

DRIVING

Panamera

“Gran Turismo” literally means a grand tour. The Panamera drives in its own GT dimension, and for us, all the more so in a country that bears such an affinity to its name: Panama,

In the process it opens up new horizons for both itself and for us, a land between two continents and two oceans.

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TrafficFlow

*Right down the middle is the declared goal of this journey.
This makes the Panama Canal a parallel world. As for the country
itself, it is engaged in the exciting process of finding its own way.*



RoadShow

The green belt of Panama lies between the azure of the Caribbean and the blue of the Pacific. At the narrowest point of Central America, the Panamera enters directly into dialogue with Panamanian driving culture.



Jesus is stuck in traffic. And we are stuck behind him at a suitable distance. The Panamera will take on just about anything, but the bumper of the swaying bus sporting a license plate that reads "Jesus" might be a little much. The vehicle groans into motion, and the palm fronds lining the roadside sweep the dust off its paint to reveal works of art. The back of the bus is tattooed ten times over with images and characters—a rolling rush of color. An expansion of consciousness directly in front of the windshield, that is what we were seeking, a pure GT feeling. With such a felicitous start, our grand tour can now unfold in the magic of the unknown, on course in the Caribbean.

Panama is a home game for the Panamera. That is how one pictures it back home—a tropical adventure. We arrive full of anticipation, but without a detailed conception. The trip will engage our imagination to the fullest and beyond. This narrow strip of land, which emerged from the water as



THE PANAMERA AS A REAL LATIN LOVER. PANAMA LOVES THE MIDDLE ROAD—WHICH LEADS TO THE OCEAN.



an isthmus three million years ago, changed the climate of the entire globe. Suddenly a crooked bridge of land connected the northern and southern American continents—and separated two oceans in a flash. The Gulf Stream was born, which has influenced our weather and our lives ever since. A small country and big changes—Panama is always good for surprising insights.

The low-lying “S” of this piece of the earth, which fits the insignia on the tail of our Gran Turismo so well, clearly has also inspired its road builders. The line of the new *autopista* winds its way through the country in long curves. To the left and right we view an entire miniature world to explore: tropical rain forests, extended beaches, green mountain

PANAMERA S

Engine: V8
 Displacement: 4,806 cc
 Power: 400 hp (294 kW)
 Maximum torque:
 500 Nm (3,500–5,000 rpm)
 Top track speed:* 283 km/h (176 mph)
 CO₂ emissions: 247 g/km
 Fuel consumption:*
 – City: 15.3 l/100 km
 – Highway: 7.8 l/100 km
 – Combined: 10.5 l/100 km
 * with PDK

ranges—and then another urban jungle. In the country of Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who in 1513 was the first European to cross Panama to the Pacific, our sporty voyaging sedan becomes a real vehicle of discovery. A pennant on the rearview mirror lets us know we are driving under the flag of Panama. And that is a fine thing. Within ten months, the Porsche subsidiary has already sold eleven Panameras. This booming Central American country has 3.2 million inhabitants, most of them descendants of the Indios, of whom seven tribes remain. Mobility is crucial, in everything from kayaks to tanker ships, from municipal buses to Porsches.

The full spectrum of old to new cultures exists here. The unusual geographical position

of Panama poses challenges to one’s sense of direction. If you want to drive to the south, for example, sometimes you have to go east. That can confuse newcomers, and seem as exotic as the Panamera’s platinum-silver hood does to the millipede that painstakingly inspects it and divines, from the droplets of the night, a story from the rain forest.

We decide to drive across Panama, and the Panamera settles on the narrowest part of the isthmus. One of the most famous straits in the world serves globetrotters as a compass needle—the Panama Canal. Only the Suez Canal enjoys a similar fame. These 81.6 kilometers (50.7 miles) have symbolized and been synonymous with an entire country, bringing many benefits but also a fair amount of grief.

Eye-catcher: The Panamera is the highlight of a journey that inevitably leads to water



Imagine the following: human hands divide two continents, ships master a 28-meter (92-foot) difference between two sea levels. At its opening in 1914, the canal was acclaimed as an eighth wonder of the world; and for the ships, the weeks on the high seas shrink to a day’s journey through a freshwater channel.

