

To the Arctic Circle ...

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There are still some great adventures to be had with our cars and driving to the Arctic Circle was something my wife, Debbie, and I had wanted to do for a long time. The 4000-mile route would have to pass through 7 countries, and we'd cross seas by tunnel, bridge and ferry. Epic!

Upper left: Arctic Circle Centre wasn't open

Upper right: A day's skiing at Oppdal

...and back



The big question was whether to do it in summer (blue lakes and midnight sun) or winter (ice and Northern Lights). Our minds were made up when we heard about Ben Coombs' Pub2Pub adventure tours and that he was running the inaugural 'Snowstorm' tour to the Arctic Circle in March 2025. We signed up straight away.

The second question was what car to go in. Snowstorm didn't mind whether classic or modern - just prepare well and fit winter tyres. As I'd just bought a 924S, this seemed the obvious choice and the perfect opportunity to get to know the car.

It all started with co-driving a friend's 944 last summer on an Alpine tour across most of the classic alpine passes. I loved driving that car and it struck me as ideal for tours and road-trips. There was enough comfort and luggage space to be away for more than just a few days, and the torquey engine, fine balance, and easy gear change suited the way I drive.

I'd just sold my BMW Z4 3.0Si coupe and there was space in my life for something 944-ish. I got some good advice, and the search was on for a 924S.

Joining the 924 Owners Club, I soon spotted a 1988 model-year Le Mans edition for sale within an hour's drive.

My 944 friend came with me to view and it was a beautifully presented car. We poked and prodded a bit, and both took short test drives. They say you shouldn't buy the first car you see, and maybe I got a bit carried away, but I could just see this car skittering over ice roads on its way to the frozen North.

The usual man-maths justified offering close to the asking price and the deal was done. Thoughts then turned to preparing the car so it would live up to my expectation of any Porsche to be fast, safe, and reliable.

The car didn't come with much history but showed all the signs of being a pampered car for at least the last 20 years with little use, few bills and no visible rust (which I'll come back to later!). The plan was to drive the car as much as possible for a couple of months, come up with a (hopefully) short list of jobs, and hand the car to specialists Augment Automotive near Gloucester for final preparation early February.

Previous substandard work by a non-specialist classic car garage soon



Augment Automotive... called to break the news that they had found some rust where the rear subframe bolts to the shell.

Upper far left: Delicate surgery to repair unexpected rust

Lower far left: 944 buddy

Lower left; Adventure spec.

Lower far right: Blue sky day ice road in Norway

became obvious when a strange engine-related vibration started on our way to a Christmas pub lunch with the local car club. It dawned on me this car needed a proper re-commissioning.

Luckily Augment Automotive were able to take the car before Christmas and start work. It turned out the balance shafts belt was a tooth out, and the cam belt not tensioned properly. They fitted new belts (properly set-up this time), and started to go through the car in preparation for the trip.





New engine mounts, wheel bearings, and a driveshaft followed.

Final checks revealed the clutch plate was only 40-50% worn - good news - and that the staggered wheels had been fitted the wrong way with the wider rims at the front - an easy fix.

Just when I thought I'd soon be collecting the car, Tom from Augment Automotive called to break the news that they had found some rust where the rear subframe bolts to the shell. This would mean an MOT failure later in the year, and, because I wanted the car to be as strong as possible for the trip, I asked him to go ahead with the repair.

We'd all missed spotting the rust earlier as it was obscured by the subframe and layers of underseal. Inevitably it was quite an involved process (aka a big bill) to do the welding to the high standard Augment Automotive work to, replacing the subframe mounts at the same time, but I'm very happy with the finished job.

Finally, we could start 'winterising' to protect against forecast -20C temperatures in Norway: 70:30 antifreeze, fresh



Upper centre: Coffee stop at minus 15 degrees c

Lower left: Husky driving in the Swedish wilderness

Upper left; De Soto Official Pace Car Indy 500

Upper Right; THAT bridge

Lower right; First chance to test winter tyres

brake fluid, neat screen wash, and, of course, a set of winter, or all-season, tyres.

Tyres marked with the 3PMS symbol are compulsory at the time of year we were traveling. I chose Michelin Cross Climate 2 in the same 195/65 size all-round and have been very happy with them. Our first tentative drive on an icy lane to a lakeside picnic spot demonstrated plenty of grip and I felt confident we wouldn't get stuck so long as we kept clear of snow drifts....

The Snowstorm package included a Le Shuttle crossing and lovely 3*+ hotels including breakfast, at each pre-planned overnight stop. Between each stop we were free to choose our own roads safe in the knowledge that the Snowstorm Volvo 240 was never far away with its boot-





full of tools and get-you-home spares. Our briefing packs listed many interesting places to visit on the way with Google Maps links to navigate by.

As a newbie 924 owner I was reassured there was another transaxle Porsche on the trip. Joe and Sarah in their trusty 944, kitted out with Scandi-spec roof rack for spare wheel and 4 spotlights mounted high, impressed with their rate of progress and ability to find the most challenging roads. Other classics included a rally/race XJ6(!), an extremely well-travelled classic Range Rover, and a brace of Volvo 240s specially bought for the trip. Like most memorable trips, your fellow travellers add hugely to the enjoyment. (*944 buddy, Adventure spec*)



So, from the Le Shuttle terminal through France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and back again. How did we get on?

