



Zur Solitude!*

This way to Solitude Circuit!*

Motorsports past and present:
The **356 B 2000 GS Carrera GT** and **911 GT3 RS 4.0**
meet on the former racetrack on the outskirts
of Stuttgart. A thrilling encounter between
two driving machines that interpret the roller-coaster
ride in their own special ways.



By Till Daun
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The Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 grows as it rolls through the green hills just beyond Leonberg that coalesce in a wooded district before running into Stuttgart's southwestern edge. It is the place to be in the Mahden valley, even though the dreary weather makes it seem rather ordinary. And yet: between 1935 and 1965, it was part of Stuttgart's Solitude racetrack, which enjoyed considerable fame throughout the world—an 11.4-kilometer (7-mile) circuit west of Stuttgart whose course and topography were determined by the lay of the land.

Today the track that once drew crowds in the hundreds of thousands is a part of the public transport system. It takes a sharp eye to spot remnants of the old spectator stands in the woods alongside the road: hints of seats half-buried in the embankments, artifacts now almost totally reclaimed by the forest.

In the early days, Solitude was a motorcycle track, but in the 1950s it began to be used for cars as well, and they were the key to its fame. Even Formula One came to the circuit for some years, bringing its stars, such as Graham Hill, John Surtees, Jim Clark, Dan Gurney, and local hotshot Hans Herrmann. Today, almost fifty years after the last race, when nothing more exciting than daily traffic ambles along the old track, the adrenaline-charged atmosphere of race day seems far away indeed. But we want to summon up the spirit of the circuit once again, though only the race directors' tower at the old start/finish line still bears witness to its former glory. We turn up our collars and wait. We have an appointment, after all. And not the sort you skip—even if the external conditions are anything but encouraging.

That all changes in an instant when the gravelly crowing of an old sports-car engine comes into earshot, with that composed acoustic confidence that, half a century ago, let competitors know what the score was even as they pulled up to the starting line. We crane our necks to catch a glimpse, and suddenly it appears: a small Porsche with a low front, round headlights encased in aerodynamic glass covers, and two characteristic auxiliary headlights ensconced in the nose. Delicate front, slightly knock-kneed. It's clear from the nonchalant gait of the Porsche 356 B 2000 GS Carrera GT that it feels right at home on the old track: a child of the early 1960s, it witnessed Solitude's salad years firsthand. The circuit that wends its way through the woods up ahead is the "Dreikantschaber's" backyard.

Dreikantschaber?—Ewald Pfurtscheller from the Porsche Museum flashes a broad grin: "The car is based on the Porsche 356 B, whose racing version was produced 500 times to comply with the number required for homologation. A clause in the homologation rules stated that it was permitted to build different chassis forms on the same ba-

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ON THE HUNT:
THE "DREIKANT-
SCHABER" AND GT3
ON AN EXPEDITION
IN THE WOODS.





911 GT3 RS 4.0 (TYPE 997)
Engine: Six-cylinder boxer
Displacement: 3,996 cc
Power: 500 hp (368 kW)
Maximum torque:
 460 Nm at 5,750 rpm
0–100 km/h: 3.9 sec.
Top track speed: 310 km/h (193 mph)
CO₂ emissions: 326 g/km
Fuel consumption
 City: 20.4 l/100 km
 Highway: 9.9 l/100 km
 Combined: 13.8 l/100 km

sis. So two pared-down cars were developed in the Porsche racing department that had the special chassis with the vertical rear window designed by F. A. Porsche—and because the official name of the car seemed too technical to the mechanics, they dubbed the two cars Dreikantschaber [Wedge Blade] on account of its shape.” The expert motions toward the small silver race car: “That is one of them. Pretty impressive, isn’t it? Such a rare vehicle ...”

No worries, Mr. Museum, I got the point. We will, of course, return the precious car in pristine condition. That said, we are champing at the bit to let the compact racing machine show us what Solitude is all about. The sportiest street Porsche of modern times is naturally welcome to come along for the ride. Origin and future, in racing form.

All aboard: both sport bucket seats; in both, the wiry austerity makes an impression. Just looking at them, the two Porsches embody efficiency down to the gram. In the 356, the first glance reveals the stripped-down pragmatism of a racing machine, while the GT3 RS displays an uncompromising simplicity that is almost shocking in a modern street car. There can be no doubt that every single comfort feature was scrutinized and either trimmed down to its essence or discarded entirely if it had too great an impact on driving dynamics.

