

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Fancy touring Bavaria in a classic Porsche? Munich based Passo Turismo has the means, so we make a run for the Austrian border in a pair of their 3.2 Carreras

Words: Johnny Tipler Photography: Antony Fraser



All right for some. Tipler enjoys a hot chocolate and slice of cake, with Passo Turismo's two 3.2 Carrera Targas in the background. If you can sense a slight tone of resentment in this caption, it's because the Editor had to decline this trip due to his bad back!



I'm sipping my hot chocolate, relaxing outside Café Baur in Krün, when a cow's head appears round the corner. The huge bell around its neck wouldn't look out of place on Nick Mason's drum kit. This beautiful beige bovine comes into view, regards me for a moment, then sways leisurely into an adjacent farmyard. A dozen of its sisters follow, milkmaid pushing baby-buggy bringing up the rear. My drink's main ingredient couldn't be fresher. It's all part of the Passo Turismo experience, and there'll be more animal magic as we climb the Alpine foothills.

We're guests of Lars Eise and Franz Karl, Passo Turismo's Managing Director and Route Manager, sampling their 'Run for the Border' route, which will take us into the Austrian Tyrol. Set up in 2009, the operation is based in south-central Munich close to the railway

station, and if you fancy driving a classic Porsche around Bavaria and the Alpine foothills you can fly to Munich, pick up one of their classic 911s; they'll put you on one of their specially devised itineraries and off you go.

Lars and Franz are local boys, though Lars lived in New York for 20 years. They know the terrain intimately, so you can take it as read that your tour will incorporate the best sights and stopovers. More pertinently, both men are Porsche fans and you'll be driving their own cars. The two met through Franz's internet-based 911 F-model group. 'Once a month these Porsche enthusiasts meet up in a Munich pub,' recalls Lars, 'and I went along seeking advice on restoring a 1973 tangerine Targa. Two years later I met Franz again at my mechanic's garage and he happened to be helping out, working on another one of my cars. I was already thinking about starting Passo Turismo, and he was the perfect partner.'

There are currently four impact bumper Targas, three

3.2-litre Carreras and an SC, and a 964 C4 coupe on the roster, some acquired specially for the business and others the founder's personal property before the operation started. As far as maintenance goes, Passo Turismo are in partnership with a local Porsche specialist so the cars are checked and comprehensively serviced at the beginning and end of the season, with an inspection before and after each tour. 'They are always perfectly maintained,' says Franz. 'The last thing we need is for a car to let anybody down, and that's why we went for the 3.2 Carrera – it's solid and reliable.' There are more cars in the pipeline. Lars says, 'we're expanding our range carefully and slowly with the right kind of vehicles. They need a story attached to them and they have to feel right – and we have to feel good about letting people drive them. Our slogan is, "Road Trip of a Lifetime".'

Isn't it a bit risky letting tourists take control of your pride and joy? It's not simply that it gives customers a more interesting driving experience; as Lars says, 'we arranged tours for several years for friends and enthusiasts, and it was clear there was a demand, so we started the business. We have a lot of experience with the 3.2 Carrera; Walter Röhrl thinks it's the most perfect car that Porsche ever built, and what's good enough for him is good enough for us!'

Their tours mostly veer south towards Austria and Italy or west to Switzerland, but for Porsche enthusiasts there's a tour that goes west to the Zuffenhausen museum. The main routes head up to the Alps because, Franz says, 'they are world famous for their landscapes and panoramic views plus the different lifestyles – Austrian, Italian, Tyrolean – and of course all those perfect roads through the mountains. We offer a tour that goes to Stuttgart and into the Black Forest and then back

to Munich, and we call this the Heritage Route for Porsche enthusiasts.' Among the diverse attractions nearby are Garmisch-Partenkirchen's winter sports venues and the once-a-decade Passion Play at Oberammergau, with several bucolic summer events in the region, not least the Munich Beer Festival, though Lars mentions that these bacchanalias are not on the itinerary for obvious reasons, *glug glug*.