If one is in a hurry, all that is needed is a good hour in the Gran Turismo to make it from the metropolis of Panama City on the Pacific coast to the port city of Colón on the Caribbean Sea, which meets the Atlantic. Nowhere else can one make it so quickly from one of the world’s oceans to another. But our motto is *tranquilo*, or running a calm course. Which we will do along the canal—as far as possible, for we will have to drive around Gatún Lake. The sports car enters into dialogue with the water. Everything flows.

Right at the beginning we cross the canal, for sentimental reasons. No longer the youngest construction, the steel Bridge of the Americas exudes history; for half a century, it was the only connection between North and South America by land. The signpost for the dream route of the Pan-American Highway, which extends from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, dates back to this time. Because the border to Colombia is closed, the classic road stops in Panama. It would be impassable anyway, as 100 kilometers (62 miles) of tropical jungle lie between the two countries. One can pick up the journey again on the other side at a place called Turbo.

LET’S KEEP THINKING AND STEERING LATERALLY, TO THE CASUAL RHYTHM OF 400 HORSEPOWER.

Let’s keep thinking and steering laterally, to the casual rhythm of 400 horsepower. Also to the beat of the national anthem of Panama, which took control of the canal from the United States at the turn of the millennium, with a corresponding gain in power and wealth. “The two oceans that rush to its feet lend the nation direction.” These roads require no exertion from the Panamera; instead, Porsche Intelligent Performance is called for. In sporty, streamlined, and efficient form, the Panamera moves smoothly in the traffic from coast to coast. The superior ease of its brakes is required at regular intervals, as Panama’s brand of convoy and curve driving provides its full share of unpredictable moments.



To the limits: The jungle interrupts the dream route of the Pan-American Highway

What a feeling when the next signpost reads “Paraiso,” or “paradise.” And two signs later “El Dorado.” The beloved German children’s story by Janosch comes to mind, in which a banana crate that washes onto shore instills wanderlust in a little bear and a little tiger. They set off walking in what is ultimately a circle, all the while exclaiming, “Oh how beautiful is Panama.” And it is—even if the fragrance of bananas is not evident everywhere throughout the country. The moral of the story still holds, however: not everything has to be bigger, better, and more beautiful—even though the capital’s new skyscraper district is endeavoring to attain precisely that.

The Panamera evinces a real desire for freedom, while the landscape and roads occasionally evoke the surroundings in *The Jungle Book*. The necessary comfort for our drive through the corridor is provided by the balancer shaft in our eight-cylinder engine. The



IT WOULD BE GREAT IF PANAMA REMAINED AN INSIDE TIP—FOR PANAMERA DRIVERS.

automatic start/stop function takes place in the travelers’ heads—whether at the gigantic lock of Miraflores, the Indio landscape near Gamboa, or the surf off Portobelo. The automatic sense of well-being in the human mind demands we stop, inhale, absorb our surroundings. Should we tell others about our experiences here? That is where the conflict begins. Actually, it would be great if Panama were to remain an inside tip. Maybe only for Panamera drivers? In the summer season, which runs from November to March, North and South Americans have been coming to this fascinating destination for quite a while now, to enjoy their vacations, while European cruise ships and charter airlines are now arriving as well.

We continue at a leisurely pace through the belt of green between the blue of the Pacific and the azure of the Caribbean. Once again we find ourselves confronted with a fabulously flashy panorama, which of course means

once again we are behind a bus. This time it is not Jesus, but rather another of those “Red Devils”—a direct reference to a certain driving style. Each driver has personalized his vehicle with a message painted onto the metal. This one encourages us to set off on a dream voyage: “Return to where you never were”; a poetic way of urging us to expand our horizons. That would be another great way to end this story, but we’re still right in the middle of it.

Open-mindedness starts with open eyes. We have seen sea eagles with enormous wings and crocodiles that have free run of the canal without having to pay the usual fees, as well as colorful toucans—wooden carvings of which are available in every conceivable size at souvenir shops. By contrast, honey bears and golden dart frogs steer clear of paved ground, preferring the old spice trails in the interior.

