

CLASSIC DRIVER

Meet the twin masterminds behind Oilstainlab's sawn-off Porsche Half11

Lead

Oilstainlab's custom Porsche prototype has broken the internet time and time again. For Classic Driver, the gifted twins Nikita and Iliya Bridan opened their workshop and shared some of the secrets behind the infamous Half11.



"They said it was too crazy to exist. They were half right." That's the tagline behind Oilstainlab's most notorious creation, the Half11. Founded by twins Iliya and Nikita Bridan, what started as a design consultancy quickly evolved into a classic car boutique, creating everything from tribute cars, to four-wheeled monsters that blur the lines between dreams and reality. After avidly following the Half11 project for years, from its early days appearing in doctored period photos, to finally tearing up the streets of LA in all its glory, Classic Driver sent Remi Dargegen to meet the twin geniuses responsible for all the hype.



Many of our readers will know of Oilstainlab and the Half11, but as you rarely show your faces, we doubt any would recognise you as the brothers behind the internet sensation. However, you're even more than that: you're twins! Would you say it's double trouble?

We haven't shown our faces, as we firmly believe that Oilstainlab as a brand is about automotive culture, community, dreams, and not about individuals. It is not called Bridan Motors, because its not about us. We do have a unique situation of two people who look alike and share a lot of the same passions. As twins we have a certain advantage for sure, we say we are each other's "enablers". This word means a lot to us, it's core to our brand DNA. Having someone in the room who agrees or supports is always great when you are chasing impossible dreams.



What are your earliest memories about cars, racing, and classics from when you were kids?

We've been drawing a lot — cars, spaceships, dinosaurs — ever since we were very young, like a lot of kids, we suppose. Growing up in rural Canada, there was no car culture, no fancy cars nothing to aspire to. So our trips to Europe were when we would see the cars that would change our world. In Spain, we were driving through a city, and we saw a Lamborghini dealer, so we yelled at our parents to stop, we remember thinking "What is that!?" So they stopped, we went inside, and the dealer let us sit in it and look around the cars, it was incredible! The second big moment was at the infamous London McLaren F1 store. I think that car has inspired more people to join the auto/motorsport industry than anything else!



What is at the origin of your passion, and how did you feed it?

It started with the art and design side. We had no mechanical understanding or respect for that part of cars, nor were we fascinated with performance. We were all about pure style, and this led us to car design. So, at 14, we dropped out of high school and moved to Italy to pursue that Italian coach building dream — what a dream! At 17 we moved to

California and finished our studies, all this time lusting for classic cars. We didn't understand reliability, parts shortages, it was still all style up until then. At 25, we bought our first classic car and started to learn how to wrench, gaining an addiction to mechanical art and beauty, which is now a big hallmark of our work. Our passion is now a universal love of engineering, problem solving and art.



As twins, have you always had parallel paths in this passion and do you think this has helped you to conceive and manage this project? Are you usually on the same page, or are there arguments?

Yes, we're as close as two humans can be to outsiders, but we've had very different experiences along the same path.

Of course, we're aligned on a big picture and the motivation side. There is, however, a very healthy amount of friction: we are both very passionate and critique and question everything, including our own work. We definitely challenge each other on many things and push to make the coolest projects possible.



What was your background to be able to start this project, how did you manage to create something as crazy as the Half11?

As mentioned, we started in car design, but that does not prepare you for something like this! Big mistake *Both laugh*. When we started, we had no skills, no metal shaping, no welding, no machining, no engineering, no engine skills; we were absolutely clueless. But fortune favours the bold and the naive! We merely wanted to build a terrifying and accurate tribute to our favourite era of racing. We wanted to give back, to share in that era instead of just stealing ideas like everyone else does. No matter what, we would

build our dream!

Who is responsible for the inception of the Half11? Was it one of you, or did you both come up with the idea?

We had built a few 911s up to that point: a 1972 tribute, a 1967 ST-style build, and a 1973.5 RSR tribute. We wanted to do something special and extreme and the 911 is the ultimate canvas. So, we started brainstorming together. After about a year of concepts, Iliya did this crazy sketch of a 911 front attached to a Porsche indy car - we knew that was it! It was time to build it!



How would you describe the Half11?

A fantastic tale of adventure, friendship, discovery, humour, all rolled into an aluminium thunder machine.

The Half11 project is a business card for design consultancy. At its core, it's a story and the car is simply the lead character. In many ways, the design didn't matter as it would be undeniably linked in a universe that we created and shared with the world. This approach challenged the way most design projects or products are represented in the world today. Our approach is heavily inspired by American designer J Mays. In many ways we had topics that we wanted to address and challenge the world on, but those are our secret sauce...



At the very beginning, you started retouching period pictures of racing Porsches to include the Half11, creating a real confusion. Do you think that your car is a sort of missing link in the history of the brand?

