“The focus is on communicating our traditions – eye to eye”

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The story of the Porsche Heritage Experience begins with a logo from the 1960s. Alexander E. Klein is the man who had the vision for the programme of events, and has made them happen. In this interview, the head of the car collection and the Heritage Experience reveals how the Blue Shield and UNESCO organisations inspired him to bring this cultural movement to life. He also tells us what the heritage-conservation work at Porsche Heritage and Museum has to do with the rice terraces of Yunnan, China, and the aloha culture of Hawaii.

You’ve been responsible for the company’s car collection since 2012. Where did you get the idea for the Porsche Heritage Experience?

Alexander E. Klein: Four years ago, we entered a number of cars from our collection in the Gaisberg Historic Car Race. We put the event logo from the 1960s on the backs of the cars, a logo consisting of three diamonds in graphic advertising style that evoked the peaks of mountains. It’s a well-executed

reminder of the hillclimbs of the past. One participant pointed out to me that the logo was similar to that of the Blue Shield organisation. I started researching.

And what did your research reveal?

Klein: Blue Shield is dedicated to protecting cultural heritage in conflict, catastrophe and emergency situations. The Blue Shield International organisation was founded in 1996 and is a partner of UNESCO and, together, the two organisations identify cultural assets that are worth protecting. This led me to the UNESCO World Heritage programme. UNESCO adheres to the Convention on World Heritage of 1972. The fundamental idea is to preserve for humanity a list of sites that are of particular historical, artistic or scientific value. This is not just about buildings or specific natural areas, but also about conserving endangered traditions and crafts.

Did the conservation of traditions remind you of your own work and that of your colleagues?

Klein: Certainly, I saw parallels right away. This is the exact remit of Porsche Heritage and Museum, namely preserving our traditions and conserving cultural assets.

What are the goals of the Heritage Experience format?

Klein: This is not just about our cars but also the creativity of humankind. The focus is on communicating about heritage-conservation work – eye to eye. Within the scope of our Mission Future Heritage overall strategy, which includes other modules in Zuffenhausen and all over the world, the Porsche Heritage Experience is one of two driver experience formats that we stage regularly. In the course of this addition to the Porsche Legends @ series, the participants meet people who pass on their knowledge and the traditions that they have learned and lived from generation to generation. The core task of the Future Heritage mission is to build a bridge to tomorrow and to conserve Porsche values, as well as to interpret them for current times. We want to literally experience culture, identity and tradition.

The first Heritage Experience led us to China, specifically to the province of Yunnan, where the borders of China, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam meet. How did you choose this location?

Klein: China is a People's Republic of superlatives. And when you travel there, you journey through exciting contradictions as thousand-year-old traditions meet pulsating mega-cities, and imperial temples stand alongside state-of-the-art skyscrapers. The landscape of Yunnan province is distinguished by extraordinary beauty, snow-topped mountains, deep gorges, rare plants, rapeseed fields and rice terraces. More than half of the recognised ethnic groups in China live in Yunnan. Its world culture and natural heritage tell the story of a region of yearning and a wide range of diverse ethnic minorities coexist here. Traditional crafts from long-forgotten times are still practised, and there is a particularly high concentration of UNESCO-protected sites and arts.

What impressed you most there?

Klein: Visiting the famous rice terraces was extremely impressive. We learned how such fields are cultivated in the traditional way, and how they have existed for centuries. The local inhabitants, the Hani, showed us how humans and nature can interact symbiotically, and we participated in their daily rituals, For example by catching by hand the fish that they use to fertilise the rice fields. We learned that the Hani hardly use writing, pass on their traditions through song and dance and, as a mountain people, have no word for war in their language. We had the honour of being part of their community and experiencing how proud they are to carry on the Hani culture.

In 2021, the second Porsche Heritage Experience was held in Hawaii. What awaited you there, and what made you choose the aloha culture?

Klein: There is much more to the aloha culture than flowers in the hair and friendly people. The roots of Hawaiian culture go back more than 1,200 years. The cultural identity of the Hawaiians has been heavily influenced by the history of maritime exploration, religion and faith, and by wind and water. The islanders have given us invaluable insights into their culture and their way of handing down traditions via language, dance and symbols. Fishponds are a very special tradition of ancient Hawaiian aquaculture. The Hawaiian people traditionally pass on the task of maintaining and preserving their centuries-old aquaculture to the next generations. And as part of the Porsche Heritage Experience they allowed us to be a part in this.

The latest Porsche Heritage Experience is being held in Germany. What made you decide to stay at home this time?

Klein: For us, it was a matter of honour, in this anniversary year that means so much to us, to stay in our own country and experience profound insights into heritage conservation and cultural preservation in Germany. This is why we aim to present our understanding of tradition in our own country in 2023.

And why did you choose the Rhineland-Palatinate region?

Klein: This selection was no coincidence, being based on the same parameters as always, namely the concentration of exceptional manifestations of culture, identity and tradition. In general, where there are a lot of rivers one finds a lot of culture. Rivers distribute culture, are transportation routes for goods, and inspire aesthetically inclined individuals. Rhineland-Palatinate even bears the name of Germany's most important river, the Rhine, which is one of the main transportation routes in Europe. When you add the Moselle, the Saar and the Lahn, the state is traversed by four of Germany's major waterways. This alone was sufficient reason for us to get to know the region, along with its customs and crafts.

What awaits the participants in this year's Heritage Experience?

Klein: We'll be visiting Weinessiggut Doktorenhof, Hambach Castle, and Speyer Cathedral, while staying in the Kloster Hornbach Hotel. And, in between these four destinations, we'll be driving along stunning roads based mainly on the pilgrimage routes of the St. James's Way. With the Palatinate experts on cultural conservation, we'll discuss their methods and scientific approaches in a variety of workshops

and compare them with the conservation work we carry out at Porsche. The goal here is always to broaden our own horizons in order to learn from the best in their field. The accompaniment of historical sports cars as we travel from one cultural site to another rounds off the cultural experience very nicely.

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