

# LONG BEACH



## Street Circuit

Track length: 3.17 km  
Right-hand turns: 7  
Left-hand turns: 6

# With the Panamera GTS in Long Beach

*Pattie Hughes Mayer is a safety-car driver for the American Le Mans Series. She explains how her car, the Panamera GTS, becomes more agile the faster she drives it.*

By Heike Hientzsch  
Photos by Bob Chapman

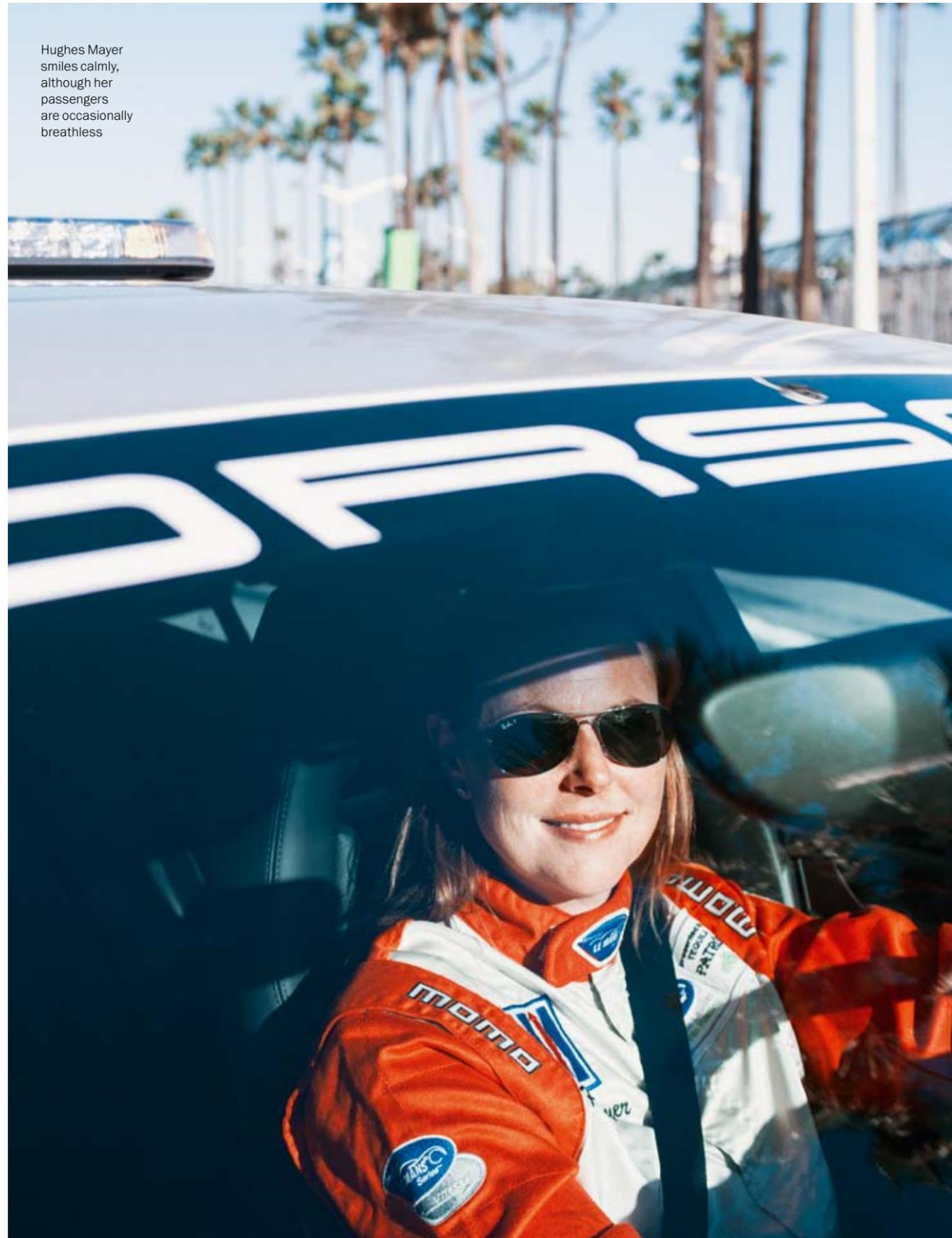




The American Le Mans Series held its second race this year on this 3.17-kilometer course

**P**attie Hughes Mayer recalls with fondness the warm sound of the 911 as it pulled up to a stop sign near her parents' house and then accelerated through a gear shift or two before coming to a stop again outside the family home. Then there was the inimitable rustling sound it made right after the ignition was switched off. This music accompanied her father's return from work every day. Early childhood memories have the potential to condition us for life. "The sound, the smell, the feel, the name," says the 43-year-old American in listing the impressions it left. "Porsche touched my heart and soul early on. For me, the brand is a passion and a way of life."

The 911 became her dream car, and today she is proud of her own 911 Carrera 4S. It's well suited to the daily demands placed on a mother and homemaker. As for her profession, Hughes Mayer shows others how to drive a sports car, such as a 911, correctly and enjoyably. She is an instructor at the Porsche Sport Driving School in Birmingham, Alabama, and she's also a safety-car driver in the American Le Mans Series (ALMS), driving a Panamera GTS. Her qualifications include an active period as a race-car driver and a total of twenty years of experience in racing. You need excellent driving skills and a cool head to keep a roaring field of ALMS cars with around 15,000 kW (more than 20,000 horsepower) in check, all the more so under emotionally charged circumstances. After an accident, for example, in order to enable course officials and medical personnel to work safely. And you need a suitably quick



Hughes Mayer smiles calmly, although her passengers are occasionally breathless



The Panamera safety car is an unmodified standard-production GTS

vehicle to lead the field because the laps driven under a yellow flag are not exactly slow. If the pace is not rapid enough, the race cars' engines will overheat and their tires will cool.

