

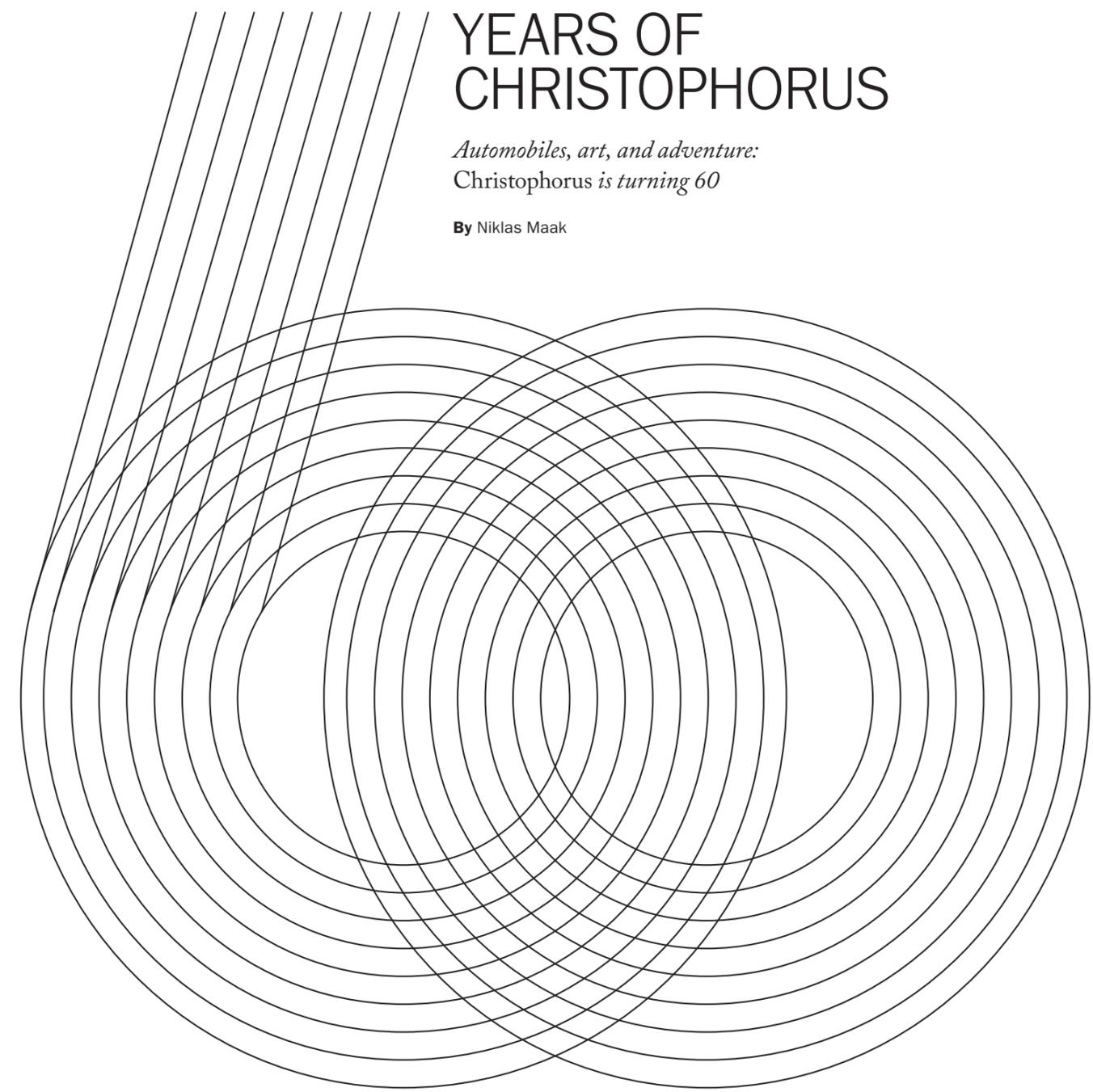


001 Christophorus
1952

YEARS OF CHRISTOPHORUS

*Automobiles, art, and adventure:
Christophorus is turning 60*

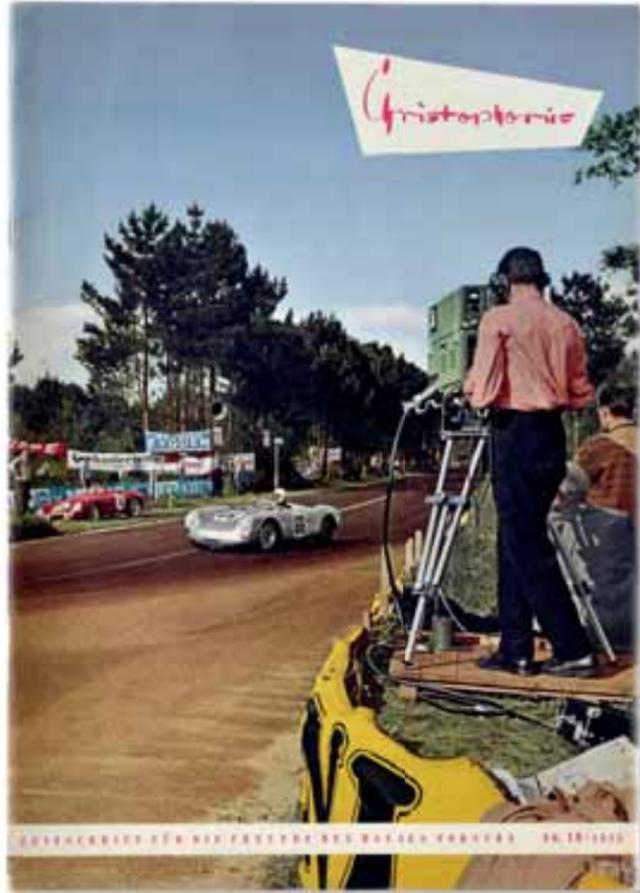
By Niklas Maak



First impressions are usually close to the mark, as the saying goes. And indeed, the cover of the very first issue of *Christophorus* magazine already said it all. Published in 1952, it shows a silver Porsche 356 with red leather seats—but not in a place where you would expect a sports car, like at the side of a racetrack or in front of a fashionable city café. Instead, it is parked in the snow on