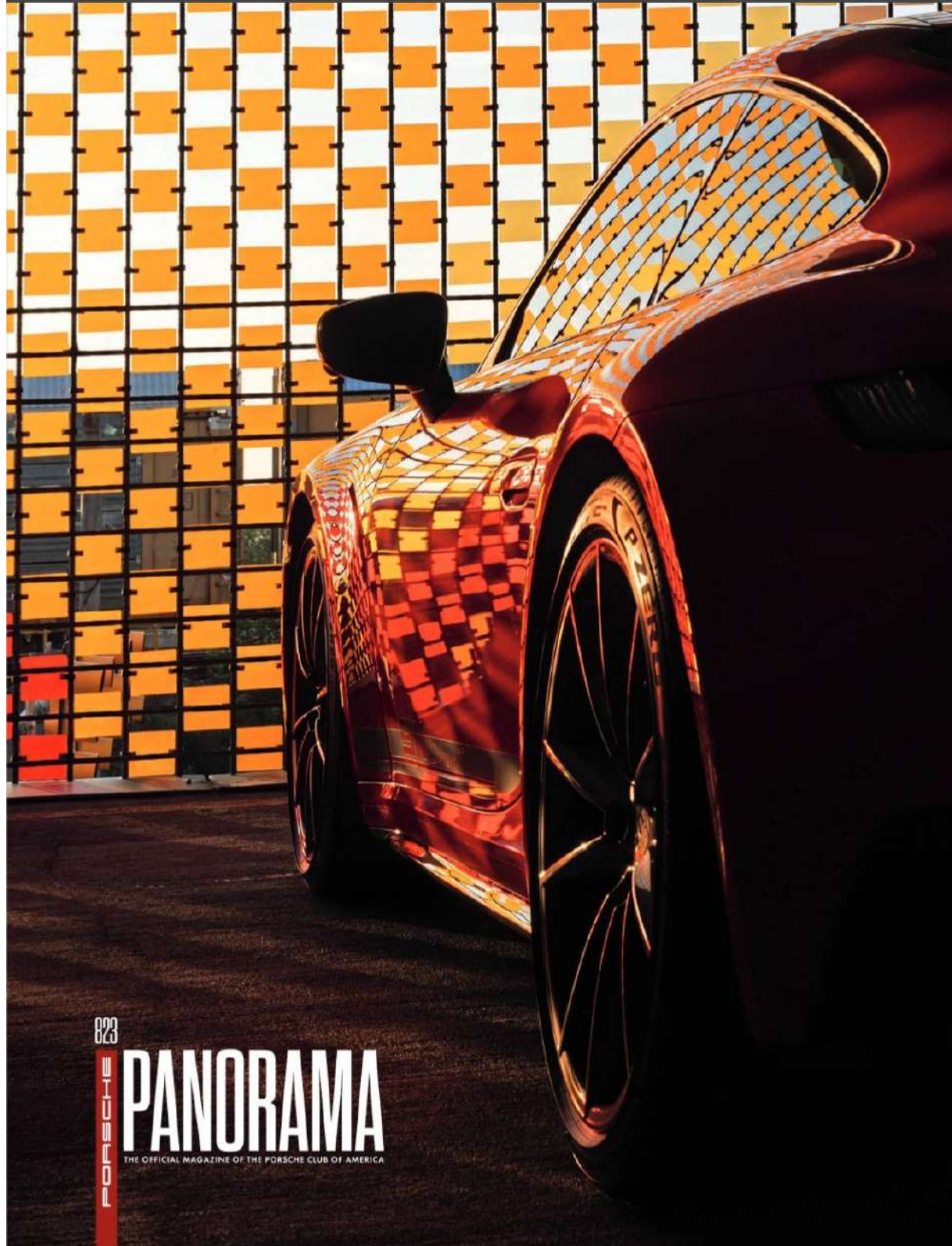




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Where They Belong

PORSCHE EXPERIENCE WITH THE ROLLING MUSEUM WANTS YOU TO DRIVE THE CLASSICS.

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GENIAL FRENCHMAN STÉPHANE VRINAT introduced himself as “the crazy person behind The Rolling Museum.” When gently prodded that maybe “crazy person” perhaps wasn’t the right descriptor for a respected businessman/collector, Vrinat doubled down and said, “Yes, I think it is.” On the surface, maybe it does seem a little off-kilter to loan 10 rare and valuable vintage Porsches to total strangers for them to use on challenging Spanish B-roads, but in practice, The Rolling Museum and Porsche Experience—put together by Vrinat and Porsche Spain as an exciting new event—was anything but daft.