The two Porsche models from different eras, whose aesthetics could hardly be more distinct, nevertheless carry the same DNA—a dedication to motor racing. Then as now, Porsche gives especially demanding drivers especially uncompromising tools to work with. The underlying philosophy is clear: a street-legal sports car that can drive to the

racetrack on its own wheels and then blow you away with its driving dynamics. One hundred percent driving pleasure. One hundred percent competitiveness.

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Engines start. Just a few taps on the gas pedal and the 356’s air-cooled four-cylinder boxer engine with a displacement of exactly 1,966 cc roars to life. In the 911 it’s even a bit easier: its 3,996 cc six-cylinder boxer engine with the crankshaft from the 911 GT3 RSR race car rumbles even while idling. What an extremist: stark vibrations in neutral and the rattling of the sport clutch are not for comfort fanatics, and the force required to operate the clutch is no walk in the park either. But in race car mode, none of that matters; the driver revels in the car’s exceptional precision and stability, lightning-fast responsiveness, and explosive power.

The old boy starts the running: it speeds off westward with a gravelly rumble; after a few meters, we’ve reached the bend to the left at the Glemseck corner. The track rises and the Dreikantschaber dives energetically into the next left turn, its short wheelbase making itself felt as soon as we enter the corner. Quick as a weasel into the radius and then a hard day’s work for the driver. Typical for cars of that era. You drove with energy and momentum, sawing away at the steering wheel, preferably a bit over the limit than a whisker under. A driving style not merely encouraged, but demanded, by the 356. Playfully it races up the 90-degree ramp, but can’t be left to its own devices for an instant; its squirrely handling requires a driver who keeps his concentration and a firm hand at all times.

The GT3 RS 4.0, which follows on the heels of the lovable rogue from the 1960s, is another story altogether. Despite its highly responsive cornering behavior, it maintains perfect stability, zipping around the corner as if on rails before ripping up the steep incline. Today is not the day to put its 500 hp (368 kW) to the test; we glide over the next 11 kilometers on a wave of pure propulsive power. Downshift?—Bah! The massive engine powers the light 1,300-kilogram (2,860 lb.) RS around the following Hadersbach corner, a steep bend that opens into a long climbing straightaway, in fourth gear. But if anyone expected the Dreikantschaber to have any more difficulty with this section, they were promptly disabused: with 155 hp (114 kW) under the hood, the old two-liter four-cylinder also has power to spare; and it doesn’t hurt that the 356 is substantially lighter than its modern counterpart. The 356 B 2000 GS Carrera GT blasts through the critical section and has enough juice left over to put the subsequent straightaway—a punishing incline that sucks the energy out of lesser engines—behind it in a matter of seconds.

Overhead camshafts with a vertical shaft drive, dual carburetor, a powerful intake and exhaust system—these are the elements that make the almost fifty-year-old racing engine as punchy as it is powerful. The 356 sprints up the ascent and then coolly hums down the long straightaway toward the Frauenkreuz bend. While drivers in Solitude

races flooded it here, we opt for speeds more amenable to the rules that govern public traffic on rural highways. Even so, it’s a delight to pilot these purring, compact driving machines; the unfiltered driving pleasure is there for the taking even without pushing the cars to their stupendous limits. That would hardly be possible in the GT3 RS 4.0 in any case; even the slightest of corners or compressions would send the car hurtling through the woods at over 300 km/h (186 mph). And the 356 would be right on its heels at over 200 km/h (124 mph). No thanks.

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THEN AS NOW:
UNCOMPROMISING
TOOLS FOR
DEMANDING DRIVERS.

A breather at the traffic light at Frauenkreuz, then the Dreispitz section, the drawn-out Lettenlöcher bend, and in no time at all, we’ve reached the S-curve before the Schattengrund. Once again the sports cars plunge into the tight corners with verve, and soon we’re in the meandering Glemstal section, a series of bends in quick succession. The circuit skirts the river; and even today, the section challenges the driver to find the perfect rhythm, braking, and turn-in points. This is where Solitude separated the wheat from the chaff.

Soon we’ve reached the finish tower in the Mahden valley. The Dreikantschaber seems to peer down the track to the Glemseck turn almost wistfully, and for a brief moment we hear the cheers of the spectators, the smell of oil and gasoline wafting through the air. ▲

Zur Solitude!

THE 356 SPRINTS
UP THE ASCENT AND
THEN COOLLY HUMS
DOWN THE LONG
STRAIGHTAWAY.