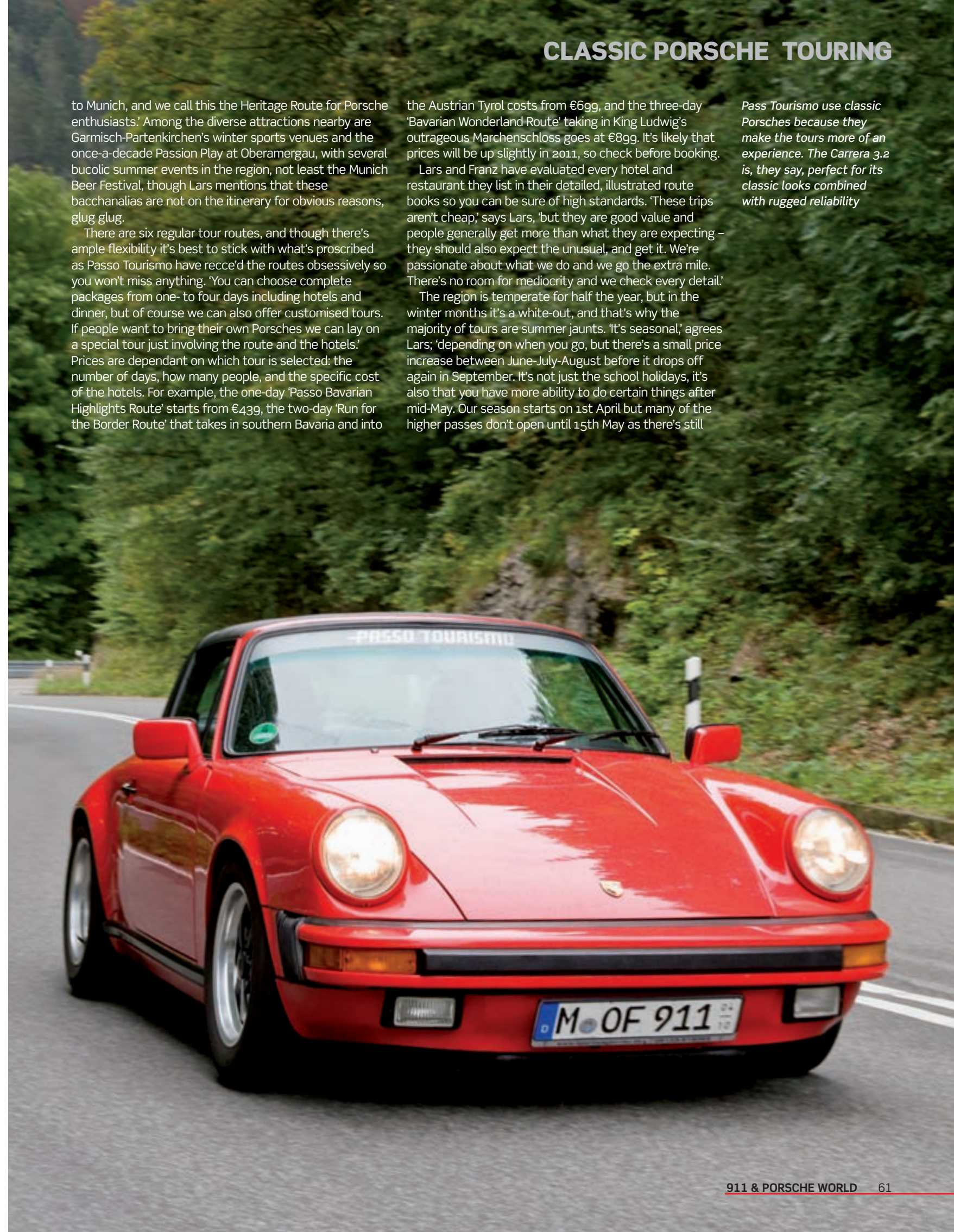
There are six regular tour routes, and though there's ample flexibility it's best to stick with what's proscribed as Passo Turismo have recce'd the routes obsessively so you won't miss anything. 'You can choose complete packages from one- to four days including hotels and dinner, but of course we can also offer customised tours. If people want to bring their own Porsches we can lay on a special tour just involving the route and the hotels.' Prices are dependant on which tour is selected: the number of days, how many people, and the specific cost of the hotels. For example, the one-day 'Passo Bavarian Highlights Route' starts from £439, the two-day 'Run for the Border Route' that takes in southern Bavaria and into

the Austrian Tyrol costs from €699, and the three-day 'Bavarian Wonderland Route' taking in King Ludwig's outrageous Marchenschloss goes at €899. It's likely that prices will be up slightly in 2011, so check before booking.