This was a trip-of-a-lifetime for many, no question. We all had the common goal of reaching the Arctic Circle and all 18 crews made it. But there was plenty more to enjoy along the way. (*We made it!!*)

Each will have their own highlights but as lovers of winter sports our highlights included: driving husky sleds in the wilderness of northern Sweden; skiing in Oppdal, Norway;



ice driving on high Norwegian roads; and seeing the Northern Lights at Mo I Rana, close to the Arctic Circle. *(Husky driving in the Swedish wilderness, A day's skiing in Oppdal, Blue sky day ice road in Norway, Northern Lights - Mo I Rana, Norway)*

Each day we were treated to a mix of history, culture, museums, and wildlife, all linked by the epic roads and bridges you'd expect on a tour in this part of the world.

We saw the beautifully preserved 17th century Vasa warship in Stockholm, and U-boat U995 near Kiel. As a Brooklands volunteer and member, I was fascinated to see the damage caused by one of Barnes Wallis' 10-ton 'Earthquake' bombs on the U-boat bunker at Valentin. *(Vasa 17thC warship, Slippery shapes 924 vs U995)*

There were several car museums to visit, and a favourite of mine was Bilhistorik Senter close to Oslo. Devoted to obscure automotive Americana, we were the only visitors until fellow Snowstormer Mark turned up in his Jeep. Others chose to visit the World of Volvo back in Sweden. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to see the tantalising Automuseum Prototyp near Hamburg with its many VW and Porsche prototypes and classic race cars. *(De Soto Official Pace Car Indy 500)*

We missed seeing a moose in the wild but compensated

Above: Slippery shapes 924 vs U995

Far lower left: Vasa 17th century warship

Lower right: Transaxle cousins



by taking the obligatory pic of the car by a triangular moose sign. On the plus side, we saw reindeer and soaring eagles. And, of course, the huskies which pulled our sleds so excitedly at the rescue centre were adorable and intelligent creatures. *(The nearest we came to a moose)*

The Oresund bridge between Denmark and Sweden didn't disappoint this former engineering student. Any fan of the Scandi crime drama 'The Bridge' starring the Porsche-driving detective Saga Noren, will know what an amazing structure and achievement it is. When we wanted a break from driving there was sometimes the option to take a ferry and enjoy a few minutes relaxation crossing the water. *(THAT Bridge)*

The 924S took the trip in its stride brilliantly. Despite temperatures as low as -17C it never failed to start and the heater was perfectly up to the job.

I had to adapt to a pedal that didn't always return after feathering the clutch during slow speed manoeuvring. Suspecting slave or master cylinder seals, a quick phone call to Augment Automotive resulted in new cylinders from Rose Passion waiting for me when I checked into our Radisson-Blu hotel in Trondheim, Norway, 3 days later. That's service! I had plenty of offers of help from fellow Snowstormers to get them fitted but, in the end, I left things as they were and easily made it home.

The only other niggle was the idle speed sticking at 2000rpm for a few seconds after a fast run, slowly dropping to a slightly-high 1000rpm. This compounded the clutch-feathering issue, but we just learned to be patient!

The Michelin tyres were a revelation allowing us to bowl along quite happily at 80 kph, like the locals, on ice- and snow-covered roads. It was easy to forget just how slippery the roads were as the directional stability was so good. But occasionally you'd break traction as you accelerated or braked, especially if you were a bit clumsy. I found this out when I had to do a hurried 3-point turn on the main road by the Arctic Circle Visitor Centre...

Snowstorm was an amazing trip and thanks go to Ben Coombs for translating the idea into a well-paced but ambitious itinerary with excellent hotels and company. It was truly an adventure beyond the typical car tour and we're already weighing up which one to do next.

My first ever Porsche has turned out to be a good one and I've happily bonded with the car. The re-commissioning work by Augment Automotive has paid off and it's a 'keeper', hopefully good for another 37 years. A perfect, complementary, stablemate for my much slower, much simpler, but always entertaining, Citroen Dyane.

I expect she was being ironic, but the Swedish husky lady summed it up when we arrived at her remote farmstead in the snowy wilderness. Before we had a chance to introduce ourselves, she said: "nice winter car!"



Above: The nearest we came to a moose

Below: We made it!

Right: Northern Lights, Mo I Rana, Norway



Footnotes:

It turns out that the grit/dust combination used in winter on Norway's roads can congeal on the inner wheel rim putting the wheel out of balance. It was a wheels-off job to clean the Teledials. (*Dust and grit stuck to rim*)

Petrol in Sweden is cheaper than UK. And beer in Norway twice as expensive!

Links:

Augment Automotive <https://augmentautomotive.co.uk/>

Pub2Pub <https://www.planetpub2pub.com/drives>



Editors note; If William's epic trip has inspired you to Arctic prep your 924, check out:

Only a road trip away

David Zu Elfe - Porsche 924 Overland Build

www.youtube.com/@OnlyARoadTripAway

Essentials kit for sub zero roadtrips

- 2 person bed system
- Pop top
- Arctic petrol heater - Webasto air top 2000
- Front runner roof system
- Winter tyres
- Cabin Heater
- Updated electrics
- Upgraded lights
- Upgraded and raised suspension
- Sand tracks etc