From the start we created a universe that this car could have existed in, neatly fitting it into a racing class that Porsche did not compete in, but one that the GT40 dominated. This allowed us to ground the design, project, and proportions in reality, limiting our scope and narrowing down our project. We love this era so much and have always wanted to pay tribute to it, it's a love letter to an era of true heroes, daring, drama, adrenaline, and death. So the images were that, they also helped us judge the design. Does it fit

into the era? Is it appropriate? Of course, any confusion this caused was quite funny for us, as we were not trying to do this on purpose, it was merely a side effect.



It's very much linked to Porsche, but it has a V8. What's the reason behind this engine, and do you imagine an evolution with a flat-6 or even a flat-8?

Simply put, for a prototype car, this is the only possible choice. There is a reason the McLaren f1 prototype used an American V8. We have been open with the development of this car, and people criticise elements of the build without understanding the big picture. The future holds many exciting powertrains, from a flat-6, to a flat-8, to anything you can imagine!

Since our photo shoot, there has been a big change: you added a roof to the car. Arguably this makes it more useable, perhaps more realistic, and this is very objective, but we could also say more extreme, as you get a better sense of proportions. What prompted this addition?

The car was always going to be a coupe. That was the original vision, it just took us time to get there. Building cars takes time and this project was just on weekends. The coupe certainly emphasises the proportions: at 37.5 inches tall, it's incredibly low, and wide. The coupe is also much more pleasant at triple digit speeds, and was perfect on our 3,200 mile cross country trip from Los Angeles to New York last September.



Can you tell us about your goals for this project? Are there plans for a small production run of the Half11 and what's in store for the future of Oilstainlab?

The Half11 never was a commercial product. Many people advertise a price or say it's for sale, but this is simply not true. This car was our vision, an uncompromised love letter to an era we adore. After sharing everything with the half11 development, the hardest part has been keeping the new car secret.

We will be unveiling a new vehicle soon that is intended for very limited production, a few private clients have seen it now and their reactions have been incredible. It has been in development since 2022 and reflects our vision for a modern performance concept that respects the past. It should absolutely delight once it hits the roads, but as always, we are working on many other ideas and projects.



The Half11 is rather polarising. What surprises us is some purists absolutely love it, while some tuners hate it. What would you say to the haters?

We thank them! We are professional artists and you learn more from your failures, critics, and haters than from the constant positive feedback loop. We genuinely believe this hate has helped make the project better. We also find it is not that polarising, most people can respect that two brothers had a vision and built something with their bare hands. In an increasingly digital world, making things is forgotten. We simply hope to educate and inspire the younger and older generations to not forget this era of automotive history. We have been very open about the entire project, sharing every failure, lesson and success on social media. It's a vulnerable position when everything is so curated these days. This has left us open to criticism and ridicule, but how else do we learn? Failure and haters' comments just fuel us to do better, learn from mistakes and keep going. So thank you for all the positive and negative comments!

What do you hope people will think of the Half11 in 50 years?

We hope they will know how to drive and not get scared when it starts and makes loud noises and bad smells *both laugh*.





What do you both think of the classic car scene and its evolution these past a few years?

We've been active in the classic car scene since 2012. The community is so much bigger now, there's so many events. It's great for the hobby, and it's great to see it growing. There is a reason people gravitate towards timeless beauty and experiences. There are, of course, the negative sides to this growing popularity: costs, bad people, clout chasers, horrible collaborations, so sometimes we do wish for the simpler times, when there was a smaller and more authentic community.

Regardless of value, what are your dream classic cars and race cars?

Brabham BT44

STP-Paxton Turbocar

Lamborghini Countach LP400 'Periscopio'

Pininfarina Modulo

Lancia Stratos Zero

Ferrari 212E Montagna

1970-1973 Mazda Porter Cab

Panhard 24

1937 Talbot-Lago T150 CSS Figoni & Falaschi Teardrop Coupe

Everything from "Avions Voisin"



What is the most striking design ever made in your opinion and why?

The 1938 Dubonnet Hispano-Suiza H6C Xenia - this pre-war car must have looked so unhinged at the time. It was so advanced, like a true spaceship, relative to the rest of the cars on the road.

And the most exceptional designer?

Gandini, if we could only pick one.



What is the recipe for good car design?

Honesty and simplicity.

We live by the Dieter Rams principles:

"The details are not the details. They make the design. Fashion fades, only style remains the same."

"A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."



Do you consider yourselves Classic Drivers?

Yes! We only have old cars, nothing newer than 1975 more or less, we live the classic car life!

To end, what's behind the name Oilstainlab?

Oilstainlab starts with oil, the lifeblood of our cars. Stain represents that once you are a car guy, you're always a car guy, your soul, fingers, driveway, and clothes get stained forever. Lab is a play for experiments, a place to play and try things, to fail and succeed, to make progress, using all our knowledge.

Photos by Remi Dargegen

Gallery