Lars and Franz have evaluated every hotel and restaurant they list in their detailed, illustrated route books so you can be sure of high standards. 'These trips aren't cheap,' says Lars, 'but they are good value and people generally get more than what they are expecting – they should also expect the unusual, and get it. We're passionate about what we do and we go the extra mile. There's no room for mediocrity and we check every detail.'

The region is temperate for half the year, but in the winter months it's a white-out, and that's why the majority of tours are summer jaunts. 'It's seasonal,' agrees Lars; 'depending on when you go, but there's a small price increase between June-July-August before it drops off again in September. It's not just the school holidays, it's also that you have more ability to do certain things after mid-May. Our season starts on 1st April but many of the higher passes don't open until 15th May as there's still

Pass Turismo use classic Porsches because they make the tours more of an experience. The Carrera 3.2 is, they say, perfect for its classic looks combined with rugged reliability



Targa top off is the way to go, weather permitting. And yes, cows really do roam the streets in some parts of Bavaria!



snow piled up, so there's great scenery but you just can't get through.' They do have the 964 C4, which, shod with winter tyres, can cope with winter work, but for the moment there's no go in the snow.

The longest route goes from Munich through Innsbruck in Austria over the old Brenner Pass and down into the North Western Dolomites in northern Italy before tackling six consecutive Alpine passes. 'It's like a pearl necklace, at four days the Grand-daddy of them all,' says Lars. 'You go in and out again, and it takes you back through Austria and then via Garmisch to Munich.' Grand-daddy's pretty flexible though, with special rates negotiable for groups and longer tours. What you get is a fab 911, breathtaking scenery, every stop-off point a treat, and great hotels.

Reaching their base in Kirchenstrasse is easy: Munich's east railway station is a couple of hundred yards away, and there are several hotels, restaurants and bars nearby if you need to overnight. They'll fill you in on Munich sightseeing and nightlife, and if you arrive in your own car you can park free in their yard. Unused to a 3.2 Carrera? The yard's long enough to have a traffic free familiarisation before heading out, though Franz says that three-quarters of their customers are already acquainted with a classic Porsche, 'and there are others that drive water-cooled Porsches and are keen to try the air-cooled ones – this is their opportunity to drive one.' It's clearly inspirational: a Boxster owner was so enthralled by his touring Targa and the sound of its air-cooled engine that he's trading the Boxster for a 3.2 Carrera Cabriolet.

Wedding anniversary, birthday present, there's something for everyone in Passo Turismo's prospectus

and they'll provide a selection of music CDs for the trip, though in practice the scenery and flat-six soundtrack are riveting enough. On the other hand, anything, come to think of it, would be better than Camera Boy's current fave... Miami Sound Machine's Doctor Beat...

Hey, well let's tour! We've a pair of 3.2 Carrera Targas at our disposal, sleek and beautiful in silver and red, and I can't wait to get rolling. Flanked by tram tracks and onion-dome churches we head out of Munich, zig-zagging through the suburbs into progressively rural countryside. First thing I notice about the silver 3.2 Carrera Targa is its fresh engine, so lively and eager to rev! And the much maligned 915 gearbox, well this one is slick and precise, just as it should be. Lars tells me later that the car had a full mechanical overhaul 30K ago, so now everything's nicely run in. From time to time we switch cars. The pristine red Targa was sourced in the USA in 2009 and has modified suspension that gives it more acute turn-in than normal. Targa tops off – touring doesn't come more memorable than this.

We pause by the first of a succession of broad lakes, and I defer my swim, having tested the water by hand: shiiiiivery. We're seeing quite significant hills with the Alps as a distant backdrop, flower-filled pastures and typical low-pitch roofs with long overhangs, firewood logs stacked up into gable-end eaves. We twist and turn through pine forests, tumbling streams and moss-covered rocks to the side. Now there are lush green meadows with innumerable wooden field barns, cows, sheep and goats, chalets and onion-dome churches.

