

ROCK DOG

AN OSLO BLUE 2018 GT3 TOURING
HONORS A FATHER'S MEMORY.

STORY BY **DAVID MATHEWS** PHOTOS BY **NICK BERARD**



“At the end of a long, hectic day, with the turn of a key, my world becomes organic, raucous, and exciting.”



With those words, Wilfred “Will” Szerenyi expresses the feeling we’ve all felt when easing behind the wheel of a Porsche, be it a dainty 356, a prosaic 912, or a 500-horsepower GT3. It’s the solid thunk of the door, the aroma of oil and leather, the nick of the shifter moving through the

gears. It’s the sweet, symphonic melody of gear whine and exhaust note on a warm summer evening. It’s the sensation that transcends time, and causes the world to pause and take notice. It’s the visceral experience that both soothes and excites the soul. Ferdinand Porsche experienced that same emotion. “In the beginning I looked around and, not finding the automobile of my dreams, decided to build it myself.”

Will is not a run-of-the-mill human being. Oh sure, he’s a Gen-X family man who dotes over his wife, Jen, and their children. His suburban home features a perfect brick patio, outdoor kitchen, and manicured lawn. His living room is a mild clutter of children’s games, books, and toys. But that seemingly mundane lifestyle belies the “below-the-surface” Will, a 70-hour-a-week anesthesiologist who also plays bass guitar in a rock band—barefoot. He also owns a boisterous, beautiful, Oslo Blue 2018 GT3 Touring that has been modified to make its presence known. His daughter, Emerson, announced to her second-grade class, “That was my dad heading to work,” as he accelerated down a highway entrance ramp, tickling 9000 rpm on the big dial...a quarter-mile from her school. Yeah, *that* Will.

As with many Porsche owners, Will fell under the Porsche spell as a teenager. His dad, Bernard, whom Will’s mother affectionately called “Berci,” owned a pris-

tine 1972 911E Targa. “Although a schooled and skilled mechanical and electrical engineer, my dad was not really a car guy,” said Will. “He drove an old VW diesel Rabbit that went from zero to 60 in about five minutes.” With a mechanical and technical proficiency coupled with an engineering background, Will’s dad developed a business servicing and repairing car wash machinery—a successful concern in car-crazed California. He eventually acquired a car wash in Huntington Beach, and Will’s mom ran it.

Berci, who fled Hungary years earlier to escape Soviet persecution, became partners with another Hungarian who happened to be an excellent body and paint man. They developed a side business of buying totaled Honda Accords and then repairing, repainting, and selling them. The need for cheap transportation was great, and the California market was profitable. After a while, they decided to move into more upscale cars, doing the

same “salvage, repair, and sell” thing but at a higher level. The partner eventually found the Porsche, a car “in need of love.”

Berci and his friend meticulously rebuilt and restored it over a period of years, and by 1982 the 911E Targa was finished. Will’s dad decided to keep the car, and it became a source of pride. Sixteen-year-old Will was allowed to change its oil, wash and wax it, and drive it only under the strictest of guidelines and on the most special of occasions.

WILL SPENT MUCH of his free time in his dad’s shop doing the kinds of things boys like to do. “As a kid, as far back as I can remember, I loved going to my father’s shop,” said Will. “I loved getting dirty—hydraulics, pneumatics, oil, grease, dirt, grinders, sanders, saws, welding, tools, drafting, trucks, forklifts, sparks. He taught me how to weld both TIG and MIG—brass, copper, alu-

minum, stainless, and iron. He taught me how electric, diesel, and gasoline motors work; how to cut metal with a torch; how to drive when I was eight or nine.”

“When I reached my early teens, I fell in love with the Fiat X1/9,” he continued. “I worked and saved and by the time I was 16, I had around \$8,000, nearly enough to buy a new one. But on my 16th birthday, May 1, 1982, my father gifted me a 1974 X1/9 that he’d torn down and rebuilt. It was beautiful—white exterior with black striping and an orange interior. It had ANSA headers and exhaust. It was lowered. The aluminum wheels were cool. It was the most awesome car in the world. The challenging thing about that car was that it was always breaking down. So, if I wanted to drive it or go out with friends or on a date, I had to learn how to fix things.” Will developed confidence with all things mechanical. Over-confidence, some might say.

“After I drove my dad’s Porsche, I couldn’t believe





what a piece of junk the X1/9 was. That Targa pulled and pulled and pulled. And the attention I got when I was driving with the top off. It had no exhaust modifications, but man, that sound...Wow! The clutch was a little tricky, though."