In fact, it proved to be a near-religious experience both figuratively and even sort of literally.



Top: Autódrom de Sitges-Terramar is a prewar-racing time capsule. Right: The village of Alrafulla is a quiet study in picturesque charm.



Stéphane Vrinat is a bit of a contradiction. After a successful career in the automotive industry, he started his own shop to buy, restore, and sell classic Porsches. The plan went awry when Vrinat simply couldn't help overdoing it, thus erasing his profit margins and leading to collecting more cars than selling them. He's clearly a perfectionist as far as the mechanical condition of his cars goes (nothing went amiss on any of the cars during two days of hard driving), but unlike most garden-variety OCD types, he has zero qualms about sharing his cars. "A museum is great—but it's missing something. You can see the cars, but you can't *feel* them," he said. "No engine sound, no vibration, no smell, no thrill. It's incomplete. They weren't built for display; they were built to be driven." And over the course of two days in Catalonia, that's exactly what we did.

Fittingly, The Rolling Museum starts at an actual museum of sorts. The Autódrom de Sitges-Terramar

is a disused racing circuit that dates to the early 1920s. The control tower, garages, and other preserved buildings, however, look as if they could predate the automobile, and that apparently was deliberate. The track's architecture was an expression of *noucentisme*, a movement in the Catalan region of Spain that expressly rejected the art deco-style modernism that was pervasive during the interwar period. At the time it was built, the only major tracks in the world were Brooklands, Monza, and Indianapolis. Sitges-Terramar hosted one Spanish Grand Prix in 1923, and when the Spanish Civil War broke out 13 years later, the track was shuttered. It saw a few minor events, but that was the end of it as an active track. It's incredibly well preserved, including the astonishing 60-degree banked corners that are nearly twice as extreme as Daytona (31 degrees) and Talladega (33 degrees). It's a fairly imposing place to familiarize yourself with 10 classic Porsches spanning from

the early 1960s to the mid-1990s. Four Porsche Experience certified instructors were on hand to assist.

The first car I hopped in for a familiarization run was maybe the most challenging—a menacing-looking black 1988 930 coupe. It's a car that I'm intimately familiar with. My dad had one when I was a kid, and, remarkably, he wasn't exactly stingy with the keys. Everything came back quickly, including the stupefying turbo lag that I remember so well. Vrinat, who was in the right seat, was visibly disappointed that I didn't get on the car harder or use more of the banking (which from inside the car looked like a near-vertical tsunami of Franco-era concrete). Frankly, it was enough of a challenge paying attention to the cones that blocked off the potholes in the aforementioned Franco-era concrete.

After the familiarization run, the group headed to a fresh seafood lunch at a beach restaurant in Sitges. Sitges is what you'd picture a classic Mediterranean

The 60-degree banked corners at Sitges-Terramar must have been properly terrifying to Grand Prix drivers in the 1920s who were driving cars with motor-cycle-size tires and about 150 horsepower. The inward push (centrifugal force) that you feel is indescribable.



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beach town to be, if you've never actually been to the Mediterranean in high season. Unlike most of the seaside towns over the border on the French Riviera, Sitges in mid-June is low-key, quiet, and full of local shops and restaurants where you can get a glass of cava (Spanish sparkling wine) or sangria and a couple of plates of tapas for the equivalent of about \$25. Also atypical for most of the French Riviera, the beach is white and sandy, not rocky. Sitges is about a half hour from Barcelona's international airport. It's an ideal place to relax, get over jet lag, and get prepped for several days of driving.