Passo Turismo's route books, copies of which are



provided for each specific tour, explain where you are and the significance of what you're seeing: 'Approximately 30km south of Munich lies Wolfratshausen. This is in the idyllic valley where the Isar River and Loisach River meet ("Isarspitz"). The Isarspitz is steeped in history and has a longstanding history as a waypoint for lumber rafters, who brought their lumber to Munich during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. This tradition is maintained today, but in the context of recreation – Wolfratshausen is the staging point for the world famous timber rafts race along the Isar River to Munich.' To quote just one example. Comprehensive, I think you'll agree.

We stop for lunch at the Grauer Bar Seehotel on the banks of the Kochelsee, a fabulous lake where the water is so still that the reflection of the far shore is a mirror image, broken by a classic steamer yacht and a posse of canoeists – straight out of Last of the Mohicans. Art lovers take note: along the shore is the Franz Marc Museum, dedicated to one of the founders of the Blue Rider movement who founded German Expressionist painting along with Kandinsky and Klee in the early 1900s.

One of my particular favourites, so I'll be back.

Now the route gets more serious. Between the dreamy Kochelsee and Walchensee lakes the road hairpins its way up and down over 6kms of mountainside with a dramatic 240m elevation change. During the 1930s this was the Kesselberg Hill Climb, and if you listen carefully you can detect the echo of Carraciola, Stuck and Von Brauchich's whining superchargers as they blast their Silver Arrows around the turns. Dropping Herr Fraser off at a lay-by near the top where, on a clear day you can see Munich, Franz and I blast the 3.2 Carreras up the hallowed blacktop for the photo opp.

We overnight at the sumptuous Parkhotel in the village of Wallgau, the outside walls of every shop and chalet emblazoned with murals, secular, municipal and religious – they're ubiquitous round here. Everything's built of wood – pitch pine, we decide – and the attention to detail is fastidious, from carved cherubs to stairway newel posts. Wall paintings of a saucier kind embellish the guests-only swimming pool and spa, and there's a log fire burning in the bar. Gourmet dinner and wine, cosy bedroom suites...

You can really only begin to guess at just how difficult it was to set this shot up. Who said Baa-varia!? We did this trip in late Sept, when the area is a lot quieter, except for the sheep

This is what it's all about. Stunning views is what makes Austria and what better way to explore them than in a classic Porsche



Left: Overlooking Lake Kochelsee. The water is so still that the reflection is a mirror image

The roads are spectacular and some with stunning motorsport history like the Kesselberg Hillclimb, which in the 1930s reverberated to the sounds of Auto Unions and Mercedes



Put this one on your to-do list for sure.

Next morning we strike out for the last few kilometres to the border, through cow-bell Krün and screech-box Mittenwald with its national violin-making school and violin museum. There's another hillclimb to negotiate, tighter than Kesselberg though not designated as such and, two-thirds of the way up, road signs say we're in Austria. The scenery's more of the same, forested Alps, chalets and field barns. Turning around at Seefeld we motor the Porsches back into Germany, taking a

192m, it's popular with divers due to the crystal-clear water. We pay a toll and drive the spectacular lakeside's backroad. More photo opps as the resident Mallard population takes a shine to our man with the camera and his rye bread.

As for Lars and Franz, they are already looking forward to next season: 'it will be even better than 2010,' says Lars. 'We have so many strong testimonials that confirm that we're doing the right thing.' No argument with that. All the funny little incidents that we've encountered – the

“I'm pondering this scenario when out of nowhere a flock of sheep trundles up the road”

diversion onto an Alpine meadow dotted with wooden sheds, a scene that would do justice to Steve McQueen's futile leap to freedom aboard his motorbike in *The Great Escape*. I'm pondering this scenario when out of nowhere a flock of sheep trundles up the road, engulfing our two 911s. Just as mysteriously they disappear into some hidden dell. Animal magic. Well it is Baa-varia... Then we veer off to the Walchensee. Largest and deepest of the Bavarian Alpine lakes at 16.4km and

Red Indian canoeists, the cows in the main street, the flock of sheep, the quizzical ducks, the log fire in the bar – there's so much spontaneous potential to these tours. Wherever we stopped everybody's been friendly and the whole experience has been great: driving the older Porsches, the amazing scenery, plus snapper Fraser has made several new friends, quack quack. Our escape strategy's been accomplished in two or three days. What more could you ask of a getaway holiday? **PW**

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