ON A BRIGHT sunny summer day, when both parents were at work, Will walked through the kitchen. On the counter, as tempting as Eve's apple, were the keys to the Porsche. The wheels in Will's head began to turn. *I don't think he'd care if I took it out,* Will thought. He'd driven it before with no problem. His dad certainly wouldn't mind; in fact, he'd understand how wonderful a short, quick drive would be. He'd have it back before his parents came home.

Will grabbed the keys, drove around the neighbor-

hood, picked up three of his friends, and just tooled around—four teenage boys in a bright red Targa, faster than a speeding bullet. What could go wrong?

"There was a stretch of Beach Boulevard near La Habra that was undeveloped, a little hilly and winding. With little traffic on the road, I began to push the car. I had no idea how fast that car would go, having driven it 75 or 80 at the most. My friends began to egg me on. 'Push it, dude. Faster, go faster.' So I did, but I was scared as hell. I hadn't been over 100 mph before. I saw the speedometer reading 105, 110."

Teenage testosterone blended with the rush of wind and the blur of passing scenery. Will lost track of which gear he was in. Surely there had to be another gear. "I was at redline in fourth gear. I stopped looking at the gauges because turns were coming up fast. I'm on the

Yellow belts and stitching underscore the Scandinavian theme of this Oslo Blue coupe. Whether streaking down a highway or meandering along a deep forest trail, this GT3 commands attention.

"Playing my bass guitar and driving the GT3 are very similar. Both of them speak to me. They breathe. They come alive. They demand attention."



The personalized plate honors Will's father, Bernard. The Soul exhaust system is aptly named; it sheds unsprung weight and adds significant bellow at 9000 rpm.

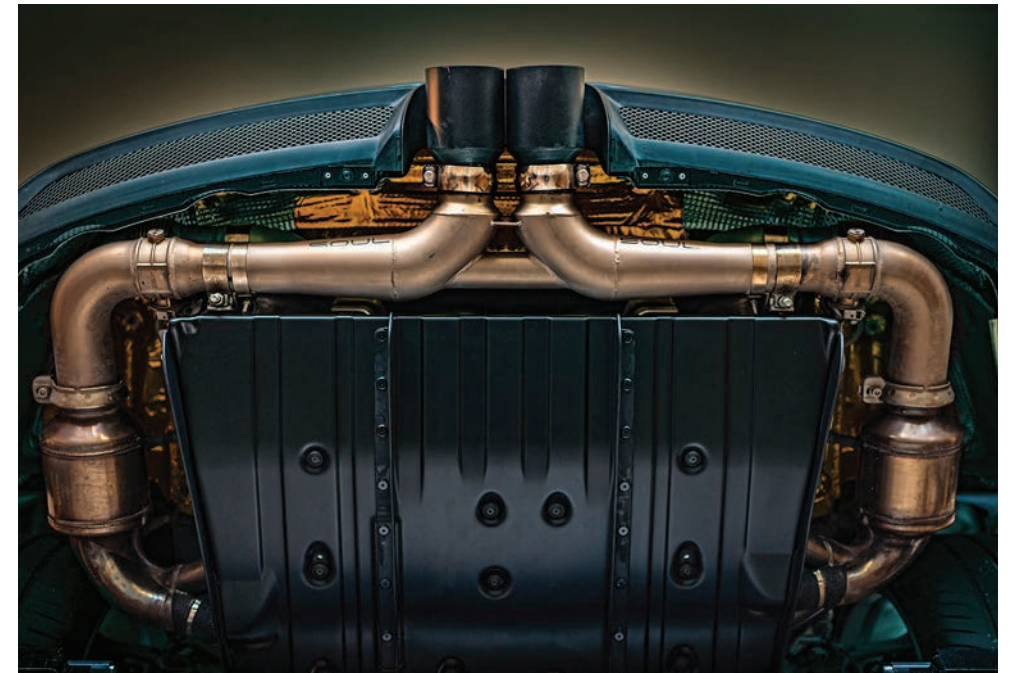
gas, on the brakes, on the clutch, looking for fifth gear." And then... "I don't know what happened, exactly. Either I missed a gear or jammed it in third, whatever. But I engaged the gearbox and let out the clutch."

Chaos ensued. A most ungodly sound filled the air. Metal shredding. Bits and pieces grinding and shearing. Then the smoke and the smell. "Looking in the rearview mirror, I saw a massive cloud of smoke. I pulled over, rolled to a stop, and everyone bailed out. We ran to the other side of the road, thinking the car might blow up at any second. Plumes billowed out from the wheel wells, the vent, beneath the car. Flames licked the fenders and blistered the paint. We stood there, awestruck, watching that beautiful car melt before us. There was nothing we could do. One of my friends turned to me and said, 'Dude, you are so screwed!'"

