



Land of opportunity



Despite its hallowed place in the history of motorsport, a 911 has never won the East African Safari. The great Björn Waldegård has long been the bridesmaid – this year he aims to be the bride

Written by **John Glynn**
Photographed by **John Glynn, Reinhard Klein/ East African Safari Rally**

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East Africa – the motherland. Many of the earliest fossilised human remains have been found in the region, leading science to name it home to the human race. As home turf goes, we could do worse. This is the Great Rift Valley; forged by tectonic forces along two fault lines, running from Ethiopia to Mozambique. The landscape is awe-inspiring; Africa's highest peaks – Mounts Kilimanjaro and Kenya – lie along the Great Rift, and her second largest and second deepest lakes – Victoria and Tanganyika – are also found here. Despite its proximity to the Equator, the region's altitude and rain-friendly topography makes East Africa surprisingly temperate, and fertile; a contributing factor in East Africa's colonisation. Imperialism was an unhappy chapter in African history that has left a European lilt to large parts of the continent. This familiarity inspires an enormous number of tourists to visit and experience the area in person. Kenya is the most popular destination, with around 1.8 million international and cross-border visitors in 2010.

One man who came as a tourist is world-famous rally photographer, Reinhard Klein: "I first went to Kenya in 1978 and was hooked. It's the dream of free wilderness; the light and the people make it a photographer's heaven. Not only that, you can creatively do whatever you like, wherever you want; completely unlike our countries. America is home to unlimited wealth opportunity, but Kenya is the land of true opportunity. More than 60 visits later, the country still surprises me."

Kenya combines 40 or more ethnic groups, speaking mainly English or Swahili. Unsurprisingly given its history, English influence is everywhere. Any time is teatime and, apart from Tusker (the 'national' beer), tea is the drink of choice.

For social inspiration, the population turns to sport. Football is the favourite, followed by running – and rallying. Few places are as enthusiastic about rallying than Kenya. And that, my Porsche-loving friends, is where we come in.

The Safari Rally was born in 1950. Kenyan businessmen, Neil and Donald Vincent, had just set a record time on the Nairobi-Cape Town-Nairobi. The Vincents were inspired by marathon adventures;

driving events that can make or break men. They decided to plan their own marathon.

Idea one was a road race around Lake Victoria; discounted due to seasonal flooding. As more ideas were discussed, a 3,100-mile route emerged, encompassing Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. When Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in 1953, Kenyan motorsport enthusiasts celebrated with the first running of the East African Coronation Safari.

Picture the cars of the Fifties; drum brakes and double de-clutching, crossply tyres with steel-sprung seats, glow-worm lights and six-volt electrics. Now imagine racing those cars over 3,000 miles of dirt roads; some at sea level, and some at 7,000 feet. Imagine a timetable that left little time for sleep, and less time for service. Throw in environmental issues like torrential rain, and the wildest animals on the planet as your breakdown assistance. Tough stuff and no mistake!

As the legend grew, so did the number of overseas entries. Factory teams came, to put their cars through the ultimate test of man and machine. Nowadays, the last seven words in my previous sentence are a mind-numbing cliché. Back then, they were not. This rally was a car killer; that was its appeal.

The Coronation Safari captured the imagination of rally fans everywhere. After the Liege-Sofia-Liege rally slipped away, the renamed East African Safari became the undisputed champion of crazy things to do on four wheels. In 1963 (and again in 1968), just eight percent of starters reached the finish line; no event was ever harder.

In the Seventies, the East African Safari Rally became simply Safari Rally, part of the World Rally Championship. Works teams with European drivers continued to push for victory, but the first win for an overseas crew would not come until 1972, when Hannu Mikkola and Gunnar Palm took first place, driving a Mk1 Escort.

Datsun was one of the first manufacturers to enter the East African race. Growing up as a Datsun-loving kid in rally-loving Ireland, my head was full of Safari Datsun trivia. Not difficult, as Datsun brochures had Safari pictures on every page. The 240Z was young Johnnyboy's dream on wheels.

The first day my dad came home in a Z-car, my squeals of delight soared to notes only dogs could

hear. Unfortunately for dad and I, my mother vetoed the purchase, but my Datsun fetish was about to end. As soon as I saw Björn Waldegård on Safari in a Martini-liveried 911 3.0-litre Carrera, it was Porsche for me, and only one man mattered.

Björn Waldegård started rallying in his native Sweden in 1962. Wins began to mount, with international success assured in 1969. Having won the Swedish Rally in a Porsche, the national importer backed him for a works 911 drive. Waldegård and Lars Helmer promptly won the Monte Carlo Rally, repeating the feat the following year. In 1979, sterling work in both Ford and Mercedes brought Björn the first World Rally Champion drivers' title.

Porsche attempted Safari many times. In 1971, the factory built five 911 ST/Rs for Safari, with modified suspension, chassis reinforcements including aluminium undertrays, powerful twin plug engines and Waldegård among the pilots.

Björn averaged an impressive mile-a-minute on the punishing Southern Loop, and had the lead on the first pass through Nairobi. When Idi Amin flagged the cars away in Uganda, it was Porsche-Datsun-Porsche-Datsun, but Waldegård was out soon after, when a high bank claimed the car.

"We should have won the rally then," says Björn. "I was 20 minutes in front and absolutely flying. I had little experience in Safari dust, and needed to overtake my teammate Zasada, who was ahead of me on the road. Between us, we managed to lose the event. I blame myself."