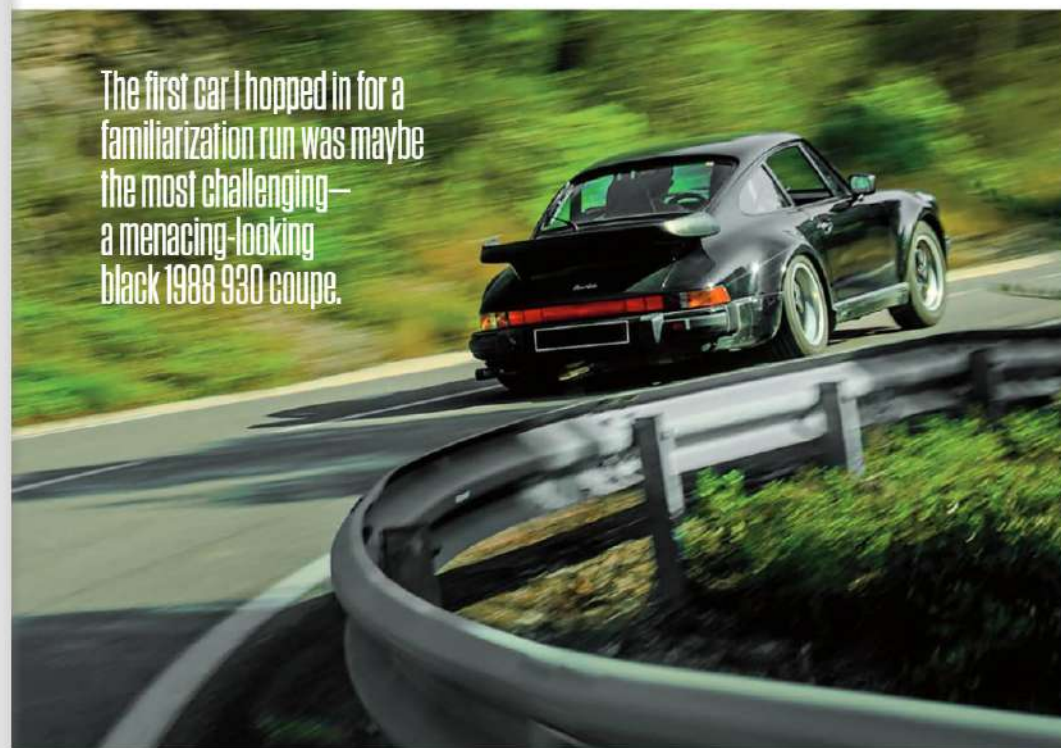
AFTER LUNCH, we began methodically cycling through The Rolling Museum collection on the roads of Catalonia. The route was curated perfectly: heavy on mountain roads with plenty of elevation changes, switchbacks, and S-curves, and generally lightly trafficked. One of the first cars that I drove was a 1970 2.2-liter 911E in the gorgeous color of Albert Blue. It was a lovely car to drive on the roads that Stéphane curated for us; the 901 gearbox, with its

dogleg pattern (first is off the "H," down and to the left), was handy given the number of 3-2 downshifts that the roads and the tiny 2,200-cc flat six required. After about a half hour, we swapped into a silver 1972 911S Targa. It was an incredible sensation, not necessarily because the car itself was so good (for the record, it was), but because I owned a '72 S when I was a college student in the late 1980s in Boulder, Colorado. I'd made the equivalent of *Shaft's Big Score!* on an Austin-Healey 3000 that I restored in my parents' garage and used the money to buy the S for \$6,500.

I haven't driven a 2.4-liter S since I sold my car in the early '90s. On the narrow serpentine Spanish roads, the S was sublime, its 915 gearbox perfectly sorted making the frequent 3-2 downshifts just as easy as in the 1970 E, where second and third gears are in the same plane. It was a hot day, with temperatures near 90 degrees, and there was a change in altitude where the idle of the S started to get a little low. I instinctively reached for the hand throttle, which was exactly where I remembered it—next to

The 1988 930 was a bit of a chore to drive on the tightest stretches of the tour. Finding the right gear, managing the elusive boost, and heaving the car around with manual steering and wide tires was an exercise in character building.

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the hand brake. Problem solved, courtesy of 40-year-old muscle memory. Keeping the revs up is the key to enjoying an S, even a 2.4 “big block.” It’s a totally different car above 4000 rpm. The noise from 4500 to the 7200 rpm redline I thought was like nothing else, until we hopped into the 1974 2.7-liter MFI Carrera. While I’ve driven several ’73 2.7 RS Carreras, I had never driven a G-body 2.7 Carrera. It was everything I loved about the ’73 Touring in a slightly comfier package. It felt a bit more softly damped than I remember, and the 1974 high-back Sport seats are equally supportive, but more comfortable to me than the ’73 low-back seats.

The Catalan countryside was stunningly beautiful, particularly the vineyards along the Gaia River, and by late afternoon, we found ourselves in the gorgeous village of Altafulla on the Mediterranean coast, about 60 miles west of Barcelona. It’s a classic Spanish seaside town on the Costa Dorada that checks just about every box for North Americans seeking European perfection—an intact medieval quarter, a small castle, a port, and Roman ruins. The Gran Claustre Boutique Hotel is located in an 18th-century building with tons of exposed stone and beams blended with modern décor.