HIS NEXT PHONE call was, well, painful. "Hey Pops, how are ya? Uh, listen, I...uh...took out your Porsche this afternoon with Brent and some friends, and, I...uh...well, I...uh...blew it up. It's dead." Silence. Interminable, unbearable silence. "Dad? Dad?" With a click, the phone went dead.

The Porsche was a total loss. Will saw it only once after it was flat-bedded away; it was in one of his dad's warehouses, a charred carcass partially obscured by car wash equipment. It never again saw the light of day. Was his dad angry? Sad? Disappointed? Sure, but "He didn't say a word to me. And he never got another Porsche."

"He never said another word about that Porsche, and it weighed on me," recalled Will. "I couldn't shake what I did, what disappointment I caused him." The money Will saved for a new X1/9? He gave it to his dad to partially





GT3 Touring

WHEN THE 991 GT3 was introduced in 2013, it was a dramatic change from previous iterations, in that it was available only with a PDK transmission. Shifts were instantaneous—100 milliseconds—and the 3.8-liter six generated 470 hp at 8250 rpm. Its front aluminum suspension, massive rear wing, lower, wider stance and active rear axle steering all contributed to its superior performance and menacing appearance, but the lack of a manual transmission proved to be an issue for many enthusiasts.

The manual six-speed returned to the center console with the introduction of the 991.2 GT3 in 2017. (An enhanced PDK was also offered.) A new 4.0-liter engine produced 500 horsepower with a 9000 rpm redline. A redesigned rear diffuser and taller rear wing produced 20 percent more downforce than the 991.1 GT3. Generous use of lightweight polyurethane and carbon fiber reduced body weight.

Then, in 2019, the GT3 donned a business suit. The Touring Edition offered the same mind-blowing performance as its winged brother but with a slightly more refined demeanor. Available only with a six-speed manual shifter, the GT3 Touring eliminated the tall rear wing and replaced it with a more conventional retractable unit. Although downforce suffered at triple-digit speeds, the 500-hp 4.0-liter six still provided satisfying performance to all but the hard core.

“It’s kind of interesting how performance perceptions change through the years,” said Andreas Preuninger, director of Porsche’s GT model line, in a recent interview.

Interesting indeed. Teasers and snippets about the newest GT3, which *Panorama* will be reviewing soon, have caused considerable salivation among Porsche hot shoes. Happily, it will be available with both a manual six-speed transmission and PDK. And, for those who prefer a GT3 without its Lego-like rear wing, a Touring edition equipped with either a manual or PDK will be offered. —DM



reimburse him for his loss. “I thought he would say, ‘No, that’s okay, keep it,’ but he didn’t it. He took the money and that was that.”

WILL GRADUATED FROM college with a degree in chemistry, attended the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine in Madison, and completed his four years of anesthesia residency in 1997. After a year or two with a private practice in Denver, he pondered how to make things right for his dad. He wanted to buy his father a new Porsche, but at Christmas in 1998, that plan fell apart.

“My mom called and told me that Dad was pretty sick. I called his urologist, who told me Dad had advanced prostate cancer. D2—the worst news possible.” Winter slowly melted into spring. Bernard became weaker and weaker. He died in April 1999. Will had run out of time to make it right.

“It took me years to reconcile my feelings—what I did, and what I was unable to do. Anyway, I always loved Porsches, so I decided that I would buy a special one to honor my dad’s memory. When I read about the Touring Edition GT3, I knew that was the car I wanted.”

However, wanting a Touring Edition GT3 proved to be easier than actually buying one. When neither of his local dealerships could secure an allocation, Will expanded his search nationwide. He eventually found one at Carlsen Porsche (now Porsche Redwood City). It was the perfect color with perfect options. It also appeared to be perfectly out of reach. The dealer wanted list price plus, plus, plus. Ouch!

“I gave them my top offer, which they rejected immediately. I thought the car was gone forever. The dealer was in the heart of tech land, and those dot-

com guys had all the money in the world. But several weeks later, I received a call from the salesperson. The sales manager decided to accept my offer and said that I should wire funds immediately.” It was a nerve-racking wait for the GT3, as the transporter took two weeks to bring the car to Milwaukee with no communication or arrival updates.

THE CAR ARRIVED in perfect condition—well, almost perfect. Will thought it was not loud enough, so he decided to remedy the situation. He ordered Soul Performance Products’ valved side muffler bypass pipes and installed them in his garage. Not only did those pipes bring a beautiful racket to the neighborhood, they also shed 35 pounds of unnecessary weight from the rear of the car.