a mountain slope, far from any road. The woman in front of the car is wearing red lipstick, a chic sweater, and slacks

and is fastening her ski boots. The message is clear: I don't need a ski lift; I have a Porsche.

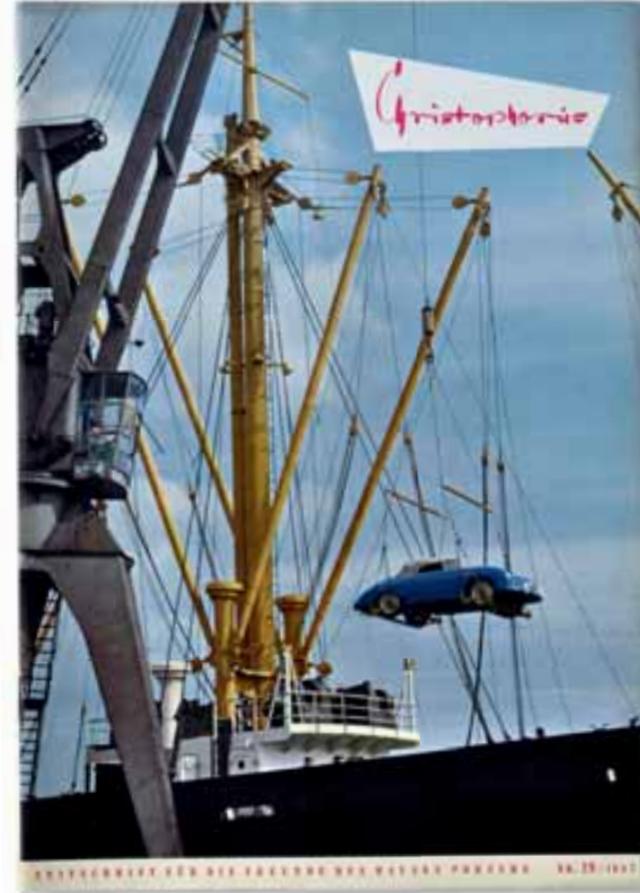
The cover was remarkable because it stood for a whole approach to life. This is no dutiful postwar housewife who stayed at home to cook and clean while her husband went to work. She is a confident, active, adventurous woman who wears slacks and is not afraid to venture into unfamiliar terrain to find excitement—and who needs a car to suit her lifestyle.