Arguments in favor of the Panamera GTS include its 316 kW (430 hp) from a V8 engine, active all-wheel drive with electronically controlled torque distribution, a seven-speed double-clutch transmission, and a peak speed of 288 km/h. But isn't the car a little bulky for this job? "Oh my goodness, no!" Hughes Mayer hastens to exclaim, as if she couldn't imagine a more ridiculous question. "There's a race car in the Panamera—in fact, even in the standard version of the car. It didn't even need any technical modifications to be used as a safety car." What other car could just roll from the production line and fulfill this

*Except for the driver, this Panamera GTS safety car is completely standard. And it's also suitable for the racetrack. What other series-production car can say the same?*

function? "Well, leaving aside the driver," she says with a self-possessed smile, "this car is absolutely standard and at the same time absolutely suitable for the racetrack." Her simple explanation: "The Panamera is a Porsche to the core. And the faster I drive it, the more agile it feels."



Pattie Hughes Mayer doesn't just drive the car on racetracks in emergencies. The "Vitesse" program at the ALMS includes passenger rides for guests, VIPs, and fans. "Even when the car is full," she reports, "it responds promptly and precisely." Its suspension and steering provide maximum control. Hughes Mayer's passengers experience something of an emotional roller-coaster. They start off on the skeptical side, with men not infrequently mak-



Street circuits demand utmost precision:  
The ALMS includes city races in Long Beach  
and Baltimore

ing comments on the order of, “Oh no, I hope you don’t drive like my wife!” Everyone, regardless of gender, is impressed by the luxurious interior of the car. Hughes Mayer continues: “They get in, relax in the comfortable surroundings, and think something like, ‘Well, this will be a nice drive, but not exactly the racing experience I thought it would be.’”

That changes the instant she pushes down on the right pedal and merges onto the race course. At the last possible moment before the first curve, when every normal driver thinks the braking point was the last missed opportunity of their life, “They’re struck dumb, and that’s the end of the comments for a while.” She grins. Yes, you can see she enjoys her job. “But I have to be careful and make sure no one forgets to exhale!”

*“In addition to the  
real Porsche feeling, it’s just  
very American to want lots  
of space for the family.”*

Does she have a favorite race course? Several of them. “The best of all is the Formula One course in Montreal.” Her eyes sparkle as she talks about the demanding curves and infamous braking points in Canada. “And I love Road Atlanta as my home track,” she admits. “I go there relatively often because I live there, and I like the variation on its extensive course. It’s also great for the fans who come with their families, picnic baskets, and motorcycles and sit on the hills. But a street circuit like Long Beach,” she continues, “has its own spectacular attractions. It also has very fast curves but much more restricted visibility on account of the cement walls. The passengers in the car don’t know what to expect after each curve. When they take the drive and feel how stable, commanding, and race-car-like it goes through the curves, they’re really impressed.”

The people who emerge from Hughes Mayer’s Panamera GTS are thoroughly impressed, in general, by “how much of a race car there is inside,” and of course by the driver as well. As she notes, “Some people realize for the very first time that women can do more than just talk about entering a profession like this, but in fact actually do it.” The Sport Driving School also makes sure to encourage female drivers. “We’ve got a few women in every course,” she says, “but we’re working on attracting more. First of all, ever more women are buying Porsches, and second, there’s a race-car driver in us, too.”

This safety-car driver has sat at the wheel of a Panamera for three years now, with 2013 the first year in a GTS. Hughes Mayer has

long been a committed and outspoken fan of the car, both on and off the track. “In addition to the real Porsche feeling,” she remarks, “it’s just very American to want lots of space for the family, and, with the Cayenne, a trailer hook for a boat.” As far as she is concerned, what the Panamera and Cayenne offer in this regard translates to a “future for the brand.” But that doesn’t mean her 911 should feel jealous. It will always enjoy a special status as the fulfillment of her childhood dream. ●

**PANAMERA GTS (2012)**  
**Engine:** V8  
**Displacement:** 4,806 cc  
**Power:** 316 kW (430 hp)  
**Maximum torque:** 520 Nm at 3,500 rpm  
**0–100 km/h:** 4.5 sec.  
**Top track speed:** 288 km/h (179 mph)  
**CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:** 256 (251\*) g/km  
**Fuel consumption**  
 City: 16.1 (15.8\*) l/100 km  
 Highway: 8.0 (7.8\*) l/100 km  
 Combined: 10.9 (10.7\*) l/100 km  
 \* with 19-inch all-season tires featuring optimized roll resistance

**911 (TYPE 991)**  
**CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:** 289 g/km to 194 g/km  
**Fuel consumption (combined):**  
 12.4 l/100 km to 8.2 l/100 km

**CAYENNE**  
**CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:** 270 g/km to 189 g/km  
**Fuel consumption (combined):**  
 11.5 l/100 km to 7.2 l/100 km