The floating dinosaurs that constantly cross our line of vision in the oncoming headlights, on the other hand, are of a modern nature. These are the approximately 15,000 ocean-going vessels that take a shortcut through the Panama Canal every year, bringing nearly one billion dollars into the country’s coffers. Stacks of containers form patchwork skylines at the loading terminals. All the Porsches sold in the country also arrive by sea.

The canal zone is fertile ground, and high-tech as well, especially when work on the second and deeper channel for even larger ships is completed this decade. But even now the freighter *Golden Conqueror*, which is stopping its forward progress at the car bridge near Pedro Miguel, leaves a powerful impression on the passengers in the silver Panamera. A green shoreline on the left has suddenly turned into a black wall—darkness at noon, a confluence of different types of transport. For all their gigantic size, strict traffic rules hold for the ships as well, with the canal becoming a one-way street in alternate directions. Periods of waiting can often make what should be a ten-hour journey three times as long. Four wheels, as it turns out, do indeed provide considerably more freedom.



DREAMS CAN FLOW UPHILL: WE CAN CHANNEL OUR POWERS OF IMAGINATION.

Parada, por favor. Stop, please. The simplest joys of life are among the best. Up near Colón, where the canal hits the Caribbean Sea, the Panamera sidles up to the beach. The climate has such a degree of tropical humidity that a Finn built a wooden house here; in the rainy season he has an all-round sauna. All sentient beings, from people to stray dogs, are astonished at the visit from the Gran Turismo world, which provides a new diversion in their lives otherwise dominated by *telenovelas*. Curiosity is strong on both sides. Only the girls of the village find the sole telephone booth far and wide to be more interesting. Fidel, the local guide, takes this moment of deceleration to tell us about his uncle who was a racing driver and even entered Le Mans. His claim seems so audacious that we promptly check the statistics and, sure enough, there it is: Rodrigo Teran, Le Mans 1979, eleventh place in a Porsche 935. Panama has its pride.

One part wild, one part urban—that is Panama’s formula, and the Panamera turns out to be a veritable native thanks to its superb ability to handle both. On the man-made causeway over to the Amador Islands, which lie like a necklace around the Pacific entrance to the canal, our sense of direction once again fades even though we’ve been going straight ahead the entire time. To our left, the skyline of the million-strong metropolis of Panama City lies under a heavy white cloudbank and evokes images of Hong Kong; to our right, we gaze at the green hills of Hawaii rising from the ocean.

The future attraction on this promenade is still a skeleton of steel. A rather odd one, it features the unmistakable fingerprint of star architect Frank Gehry. This intricate construction will house the Biodiversity Museum, which will showcase the country’s origins. Its main message is “We are all Panamanians.” The scientific basis behind this idea is that evolution was accelerated when North and South America were joined. Panama views itself as a bridge of life—“the entire country is the museum.”

The old quarter of Casco Viejo is an example of living history. The Panamera glides up past

the fish market toward the Presidential Palace, in a setting that might recall Havana of earlier times. The search for a parking place in the narrow alleyways turns into a salsa sequence, a small adventure at a pedestrian pace, but impressive all the same. Plants grow everywhere between the stone walls, and the facades are weathered from warm rain and the eventful history of a still young nation. Directly following a tropical downpour, the inhabitants are drawn inexorably out in front of their homes. This part of the city is a beloved jewel, named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A keen joy of life grips the Plaza de la Independencia, extends out to the entire country, and cannot be restrained. But why should it be?

The only thing missing is a vignette that features a Panama straw hat. We hesitate to find

one, because then the rest of our story would be far too real. Anyway, this particular head covering comes from Ecuador; it only spread around the world through the canal.

On the way back, the huge flag above the canal administrative complex attests to the well-being and self-assurance of modern Panama. The messages painted on the buses, which will accompany us to the end of our tour, continue to reveal the Panamanian state of mind in typical individual form. "Everything comes to those who know how to wait," is what one driver wishes to impress on those behind him.

The waiting period is over. The Panamera has long since arrived in Panama, contributing to its keen joy of life.



FLOATING DINOSAURS: PANAMA INVITES YOU TO STUDY THE HORIZON.