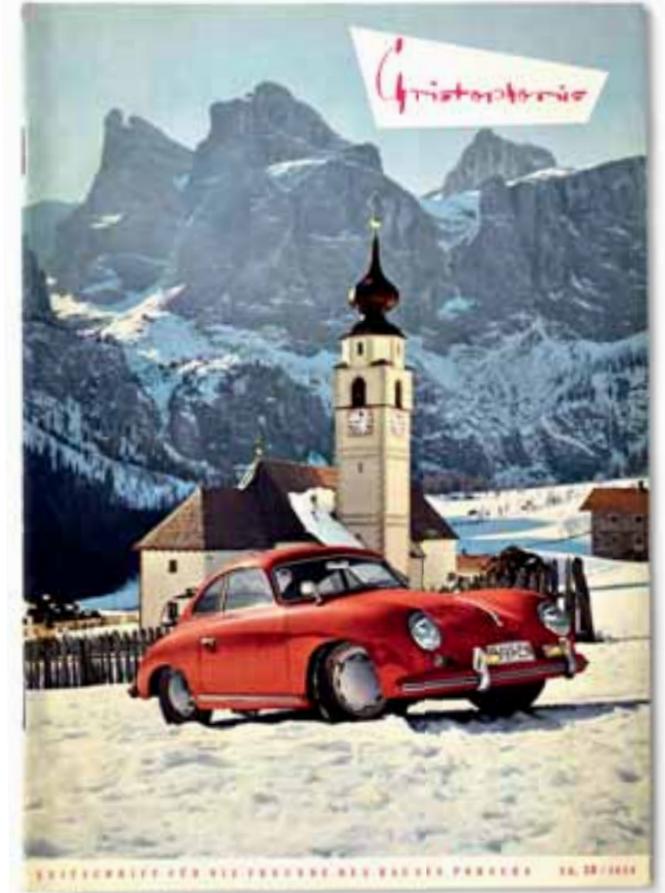
016 Christophorus
1955



023 Christophorus
1956



029 Christophorus
1957



036 Christophorus
1958

In a stroke of near genius, the designer of the cover managed to convey a striking image of a Porsche as both an object of beauty and a car that can take on any adventure. It was the perfect image for the time. After all, it was only seven years after World War II ended, and times were tough. Germans had an enormous hunger to find out what they might discover in unfamiliar places and foreign countries by exploring them as friendly visitors rather than attacking and occupying them.



The image on the cover was not the only way Porsche was presented in the first *Christophorus* issue as the perfect car for adventures of a peaceful nature. It also contained a travel report entitled “I Was in Africa” by one Dr. O. Domnick, describing a trip through Europe and North Africa in which he drove 10,000 kilometers (about 62,000 miles), contending with sand dunes, gravel, and dusty roads. The photographs show his 356 on the Atlantic coast of western Africa, in a desert fort under giant palm trees, “posing” in front of camels, in the sand. Here, too, the message is unmistakable: with its reliable, air-cooled rear-mounted engine, the relatively light and small Porsche is a virtually indestructible vehicle

that can handle off-road terrain almost as well as a Jeep but that also has the speed of a sports car—the ideal vehicle for anyone who wants to take the road less traveled, a car for a life of adventure and excitement. Even sixty years after it was written, the travel report still makes for good reading. The author does not merely describe the landscapes he travels through and wax enthusiastic about the reliability of his car, he also has a sharp eye for detail and does not hesitate to report the darker sides of what he sees, such as the shady characters—German mercenaries and soldiers who had made their way to Africa after 1945 and who were now waiting to ship out to Indochina—he encounters along the way.

From the very start, *Christophorus* was more than just a promotional magazine. It was a magazine whose authors set out in their Porsches to explore some of the more inaccessible places and truths of their time. Many early articles and features were both reports on unfamiliar worlds and “how-to manuals” with practical tips and advice for would-be explorers aspiring to follow in the authors’ footsteps. Thus the traveling doctor recommends a hardtop rather than a convertible for traveling in hot climates, advises against nylon shirts, and warns that “ladies in slacks are not welcome in Spain and areas further south.”

