at the hotel, we headed off to dinner at the Neue Welt restaurant, where I enjoyed a local delicacy, *spargel*, or white asparagus with hollandaise sauce, along with an excellent wiener schnitzel. After our first shared adventure, people were loosening up, telling stories and forming new friendships.

Saturday morning we were off to Dirk Flüß's workshop to see some excellent examples of early VWs and Schwimmwagens. But we couldn't stay long because we had another appointment coming up that would occupy several hours of our day.

Manfred Hering gave us an extensive tour of his industrial-scale restoration shop, Early 911S.



Manfred Hering's restoration shop, Early 911S, as the name describes, caters almost exclusively to air-cooled 911s, from the earliest 901 to the last 993, but it also had a few 356s in process. The facility is impressive for the high quality of the workmanship, but also for its industrial-level scale, all of it kept operating-room



Every meal on the trip brought new friends closer, and generated new stories from each daily adventure.

John Willhoit concentrates before taking a swing during the intensely competitive (ha-ha) mini-golf tournament.



Just a small sampling of the selection of work recently completed at Early 911S.

clean. Oddly, my personal favorite at Early 911S was something that looked almost exactly like a VW Vanagon but was in fact a Porsche B32.

As the saying goes, all work and no play makes Johan a dull boy, so after another great lunch we proceeded to the Freizeitpark Fischerta for one of the high points of the trip: a mini-golf tournament at one of the most ragtag putt-putt courses I've ever seen. No matter, the rough character of each fairway made it that much more fun. My group was composed of John Willhoit, Rocky Taylor, Al Thomas, Bob Keeler, and me. After some incredibly bad shots, I managed to place second overall in the tournament to Andy Eisener and everyone had a fun time before we headed back to the Amertal for a rest, followed by a great steak dinner at Eisenwerkschänke, which translates as "The Ironworks Tavern."

With hundreds of pots and pans and cooking utensils hanging from the ceiling, lively wall art, and a gregarious wait staff, Eisenwerkschänke is famous for its quaint, kitschy decor and excellent steaks. It's also where I first encountered the regional dark lager called Dunkel, known for its exceptionally tangy yet smooth flavor. It became my drink of choice for the rest of the trip.

On Sunday, April 12, we broke camp from the Amical for a 1.75-hour drive south to the world-famous Nürburgring, where we were all signed up for a Ring-Taxi ride around the world-famous Nordschleife racing circuit. I rode in the back seat of a performance-



The steak dinner at Eisenwerschänke tasted as good as it looked, especially when paired with a stein of Dunkel beer.



Mr. Willhoit shares an entertaining story that had Mark Hutto hiding his face.

tuned BMW M5 next to Mark Ellison, while Mike Benson enjoyed the action up front with our driver Tomas. Of course one wonders just how fast, really, a four-seater can go, but as we pulled out of the pit area and onto the course we... *whoa, that's fast!*

Tomas got *on it*, dancing on the edge of adhesion all the way around the 20-kilometer, 170-corner circuit, passing many cars with only inches of clearance... and no one ever passed us. As someone who's raced and given rides on the famed "Green Hell" for at least 15 years, I'm sure Tomas could have gone harder, but he didn't need to. I was impressed! I'll say this about the Nürburgring: like the



Peter Hofmann's Classic Parts in Saarbrücken is a quality restoration shop and parts supplier.



Grant Larsen, John Willhoit, Sabine and Peter Hofmann, and their lovely dog, Phoebe.



Our Ring Taxi driver Tomas pushed the limits of adhesion all the way around the famed Nordschleife, much to our delight.

Grand Canyon or the Taj Mahal, everyone has seen a photo or heard a story, but until you experience the place for yourself, you won't really get it. After that ride, we got it!

From there we journeyed to the small but interesting Zylinderhaus Museum for a quick tour and a snack before driving another hour south to the Blesius Garten Hotel, in Trier, Germany, and dinner at the hotel. Wow, what a day.

Monday, April 13, started with a visit to see Peter Hofmann and his lovely wife Sabine at Classic Parts in Saarbrücken. Theirs is a medium-sized shop specializing in 356s, early 911s, and 912s. But they also have a deep fascination with Porsche racing history and count among their very nice collection of cars a Jean Behra 550 and a 904 once campaigned by Brumos legend Peter Gregg. Also joining the group at the Hofmann's shop was recently retired Porsche design ace Grant Larson. The Hofmanns treated us to some wonderful coffee and beautiful and delicious cakes. Their little dog, Phoebe, who bore a striking resemblance to the cartoon character Tin Tin's dog Snowy, was also a hit with the group.

After a brief lunch along the way, we moved on to one of the coolest, most amazing, and craziest museums I've ever visited. The Auto und Technik Museum Sinsheim is about an hour north of Stuttgart. Name a motorized vehicle of some kind—locomotive, airplane, military vehicle, racing car, motorcycle, bicycle, hot rod, submarine, or anything else—it's there in numbers. There's an amazing display of World War II North African military equipment. They have both supersonic passenger jets, the Concorde SST and a Russian TU-144, up on pylons and you can climb into them. There's also a submarine you can crawl down in, and... and... there's



Just pulling up to the Auto und Technik museum in Sinsheim is overwhelming, with its displays of several aircraft on pylons, including this Concorde SST.