There’s a pool, spa, and the lovely Michelin Guide-recommended Restaurant Gaudium, where chef Jaume Drudis serves modern takes on traditional Spanish food blended with other cuisines, using seasonal, locally sourced ingredients. The meal was spectacular, and if you’re a fan of wonderful Spanish red wines and cava, you’ll be extremely happy. The hotel is located within the courtyard of the Castle Montserrat, which is lovely to explore on a quiet evening. And quiet it was, almost eerily so, with the exception of someone apparently blasting, of all things, “The Galaxy Song” from *Monty’s Python’s The Meaning of Life*. It was a bit surreal.

THE SECOND DAY’S ROUTE took us through the Priorat mountains, and it also brought seat time in one of the cars that I had been the most interested in driving—an Emerald Green Metallic 1976 3.0-liter Carrera. It was one of the handsomest cars there in its bright shade of green with Cinnamon-colored seats and tartan inserts as well as ATS “Cookie Cutter” alloy wheels. The 3.0 Carrera was never sold new in the U.S. and is an enormously misunderstood car. It shares the same body of the 1974 2.7 MFI Carrera, with rear flares that are midway between a standard narrow midyear G-Body car and a 930. It looks like a 911 SC, and with a 3.0-liter Bosch K-Jetronic injected engine, one wouldn’t be off base in assuming that it drove like one, too. For the record, it does not. Although riding on 15-inch CN 36s, it felt more like a car with stiffer dampers and shorter sidewalls. The engine, however, was the real revelation. Like every CIS car, it fired up easily and settled into a nice, even idle. When I got on it, the car felt livelier than an SC. It revved more eagerly, the flywheel felt lighter, and the redline was about 500 rpm higher than in an SC. All of the rotating mass in the engine felt lighter (which



Car culture in Spain feels more lively than anywhere I’ve been. People lined the streets of every village, giving the tour a low-speed Targa Florio vibe.





The mini Gaudi basilica in Montferri was one of the highlights of the tour.

it was). The 3.0 Carrera felt slightly less torquey than an SC down low, but this was a more than acceptable trade for the way the engine felt in the upper end of the rev range. For me, it was reminiscent of the difference between a 2.4-liter 911E and a 911S.

The rest of the day was full of challenges and fun comparisons. It was an absolute delight to get into the 1974 2.0-liter 914. Thanks to Vrinat's obsessiveness, the car was incredibly well set up, and I had a wonderful time managing the car's momentum to keep up with ones that had three times the power of the little 914. As for comparisons, it's not often that you get to jump out of a 3.2 Carrera with a 915 gearbox and into a car with a G50. At the risk of making the G50 fanatics angry, I still maintain that a fresh 915 with properly adjusted shift rods is the near equal of the G50. Cue the letters.

Another highlight of the tour was a stop at the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Montserrat in Montferri. It is a small church on a hilltop. It was the creation of Josep Maria Jujol to a design by Antoni Gaudí of Sagrada Família fame. While the latter is polarizing, with great architect Louis Sullivan a huge admirer, others have called it strange or even vulgar. The Sanctuary of the Virgin of Montserrat is more universally praised—it's incandescent inside and out, and it's representative of what makes touring in Spain surprising and delightful. Lunch at a mountaintop restaurant in Siurana was a sublime (and seemingly nonstop) mix of Spanish classics such as codfish fritters, hard sheep milk cheeses, and olives. The afternoon took us back toward the coast through the mountains and vineyards of Penedès. It got progressively warmer as the day went on, as praise for the 944 Turbo got louder and louder—not just for the car's wonderful power and balance, but for its ice-cold A/C.

All totaled, it was nearly 300 miles of some of the most spectacular roads I've ever driven, combined with uniquely Catalan dining experiences. The experience, including hotels, parking, and meals, is priced at €6,900 (about \$8,200) for one person, and €9,990 (about \$11,700) for two drivers, or €8,190 (about \$9,600) for a driver and a passenger. Barcelona is easily accessible from virtually anywhere in North America, with nonstops from most major hub cities. Because of the fairly intense competition at Barcelona's Josep Tarradellas airport, fares tend to be quite reasonable, even last minute. For more information on this Porsche Experience, go to therollingmuseum.com and inquire at info@therollingmuseum.com. 🍷