Of course, there are articles about Porsche’s successes on the racetrack, too, but probably the most interesting thing about the early issues are the road movies that the travel features conjure up in the reader’s mind. Or perhaps “off-road movie” would be a better term, for many give you the sense of being right there in the cockpit of a (very fast) all-terrain vehicle. There is a report by Pierre Boulat, *Life* magazine’s Paris correspondent, about how he and his wife drove from Paris to Suez and on to southern Egypt in their Porsche. A travel feature written by Uwe-Anders Koch in 1968 gives an account of his experiences on a trip through Asia Minor in a Targa. One author describes a road trip through Canada; another writes of setting out to visit the famous gypsy community in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in southern France. And several reporters recount adventures in Morocco in which they pass Jeeps without once getting stuck in the desert sand; the clutches of their Porsches—which were still unsynchronized in those days—were robust enough to take all kinds of abuse.

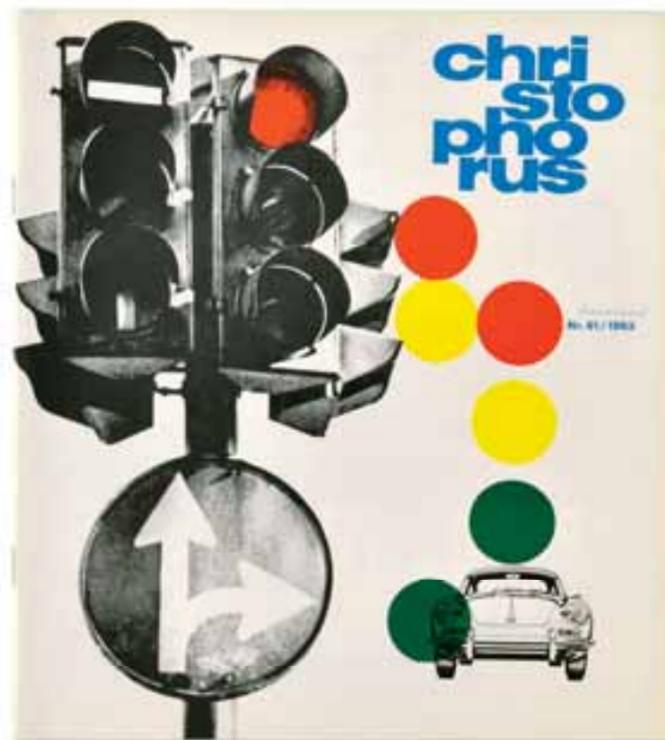
A customer writes about driving his Porsche all the way to the Red Sea. And Gaston Schroff, a country doctor from northern Germany, sends in snapshots of his 356 mired in waterlogged dirt roads with quaint farmhouses in the back-

ground, commenting that his Porsche can handle even the deepest mud thanks to its lightweight construction and rear-mounted engine.

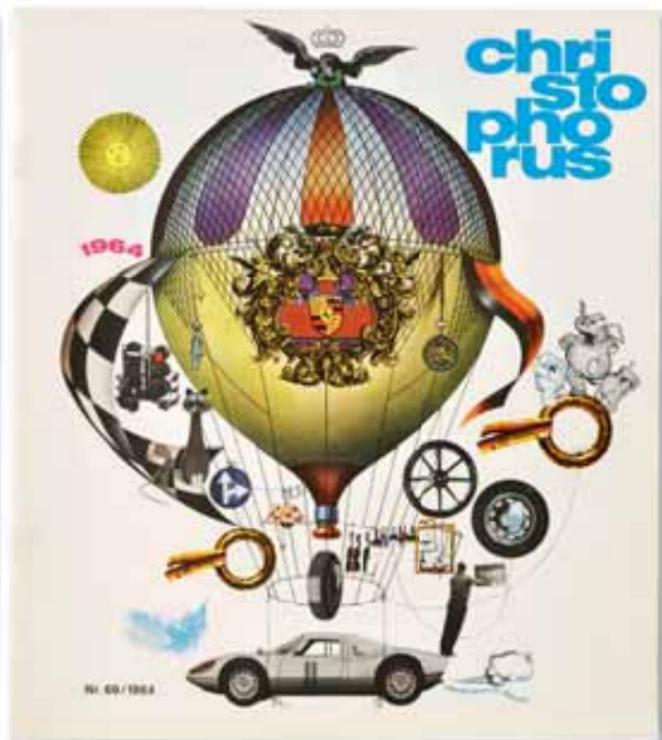
Porsches are shown on ice in the Swiss Alps, in Hawaii under palm trees, in the snow, and in the desert sand . . . The underlying message of all the many images and texts is consistent: Porsche drivers lead lives that are hotter, cooler, wilder, more exciting than other people’s. The 356 bears the promise of a life beyond the narrow confines of regular roads, a life that transcends the rut of an everyday, humdrum existence. Porsche drivers, they imply, are people who seize every chance to experience the new and the unfamiliar. And the makers of the magazine don’t hesitate to charge this promise with hints of eroticism. Under the headline “Tempting,” we see a young woman gazing out the open window of a 356 and read: “Isn’t it delicious to be a vagabond now and then? Drive just for the sake of driving; drive because it’s fun, because it’s tempting, and maybe a bit dangerous, too, to have the world lie at your feet like an open book? . . .