The Auto und Technik included a couple dozen classic Formula 1 cars...

no end. If you're enough of a Porsche fan to visit Stuttgart, be sure to clear a few hours to visit the Auto und Technik!

Then it was on to Jochen Bader's place just outside of Stuttgart to check out his small but wonderfully decorated shop/man-cave. There he has one of the best collections of Porsche-themed books I've ever seen, including my own history of the Brumos Porsche dealership and racing operations, which I autographed for him, of course.



Jochen Bader's small shop has one of the finest collections of Porsche books and memorabilia anywhere.



This author's Porsche-themed hotel room at the Motorworld V8.



... and a large display of German WWII vehicles, planes, and weaponry in a desert setting.

That night we checked into the Motorworld V8 Hotel in Stuttgart. In most cases, a hotel is a hotel is a hotel. Maybe some have larger rooms or nice beds or fluffier robes. But the Motorworld hotels are situated in car malls, where all the top manufacturers of fine automobiles display and sell their best examples of vintage and contemporary engineering finery within steps of each other. The Motorworld hotel is entirely outfitted with motoring themes. The wall above my bed had a mural of a Porsche 917, and the hotel



The hotel lobby of Motorworld V8 in Stuttgart includes several priceless Mercedes models from the 1950s, all available for purchase.



Our guide at Porsche Exclusiv Manufactur, Ronald Till, is regarded as the grand doyen of Porsche facility tours.



Every Porsche enthusiast must eventually make a pilgrimage to the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart, both to see the cars and for world-class shopping.



It's not just the cars...it's the food! The Schweinshaxe (pig knuckle) was the standout meal of many great feasts on our tour around Germany.



Richard Allen led us through Sonderwunsch (Special Wishes) and answered our many questions.

Alois Ruf and his incredibly poised daughter Aloisa were our guides around their beautiful facility in Pfaffenhausen.



stationery was accompanied by a pen in the shape of a little car with rolling wheels! Even better, the Motorworld V8 Hotel is just a short drive from the Porsche museum.

Dinner that night at the Steakhouse 66 was a sweet reminder of home, with an American menu of cheeseburgers, fries, chili poppers, and milkshakes, plus a full complement of Route 66 memorabilia. It was very special for someone who lives in New Mexico, just an hour from the famous mother road.



The small, but incredibly efficient RUF assembly line.

The next two days were jam-packed. Grant Larsen had organized tours of Porsche Exclusiv Manufactur, the Porsche Museum storage facility, and Porsche *Sonderwunsch* (Special Wishes) for some behind-the-scenes, in-depth tours. Our guide at Exclusiv was Herr Ronald Till, who described their process of restoration but also of re-imagination and personalization. They can make virtually any model authoritatively brand new or make subtle or demonstrable changes to any Porsche model, depending on the customer's wishes and pocketbook size. As one would expect, the facility is impeccably clean, well lit, and perfectly organized.

The head of Porsche Archiv, Frank Jung, was our tour guide at the Porsche Museum storage area; appropriately because it houses historic racing cars and prototypes of production cars that are either on rotation in the museum or travel to other Porsche events around the world. My favorite item was a motorcycle with a 356 engine. Of course, we visited the current display at the Porsche Museum right after. We then headed to Sonderwunsch for a tour with Richard Allen, who showed us through several customization projects in process.

While in the area, we feasted upon a legendary local specialty called *Schweinshaxe* (pig knuckle). It's a dish slowly roasted for flavor and tenderness on inside, then braised to a crisp on the outside. Served with gravy, sauerkraut, and potatoes, this was a rare treat. Accompanied by a large glass of Dunkel beer, it didn't disappoint.

Thursday, April 16, was our last day out on the road. A 15-minute drive took us to Pfaffenhausen for a three-hour tour of RUF Automobile by Alois Ruf and his daughter Aloisa. We were shown every aspect of the design and small-scale production of these beautifully refined Porsche-inspired sports cars. Originally based on Porsche



The view from this author's hotel room window at the Ameron Motorworld Hotel in Munich.

engines and chassis, RUF's current models are structurally and mechanically all RUF, from carbon-fiber chassis to bespoke engines and suspension systems to functionally beautiful interiors. Its production output may be small, but the company's product is beyond exquisite.

After our tour, we passed through Stegen on the Ammersee for an exquisite lunch at the Seehaus Schreyegg, where I had the very best weiner schnitzel of the entire trip. Then it was on to our final destination at the Ameron Motorworld Hotel München, where we again gazed at the vast array of classic and contemporary supercars on display at the various dealerships in the mall. For my last meal of the tour, I enjoyed the German equivalent of



Our last dinner together. Great friends on a great trip!

macaroni and cheese called *Käsespätzle*, exquisite for its creamy consistency and combination of Emmentaler and Gruyère cheeses and topped with caramelized onions; it was the perfect comfort food for a weary traveler.

Our amazing ten-day sojourn through German-Porsche car culture was over all too soon, though it deepened my knowledge and experience in ways that I couldn't have imagined previously. It also brought me deeper into the Willhoit fold, with a great group of guys who were always fun, curious, and adventurous, all of whom became brothers-in-arms within this singular culture we call "the hobby." 356



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