But there’s more. If a little was better, a lot was better yet. Will substituted a Soul center muffler bypass exhaust for the stock setup, further reducing unsprung weight and enhancing the bellow. “Playing my bass guitar and driving the GT3 are very similar. Both of them speak to me. They breathe. They come alive. They demand attention.”

What would his Dad think? “If he were to see my car, my GT3, I think he would be incredibly impressed. When I walk by it in the garage and look at the license plate, I think of him. When I wash and wax it, I think of him. When I drive it, he’s riding shotgun with me. I hope he’s proud of me. Yesterday, my five-year-old son put a little ding in the GT3 with a broomstick. I just smiled and gave him a hug.”



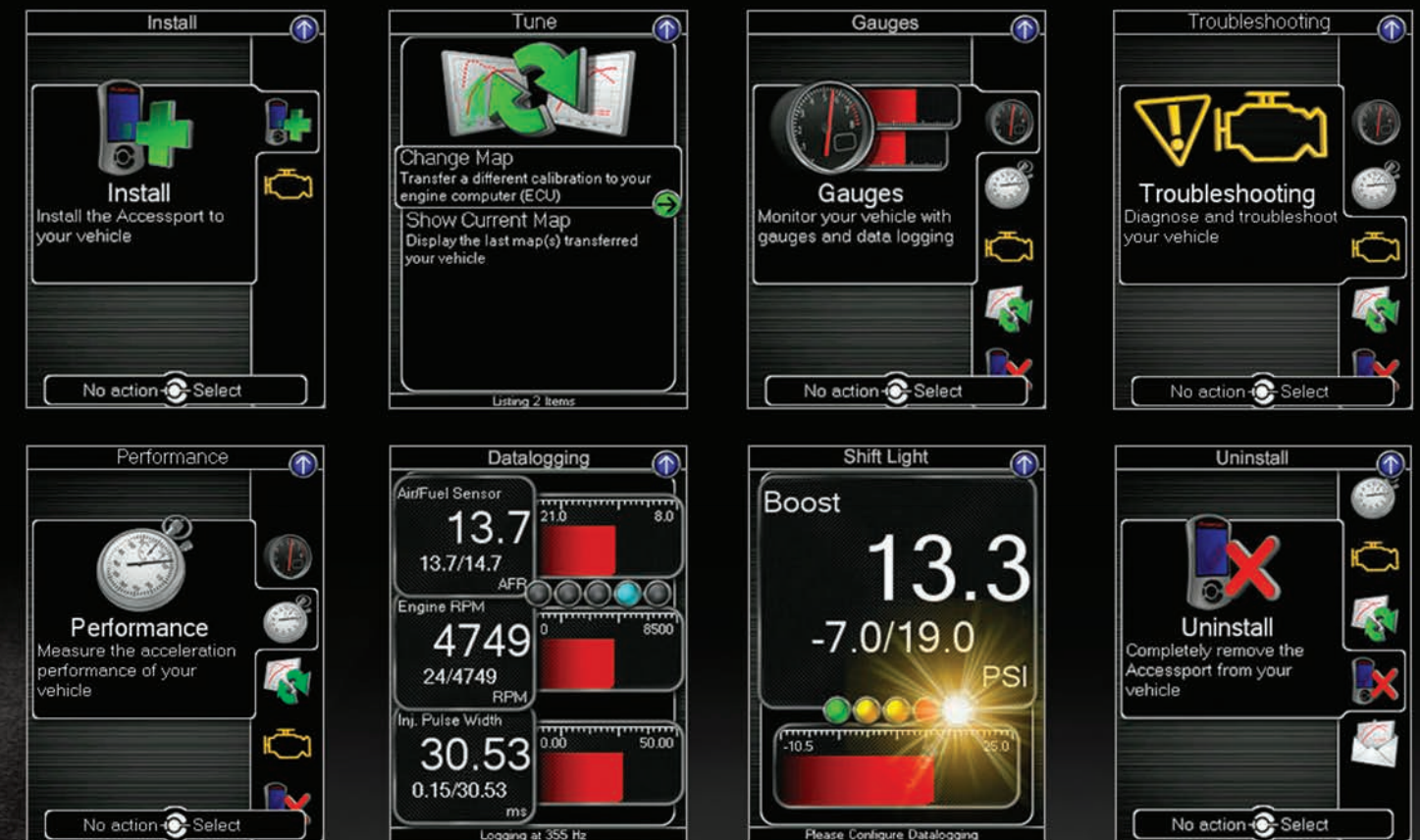
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To see a short video clip of Will's GT3 Touring, go to:

youtu.be/zAAoP-GWvsc

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