This might be a good moment to say a word or two about how the fairer sex is depicted in the magazine’s early years. Of course, we find images like Miss South Africa posing





061 Christophorus 1963



069 Christophorus 1964



072 Christophorus 1965



094 Christophorus 1968



next to a 356 in a bikini. And a few issues after we come across German actress and entertainer Elke Sommer taking delivery of her black 356, we learn that she has decided to leave the driving to her husband after having an accident on the Nürburgring.

Of course, when women were featured in automobile ads of the time, they generally were only there to look pretty and underline the cars' allure with their sex appeal. Given that such sexist clichés were common in those days, it is not too surprising that we encounter them in *Christophorus* as well. But we also find other images, images of strong, confident women who can take care of themselves and who relish adventure. One female columnist heaps scorn on a man who placed an ad in a newspaper seeking a lady companion for the passenger seat of his Porsche, with the specifications “pretty, good figure, no older than 32.” After all, she huffs, women drive their own Porsches nowadays, thank you very much. And, indeed, there is more than one article in the early issues on “fast ladies”—that is, women race drivers such as Mademoiselle Gilberte Thirion, who sped along the track at 191 km/h (almost 120 mph) in the early 1950s, and Cecilia Koskull, who piloted her Porsche at the Midnight Sun Rally in Sweden in 1950 and took home a prize.

But when it comes to portrayals of empowered, independent women that embody the modern ideal of womanhood, one of the most striking examples from the early years of *Christophorus* is a portrait of Hedda Heuser that runs over several pages. Heuser was a successful shot-putter turned medical doctor who on December 6, 1962, became one of the first women in Germany to hold office as a member of parliament. She was also the proud owner of a Porsche—naturally—with which she liked to “zip through the countryside at 160 km/h.”



Certainly *Christophorus* cannot lay claim to having always been politically correct. We come across a picture of a 356 dangerously tailgating an Opel in the left lane of the autobahn. But in the text that accompanies it, it is not the driver of the Porsche who comes in for criticism. Instead, the author saves his disapproval for the “inconsiderate” chap nonchalantly “dawdling” along in his Opel with one hand on the wheel. He then goes on to declare that the supposedly in-

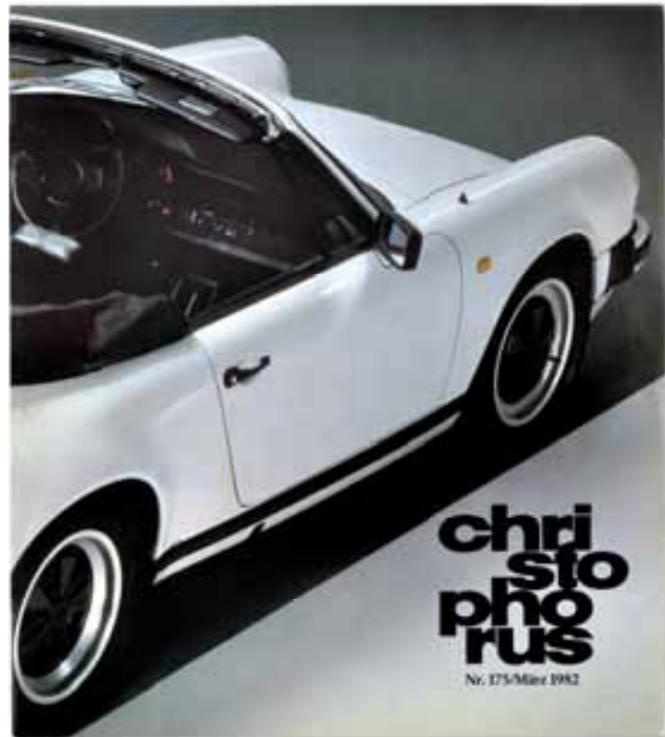
creasing number of “Sunday drivers” and “left-lane hoggers” on German roads is becoming an intolerable problem. (In Germany, passing is allowed in the left lane only, so “slow-pokes” that “hog” the left lane frequently exasperate, even infuriate, those who would like to take full advantage of the fact that there is no speed limit over large stretches of the country’s autobahns.) In another story, the author recounts that actor Steve Cochran was involved in a car chase with his Porsche and reports, not without a certain pride, that he was only forced to give up when the police pulled guns on him.

