

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Rallying Paris-Dakar the hard way with Marnie Brandenburg and her Porsche 911

### Lead

At this year's AfricaEcoRace, a handful of air-cooled Porsche 911s battled through the African savannah on the original, far more dangerous route of the Paris-Dakar Rally. Despite a cockpit fire, Marnie Brandenburg won her class – and celebrated her 30th birthday on the coast of Dakar.



"Admittedly, many girls my age would prefer a glass of champagne on the Alster in Hamburg or in some stylish club. But for me, celebrating my birthday here in Dakar is heaven on earth," says Marnie Brandenburg, with a sunburnt nose and singed racing suit. The 30-year-old has just completed the almost 6,000-kilometer-long AfricaEcoRace and even managed to win her class. Together with her father, sister, cousin and friends, they traveled under their own steam in a MAN truck from northern Germany to Monaco for technical inspection, before crossing over by ship to Tangier in Morocco, where the Mediterranean and Atlantic flow into one. In their luggage: two Porsche 911s and around 700 spare parts.







In 2009, the AfricaEcoRace was founded by world champion and rally legend Jean-Louis Schlesser, among others. The year before, the racing committee of the Paris-Dakar Rally decided to cancel the legendary race due to serious terrorism warnings. Later, it was decided to relocate the route - the dangers along the way simply seemed too great. For a while, the Paris-Dakar went through South America, and is currently taking place in Saudi Arabia. The thoroughbred trio of Schlesser, René Metge and Hubert Auriol, on the other hand, wanted to stick to the legendary route, no matter what risks awaited along the way. As a result, the AfricaEcoRace now enjoys cult status among two- and four-wheel enthusiasts.



In this regard, Marnie and her family are no exception. Her logbook for the 16-day rally through the Western Sahara and Mauritania to Dakar in Senegal reads like the script of a Mad Max film. Here too, petrol is gold, and has to be pumped from barrels into the tanks of the vehicles in stages and by hand. "The AfricaEcoRace is simply unbelievable! It is an absolutely extreme adventure. Every day we collect so many memories that you can hardly process, but in the end they completely expand your own mind. The people here, the country, the animals are fascinating - especially when you are driving at 160 km/h and suddenly have to avoid dromedaries because they are sitting in the middle of the track," comments Marnie.





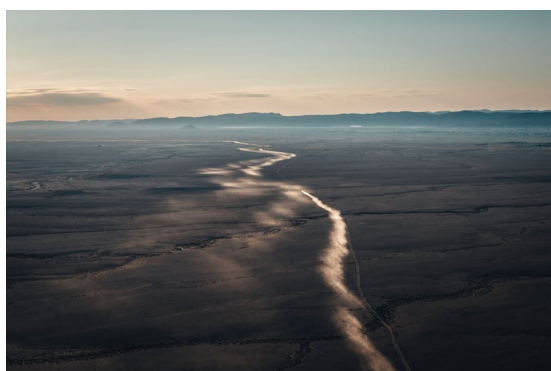
"But sometimes the poverty of the people here brings you back down to earth. But if optimism has a home, it's here in Africa. The small, cheerful children who are so delighted when you give them your packed lunch. So much happens every day, and yet the most important thing is still the race itself and concentrating on the course," says the 30-year-old from Hamburg.



This isn't the first time she's taken part in a professional rally. Marnie has already competed in the Turkmen Desert Rally along the Silk Road, and in smaller competitions such



as the San Marino Rally Legend. Water is probably the most important commodity at each of these events, followed by a fire extinguisher as the crew discovered somewhere in Senegal, after a cable fire in the middle of the desert ignited the engine compartment before spreading to the cockpit.



Luckily, the young driver had the presence of mind to press the emergency stop button, pull out the fire extinguisher and put out the fire. "It was pretty close, the whole Porsche almost caught fire. If the organisers didn't have the accompanying helicopters, who knows what would have happened. Thirty years ago, things would certainly have been different. We are bombarded with so many incredible moments every day. But I will certainly not forget this one any time soon."



However, the rally had plenty more surprises in store for the participants. The next day, Marnie's father Erik took a turn that literally nobody could have predicted: after racing over a dune that was hidden from view, their Safari Porsche took a 30 metre flight into the air. The sports car hit the ground hard and the occupants hit the ceiling. After



blacking out for a moment, they realised they had destroyed their suspension. Luckily, the MAN truck with the necessary spare parts was not far away, but a deep crack had penetrated the chassis of the car and the right front wheel was no longer pointing in the direction of travel.



Their many hours of preparation and trust in the Porsche were suddenly worthless. The team had to contend with another breakdown that tested not only their morale, but also their physical and mental limits. But that's just how life works on a rally. Equipment and people reach their breaking point. In any case, both breakdowns demonstrated how quickly the tide can turn. The Brandenburgs had just swept across the African savannah, but twice their race had almost met a premature end. Eventually, the flying Porsche had to be put on the trailer; the crack in the chassis was simply too serious. So father and daughter continued the rally together in one car - and even won the class in the end. Despite the unbridled power of nature, the spirit of the indomitable participants won once again.





Whether solar-powered, on two wheels, or in an air-cooled Porsche without air conditioning - the endless expanses of North Africa dominated by lunar landscapes, the steep dunes, the hot wind and the ice-cold nights always present the participants of the AfricaEcoRace with new challenges. As the dust settles at the end of each day and the vehicles find their way back to their storage facilities, one thing becomes clear: this rally is more than just a competition - it is a journey of self-discovery in one of the most unforgiving places on earth. However, in the mobile tent villages, is the feeling of happy exhaustion that prevails at the end. "The AfricaEcoRace, the old Paris-Dakar Rally, is an absolute sensory overload - and I love it," enthuses Marnie Brandenburg, enjoying the African evening sun one last time.

### **Watch Marnie battle the dunes:**

*Text: Bastian Fuhrmann*

*Photos / Film: Alexis Blondel, Cedric Bret, Jorge Cunha, Nuno Antunes*

### **Gallery**















































































































































































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