

Porsche Experience Day

Author: Fiona Bryan, PCGB Member and patient wife of a Petrol Head!

I was working away somewhere when I got the call. Can't remember, probably a Travelodge in Swindon, watching Coronation Street, tucking into my M&S sandwich and feeling guilty about having smuggled a bottle of wine into my room...

It was around 10pm when I heard the over-excited, elated voice on the phone – barely pausing for breath – and squealing with delight, as he told me he'd won first prize in the Porsche Centre Wilmslow raffle. No, not my 10-year-old child, but my 52-year-old husband (AKA my 10-year-old child). "I've won! I've won! It's a Porsche Driving Experience at Silverstone! We get to go down there in a Panamera! And then we get to drive a 992! I can drive the Panamera – they're going to put me on the insurance! We can look at all the other Porsches! We get lunch! There's a shop!" Yadda, yadda, yadda – you get the picture....

So, once I'd calmed him down, I found out that he had indeed, drawn out the winning ticket for this super prize and that I was to accompany him to Silverstone to share the experience. A few weeks of further excitement ensued, as we prepared for our great day out. We would drive down to Silverstone with Phil Graham (PCGB Regions Director) and his wife, Netty, in a brand new Panamera E Hybrid. We would also meet up with a couple of pals from the PCGB R5 – Martin and Angela - and we'd all get the chance to drive some fab cars in one of the most iconic racetracks in the world. Silverstone is the current home of the British Grand Prix, which it first hosted in 1948. The 1950 British Grand Prix at Silverstone was the first race in the newly created World Championship of Drivers.

Jon's love affair with all-things-Porsche began three years ago, when we liberated Ruby from a dark, damp lock-up in Barrow Upon Humber. She was somewhat forlorn and in desperate need of some TLC (and several thousand pounds worth of surgery). Ruby, as you may have guessed, is not a rescue puppy, but a 21-year-old Arena Red Boxster 986. In the words of the late Princess Diana..."there are three of us in this marriage...". Joking apart, Ruby has become part of the family, she has given us great joy, taken us on some fantastic road trips and ultimately, she was our passport into the Porsche Owners' Club – which in turn, was our passport to Silverstone.

So, to the day itself. When we arrived at the Porsche Experience venue, we were signed in and whisked upstairs to the restaurant for coffee and a welcome chat by our Driving Consultants. En route, we were able to see some impressive new Porsches on display, namely a 911R and a 911 in Speed Yellow and my personal favourite, a Cayman GTS in Miami Blue. Oh, when those lottery numbers come in, that's got my name all over it!

We decided to share the experience so that both Jon and I got to drive the new, £120,000 Carrera 992 C2. The driving experience itself takes place on a specially designed track incorporating six elements; Handling Circuit, Straights, Kick Plate, Ice Hill, Low Friction and Off-Road circuits. With a total length of nearly 5km, the track has been designed to enable it to be split into separate areas that can be used independently of each other or connected together to form a longer handling circuit. This offers a variety of track configurations and surface conditions on which the potential of Porsche cars can be explored and understood. OK, let me translate that into layman's terms: there's some fast stuff, some straight stuff, some bendy stuff and some slippery stuff!

Now, in a previous life, I had trained as a Police pursuit driver, but nothing could have prepared me for the type of driving I was about to experience that day! After a few spins around the track, where I was encouraged to "put my foot down", the adrenalin started to pump quite nicely and then my

Driving Consultant asked me if I wanted to go faster. Oh yes indeed, we went faster – to be precise, 0-60 in less than 4 seconds – and then braking from 60-0 in half the time, on a short straight stretch of road, measuring approximately 400 metres.

After I'd rearranged my face into something resembling the one I'd started out with that morning, I was asked if I wanted to take it up a step further. By this time, I was delirious and would have agreed to parachute out of the in-built ejector seat, had there been one... What happened next was something called 'launch control'. This is where you place your right foot on the gas and your left foot on the brake. You push both feet to the floor and when told to do so, release the brake. I now know what it feels like to be an astronaut. Forget the facelift – the G-force off this baby left me looking like - and screaming like - a 14-year-old on the Tower of Terror (a steel shutter roller coaster that has a 6.5 second, 100 mph, zero-gravity drop – Google it!).

The ice road was hilarious – try driving up a hill covered in sheet ice at 25 mph, without spinning the car around, like you're in a scene from *Strictly*, on amphetamines. Seriously, this was a lesson in what NOT to do in difficult driving conditions. Actually, apart from it being great fun, it did leave me feeling more confident about what these vehicles are capable of. As Jon would say, the cars are way more superior than our driving ability.

And so, on to Jon's experience – the main prize winner – he is still boring our friends and family about this, four weeks after the event. Bless him. Jon had already had the opportunity to drive a Cayman S at Thruxton – a 50th birthday present from me, which he only stopped talking about when Silverstone kicked in! I reckon he's got another two years of mileage (pardon the pun) with this one...

In particular, Jon describes his experience on the handling track as "awesome". The acceleration, the cornering ability from the four-wheel steering, the braking from what seemed like MACH 2 to zero was like hitting a wall, the smoothness of the changes from the 8 gear PDK, etc, etc, etc. In fact, whatever your level of driving experience, the new 992 had more to offer than he was able, or indeed capable, of giving. Equally at home on a racetrack, the M6 or a Waitrose car park (other supermarkets are available).

I asked him to sum up his Porsche Driving Experience in three words and he said: ABSOLUTELY. FANTASTIC. DAY. To be given the opportunity to drive two such great cars, which would normally be beyond his affordability, was an honour and a privilege that he will never forget.

Asked what was the best bit? He told me that having never driven a 911 before, it was a great introduction to what he now believes will be his next car. Three, two, one, back in the room! Well, maybe when Ruby grows up and flies the nest...who knows! But for the time being, we both feel highly honoured to have had this wonderful experience – yes, an absolutely fantastic day, with great, like-minded friends and a memory to treasure.

Thanks to all at the Porsche Experience Centre Silverstone, thanks to Jason Shenton at Porsche Centre Wilmslow for offering up such a great prize – and thanks to Phil and Netty Graham, Martin and Angela Davis as well as PCGB R5 for such a great time.

Just like Arnie...we'll be back!