For those of its readers who aspired to look like Hollywood stars themselves, *Christophorus* was also happy to provide fashion advice. One style tip recommends a two-piece jersey dress with “clean, simple lines” for the “elegant lady in her Porsche.” Functionality, sleek lines, minimalist elegance—the Porsche philosophy transferred to the sartorial realm.

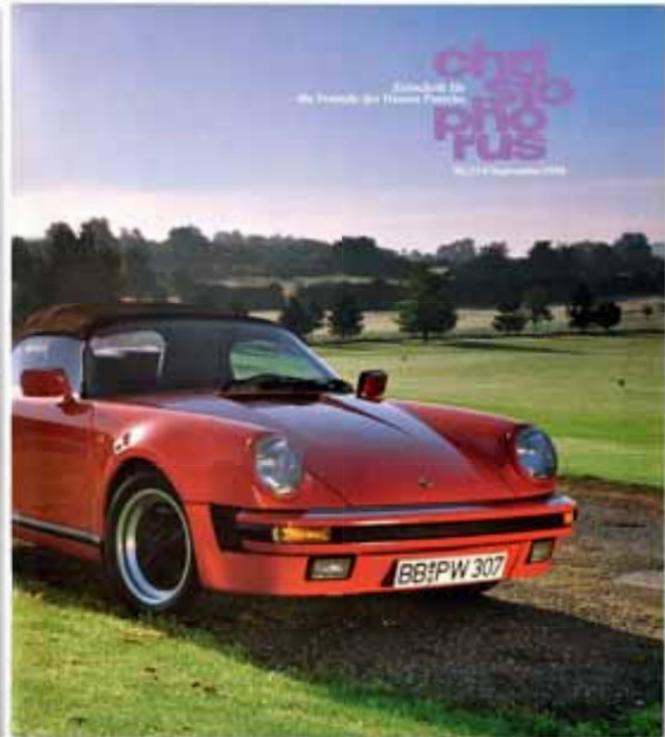
Much of the charm of *Christophorus* issues from the 1960s lies in the fact that they not merely informed readers about the latest Porsche models, but attempted to provide a comprehensive design for a whole lifestyle. The magazine keeps its readers up to date on the latest cool gadgets, such as the Sony Micro TV, and includes features on contemporary art. It recommends books to read and offers tips on how to get the best pictures with a Leica camera. It even goes so far as to give lessons in manners: “Porsche drivers are polite and attentive. They dress tastefully and would never make rude gestures to indicate that others are ‘crazy.’” *Christophorus* readers were not only shown where they might travel and what adventures they might experience in their cars; they also were advised on what clothes to wear, what to read, what contemporary architecture and art to see—in other words, they were shown a way of seeing the world.



Christophorus not only included features on contemporary art—some of the best covers from the 1960s, especially, can be considered works of art in their own right. Initially, the title *Christophorus* appeared on the cover in an elegant, fluid script reminiscent of Japanese calligraphy. In the 1960s, this was replaced by a bold, modern typeface, and the word was dissected into its syllables. The magazine’s new look reflected the minimalist approach and clear lines that characterized the Ulm School of Design and the Porsche 911,



175 Christophorus
1982



214 Christophorus
1988

which was introduced in 1963. In those years, the cover designers were given a free hand to experiment, with results that were frequently stunning. At a time when the term “Pop Art,” coined by the art critic Lawrence Alloway, was only just gaining wider circulation, many of the magazine’s covers already look as if they might have been designed by Andy Warhol or Peter Roehr—both artists who were heavily influenced by commercial art. On one *Christophorus* cover, red, yellow, and green circles come tumbling out of a traffic light and onto the page. Another cover from 1965 features a circular arrangement composed of dozens of 911 models, and the monochrome red cover of the special issue from September 1968 is reminiscent of paintings by Rupprecht Geiger or Barnett Newman.



