

Arctic Drifts

Crack, crack, crack. The metallic sound pierces our ears, even though all that the four white Porsche 911 Carrera S coupes are doing is following a yellow 911 down an unpaved forest road. The sun is hanging low over the horizon, causing the ice crystals to glitter on the snow. We are about to witness an unusual showdown on “Lake Porsche,” not far from the Porsche Driving Experience Center in Ivalo: tires versus ice. But the tires are well-prepared—each has up to 200 studs, each exactly four millimeters long. The show can begin: it’s Porsche on ice!

The participants have come to Lapland from all over the globe to take part in the Ice Force training camp, and their eager anticipation is palpable as they listen to Rich Hull’s brief lecture. The American is one of the experienced Porsche instructors who will be honing participants’ skills, teaching them the right approach to gas pedal and brakes when the going gets slippery. Northern Finland is the ideal place for anyone who wants to get a feel for driving and optimize the racing line under winter conditions. It doesn’t take many words to describe this remote spot 300 kilometers (185 miles) north of the Arctic Circle. It’s mostly just—white. But above all, the lake, for which Porsche has secured the exclusive use rights, offers plenty of room. The trees lining the snow-covered shore are far enough away not to pose any danger.

Before they get down to the nitty-gritty, Hull has a few things to tell them: theory before practice. If you’re driving on an icy surface, you need to know what happens when you put your foot on the gas pedal and why, and so the subject “driving physics” has a prominent place in the curriculum. The Ice Force participants will be dealing with four completely different Porsche propulsion systems—five, starting next season, when the Panamera joins the team. Thus a Cayman coupe with a mid-mounted engine behaves differently from a rear-engine 911. Even the two all-wheel-drive

911 models, the Carrera 4S and the Turbo, display certain differences that are not explained solely on the basis of the Turbo’s 95 additional horsepower. The participants know that once they are sitting in their respective driving seats, every little detail will count—after all, we’re talking about keeping up to 620 newton-meters (480 lb.-ft.) of torque under control.

The swirling snow creates intricate patterns on the ice as two xenon headlights appear in the dense curtain of white and an Arctic Silver 911 Targa 4S emerges, followed by an Aqua Blue Carrera 4S. Though there are hardly any steering movements to be discerned, the two cars trace one perfect circle after another. Going at over 80 km/h (50 mph), the two drivers are steering the vehicles solely by means of precisely measured doses of throttle delivered to the 3.8-liter six-cylinder engine, which fills the icy air with a deep roar. A good measure of sensitivity is also needed: piloting the 911 Carrera S requires a sure touch when it comes to steering angle; the rear engine demands deft counter-steering.

An equally apt name for the Ice Force course would be “Drift Away”—but this kind of drift has nothing to do with drifting off to sleep. Right after starting, the cars immediately accelerate to 40–50 km/h (about 30 mph); then, after the first bend, lateral acceleration produces the so-called Ferraria effect, and the rest of the course is covered more or less completely in a state of drift. Although drivers normally do their best to avoid it when driving on the road, lateral slipping—or drifting—is the whole point here, and a big part of the fun.

“Ice Force is the most challenging course we offer on ice and snow,” says Jochen Albig, head instructor at the Porsche Driving Experience Center. All the participants have completed various other training courses and have gained some experience driving ▶

Driving

The ice may not be limitless, but 185 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Finland, the wide open spaces certainly seem to be. In the Ice Force training camp offered by the Porsche Sport Driving School, there is no limit except the sports cars’ limit of adhesion—and participants will be pushing even that boundary by the end of the course.



in winter conditions in Camp4 and Camp4S. Now they have to adapt to four different vehicle concepts in the space of a single day and perform feats on a frozen lake surface that most wouldn't find easy even under normal road conditions. It's a combination that promises special challenges and thrills, taking the driving experience to an entirely new level—and with all the electronic handling controls that Porsche drivers normally can rely on turned off.

The three days of practical training under the guidance of experts begins with a warm-up program on an extra-wide slalom course—an absolute necessity at minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 degrees Fahrenheit). Only those who have proven they've mastered the principle of load transfer here are allowed to try their hand on one of the numerous prepared round courses. Once things are running smoothly there, it's on to the next challenge. One thing is for sure: no one is going to get bored. The drivers constantly have to adapt to new models with their specific handling properties and get a feel for how they handle under different conditions. The road to developing sure instincts on ice and snow is paved with setbacks. The level of difficulty increases a bit each

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day, with a new course to master—virtually guaranteeing a learning effect. And sometimes, the best way to stay on track isn't by stepping on the brakes timidly. In an all-wheel-drive Porsche driven on ice, a spirited press on the gas pedal will transfer power to the front wheels and pull the car through the curve in a neat arc. As instructor Leo Wandl says, however, "You have to watch out that there aren't too many curves in succession, or else you'll build up so much speed that you'll no longer be able to control the car."

What takes a lot of nerves at first eventually turns into exhilarating fun. Just take the so-called rally flick, which involves getting the 911 Turbo to break away in the rear at a speed of 60–70 km/h (around 40 mph) and then making use of controlled drift to steer it through a hairpin bend as quickly and smoothly as possible. A maneuver that seems right at home in Ivalo; it's no coincidence that many of the world's best rally drivers are from Finland.

On the last day, finally, the cars' dance on the ice resembles a perfectly choreographed waltz powered by several thousand horsepower. That afternoon, the Porsche sports cars thunder up the narrow forest road one last time, with the instructor's yellow Carrera leading the way. But many will be back again. It's not just the impressive sound produced by the studs that makes the Ice Force experience addictive—it's also the realization that only practice makes perfect.

Porsche Ice Force dates for 2010:
February 15–19, February 19–23, February 23–27,
February 27–March 3, March 3–7, March 7–11

Porsche Sport Driving School
Phone: +49-711-911-78033
E-mail: stephan.griese@porsche.de



Ice, ice, baby:
The days in Finland's far north are short, so there's no time to lose—and the 911s are raring to go

