



by MARCUS ATKINSON
photos by MALCOLM GRIFFITHS

DRIFTING ON ICE

SIDeways in sweden
is the name of the game



The temperature is minus 16 degrees. The snow is falling. My vision is limited and I am sweating, heavily. Strapped into a 250-hp, rear-wheel-drive 1978 Porsche 911SC, I'm on a lake in Sweden which is, fortunately, frozen. Also, I've been told to forget everything I know about driving.

This was all happening at the ice driving school known as Below Zero, and to get there we flew to Norway, before crossing into a remote part of Sweden that holds some of the fastest stages on the World Rally Championship. To kick off the experience, Below Zero boss and former rally driver Richard Tuthill welcomed us by announcing: "We will teach you how to drive a car like no other driving school." The skills we'd learn, I'd find out, included braking to go faster and driving sideways as often as possible in the Porsche 911s prepared by Richard's company, Tuthill Porsche of Oxfordshire, UK, which builds competition Porsche 911s for rallies across the globe.



Opening and left: The Below Zero fleet consists of older Porsche 911s. Schoolmaster Richard Tuthill (above) won't hold your hand as he screams for you to go faster, brake later and turn in harder. Kall lies 200 miles south of the Arctic Circle, just the place for ice driving.



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Participants stay at the Kall Auto Lodge, a hotel designed in part by legendary rally champion Colin McRae and conceived with rally enthusiasts in mind. Our instruction begins in a nearby hunting lodge, which is furnished with tables, a roaring fire and the obligatory moose head.

SCHOOL DAY

Richard opens the day by telling us exactly what we will learn. "We will teach you to handle vehicles in the smallest of fractions. To lift your throttle for a split second. To time your turn to the nearest millimeter. And above all, we will teach you to control your car. If you don't take control of these vehicles, you're a passenger." Richard then stresses the safe driving environment. "If you spin here, all you will hit is a wall of powdered snow. But we want you to push yourselves to the limit. If you haven't spun your car in the first three runs, you're not trying hard enough!" he shouts. As he sends us out on the ice, his final instruction is clear: "Drive these cars like you stole them."





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Clockwise from top left: With safe, soft snow for miles around, big slides are encouraged. Button studs provide some semblance of traction. Author Atkinson (right), who is also Hagerty International's Marketing Director, studies the "whiteboard" with Tuthill. And for lunch, reindeer stew.

WHEN I SAY 'GO,' I MEAN I WANT YOUR RIGHT FOOT ON THE FLOOR

Introduction over, it's time to climb into the cars, fasten the harnesses and head onto the lake. This vast expanse of water is covered by a 20-inch layer of ice (we hope), topped by a few inches of snow, just to make matters a little more unpredictable. Woodland surrounds the lake, and it's clear that paths through the forest would make for any number of challenging rally stages.

We start on tires fitted with button studs, which protrude about 3 mm from the tread surface. We are told to head through a simple slalom course, but only by drifting sideways. The instruction sounds easy enough, but with the temperature well below freezing, the visibility poor from the snowfall and having never driven on ice or drifted a 911, this apparently simple task is a lot harder than you'd think.

Carefully prepared for ice driving, the Porsche urges me to go faster, seemingly mocking me for lifting off

the throttle, when I should be pressing harder. Reminded of Richard's words to take control of the car, I'm soon being pulled out of a snowdrift.

Back on the ice, I'm told to punch the throttle hard, turn the wheel, come off the throttle and — as the car starts to slide — hit the throttle again to gain traction. The studded front tires fight to grip the ice as the car responds. One section of the slalom done — only 10 more to go!

After repeated tries on the slalom course, the Below Zero team agrees it is time to move us to the rally course. There are three circuits, each more technically demanding than the last, carved out of the snow and ice. The first is 1.1 miles, the second 1.6 and the last, a narrower and more testing stage, just under 3.75. Packed with bends, there is no time to relax.

With the button studs on the front tires fighting for traction, Richard shouts,

"Stop! Now go! When I say 'Go,' I mean I want your right foot on the floor. Come on — take control of the car!" I do as I'm told and I soon feel as though I've been in battle. My arms ache and, under my many layers of clothing — needed for the extreme cold — I'm uncomfortably hot and sweating.

"Can we turn down the heat?" I ask, to which Richard responds, "No. It's on or off. Welcome to rally driving. Come on, let's go again!"

DON'T FORGET THE BRAKES

After a 40-minute break for reindeer stew in the hunting lodge, we're back on the ice. This time, though, I feel like I'm making progress. Again, I call on Richard for guidance.

"This is fine," he says, "but to go faster, you need to use the brakes."

"What?" I ask.

"These cars will respond a lot quicker when you use the brakes," Richard



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Atkinson is all concentration as he studies his line in preparation for another run. Below Zero's Porsches feature 300-hp, 3-liter competition engines and full-spec FIA roll cages. Their tail-happy nature makes them fun companions in the snow.

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