YEARS OF CHRISTOPHORUS

For the first twenty-odd years of its existence, *Christophorus* had style and flair. It consistently had its finger on the pulse of its times and was on the cutting edge in terms of style and aesthetic trends. This quality is missing later, as are the dazzling travel features, whose number drops sharply from 1972 on. Evidently there was less interest in traveling by car now that more and more people preferred to fly to their destinations. There is the odd travel feature here and there, such as a report on a cross-country trip through Ireland and one author’s account of his travels through Argentina (without a Porsche, incidentally), but the passion and spark of the early years is gone.



Granted, in 1977 we find an account of a trip from the Norwegian North Cape to Cape Horn in the new Porsche 924, and the stories and images featured in the magazine still give you a pretty good idea of how preferences and fashions change with the times. In 1968 the Porsche driver’s green 911 takes him to his catamaran in eye-popping orange. In 1977 we see him picking up terra-cotta pots in Tuscany in a white 928, alongside fashion ads featuring plaid sports coats paired with white loafers. In 1979 he is shown engaging in the trendy sport of windsurfing (“equipment from 1,000 deutschmarks”) or playing golf (“2,000 deutschmarks and up”). The rise of Japanese manufacturers is reflected in an ad by Kawasaki recommending its Z 1000 motorcycle as the perfect two-wheel complement to the 911 S.



But somewhere along the way, the magazine seems to have lost touch with the major aesthetic and political developments of its times. That its makers would prefer to park their 911 in Saint-Tropez rather than have it torched in the Paris student riots of May 1968 is understandable, the rapid deterioration of the magazine’s aesthetic and journalistic standards less so. The covers from the late 1970s and 1980s are dominated by uninspired promotional photographs. Readers are treated to dull snapshots of “Ernst Fuhrmann’s 60th birthday party” and other festivities for company dignitaries rather than stunning

44 911 TURBO (TYPE 997) Engine: Six-cylinder bi-turbo, Displacement: 3,800 cc, Power: 500 hp (368 kW), Maximum torque: 650 Nm at 1,950–5,000 rpm, 0–100 km/h: 3.7 (3.6*) sec., Top track speed: 312 (312*) km/h (194/194* mph), CO₂ emissions: 272 (268*) g/km, Fuel consumption City: 16.5 (16.5*) l/100 km, Highway: 8.3 (8.1*) l/100 km, Combined: 11.6 (11.4*) l/100 km. * with Porsche double-clutch transmission (PDK)

photographs and travel features on Africa and Asia. There is even a noticeable decline in the quality of the paper used, and the selection of subjects becomes increasingly arbitrary. There are reports on an endurance test of the 944’s catalytic converter and on the Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in Filderstadt; restaurant recommendations for the Lake Zurich area; articles on the building of the new casino in Weissach and the new Porsche double-clutch transmission; a feature about a man who restores old pendulum clocks. The comprehensive vision of a way of life that characterized the early years is gone. And the advertisements from these issues are just as dreary.

And what was *Christophorus* up to in 1989 and 1990, those heady, exciting years that ushered in a new world order? No trip behind the newly opened Iron Curtain, to Dresden, Warsaw, or Kiev; not a word about the fall of the Berlin Wall. Instead, the focus is on topics like the open roof of the Porsche 944 S2 Cabrio, which is presented along with a few gratuitous and rather undignified potshots (“pretensions of perfection”) aimed at the Mercedes SL. So it’s a real relief to find the adventurous spirit of the early years return around the beginning of the new millennium, taking the shape of a bright yellow 911 Turbo with a raised chassis, braving mud and floods as it explores some of the world’s last unknown terrain on its way to Cape York in Australia, following in the proud tradition of its two-wheel drive “ancestors.” ●

Illustration: Bernd Schifferdecker



RICHARD VON FRANKENBERG

founded *Christophorus* magazine in 1952 and was its first editor-in-chief. Born in Darmstadt in 1922, von Frankenberg became one of Germany’s most successful race-car drivers in the 1950s and was known for his willingness to take risks to get ahead of competitors on the racecourse, which included Graf Berghe von Trips, Hans Herrmann, and Huschke von Hanstein. Richard von Frankenberg died in Stuttgart in 1973 from injuries sustained when he got into a traffic accident through no fault of his own. His eldest son Donald von Frankenberg gives an account of his father’s exciting life in a biography entitled *Mit Vollgas durchs Leben* (“Life in the Fast Lane”). (Delius Klasing, ISBN 978-3-7688-2655-6.)