In 1973, Björn ran a Bosch-liveried Carrera RS. The car eventually retired with oil-cooler problems. For 1974, the same 911 was repainted in blue and white Kühne und Nagel colours and driven by Edgar Herrmann and Hans Schuller. The pair had won 1970 and 1971 in Datsuns so knew their stuff, but again Porsche was out of luck. When the car hit trouble, Porsche ordered all service crews to stick with Waldegård's car, which eventually finished second.

No 911 has ever won in Kenya. The lockout was not for lack of trying. Helmut Greiner, manager of the Carrera Cup Deutschland remembers how hard they pushed. "It was Safari Rally 1978, and I was in a chase car for Porsche. We picked up Björn's emergency call: he was among the frontrunners, but the throttle valves got stuck. So we drove like hell for an hour, through the savannah to reach him. Then we got him running. He missed the podium finishing fourth, but at least he made it back to Nairobi. There was a lot of adrenaline involved!"

Stuttgart's curse did not rub off on Waldegård. The affable Swede has clinched Safari victory four times: five if you count his Safari Classic victory of 2007 with son Mathias. For all his Safari success with Ford and Toyota, Björn still enjoys a Porsche. This year, the long-time 911 fan returns to Kenya with Tuthill Porsche, for another crack at the greatest event in rallying. He is not alone in his choice of car: half the entry list for the 2011 East African Safari Classic Rally comprises 911s.

In 2003, Mike Kirkland and Surinder Thatthi revived Safari. Safari Classic is rallying as it used to be, for 1975 or older cars, predating turbos and four-wheel-drive cars. Don't let the title fool you, though; this is not some classic cruise through the wilderness. "Safari reborn is as tough as the original," reminds Björn. "In 1971, we were running average 100km/h speeds on the roughest roads in Arica. Today it is just the same."

The first Safari Classic Rally was held in December 2003, following a familiar route through Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Two years later, the event was repeated. Rob Collinge and Anton Levitan took the win on both, in Datsun Z-cars.

In 2007, Waldegård arrived with a Mk1 Escort and took the win. A last-minute 911 entry in 2009 resulted in a well-earned second place. Björn finished behind 🏆

Waldegård:
"Tuthill has built the car Porsche should have in the 1970s"

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“When you live in a slum, where can you store what little you manage to save?”

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Thanks

- Tuthill Porsche: www.francistuthill.co.uk
- Race4Change: www.race4change.org
- Safari Classic: www.eastafricansafairally.com
- Jamii Bora Microfinance: www.jamiibora.org
- Kiva Microlending: www.Kiva.org

a modified Ford Mustang, driven by Kenyan rally champion, Ian Duncan. This year, Duncan is back, running a Capri liveried with a young and exciting name in rallying; Race4Change.

Race4Change is the brainchild of Doctor Steven Funk, an American-born entrepreneur and philanthropist, now resident in Canada. Funk completed the 2009 Safari in a Peugeot 504 Coupe, supporting Nobel Peace Prize nominee Ingrid Munro and her Jamii Bora microfinance association.

Inspired by Kenya, which he calls “a beacon of light for a troubled continent”, Funk’s 2011 Race4Change brings in others such as Tuthill Porsche, The Sager Foundation and BugBam.com, each giving time and resource in support of do-good ambition.

Race4Change’s microfinance cast has grown to include Kiva.org, Women’s World Banking and the Microcredit Summit; non-profit notables that distribute thousands of dollars daily across the world’s poorest regions. Race4Change supporters can join the team and contribute to the effort by donating via www.race4change.org/donate. All donations go straight to the needy; none is used for rallying.

The aim of Funk’s Race4Change effort is to raise awareness of microfinance and the change it can inspire. “The third world is poor because of the developed world’s unwillingness to help,” says Funk. “This is the gap that microfinance fills. It’s access to low-cost, community-run financial services for those on low or no incomes.”

“Microfinance can be cost-effective health insurance for farmers who can’t afford to fall ill, or for mothers with busy fruit stalls who have previously been forced to sell them to take care of ailing children. More than that, it’s what most of us take for granted; a safe place to store cash. When you live in a slum, where can you keep what little money you save? Big banks disregard

those who can only deposit 50 cents a day, but the microfinance partners supporting Race4Change hold deposits worth millions of dollars, from people who can afford to save almost nothing.

“Microfinance is all about bestowing dignity and empowering the poor; particularly women. You offer people a hand up instead of a handout, and they then repay that faith and trust. The people repay at a minimal one or two percent, but they repay you all of your investment. On that level alone, then, they beat the commercial banks that simply choose to ignore their existence.

“Empowered women lower their fertility rates, feed and clothe their kids, keep them healthy and educate them. They build businesses and better housing. Everything you can do to help the poor helps the rest of the world, and it’s unbeatable karma. It’s the ultimate win/win situation.”

To promote microfinance in the Kenyan countryside, where people cannot see the media campaigns, Race4Change has entered three Tuthill Porsche 911s on the 2011 East African Safari Classic Rally, which runs from 19-28th November, covering an incredible 4,500 kilometres.

Waldegård will drive one of the Race4Change Tuthill Porsches, with no intention of coming second: “I tested with Tuthill in Morocco earlier this year. Understanding how much stress we can put through the car gave me great confidence. This is the car Porsche should have built in the Seventies.”

The other Race4Change 911s will be driven by celebrities and rally champions, like Kenya’s own Patrick Njiru, to raise awareness of microfinance as a means to empower women. Big-name drivers include four-time US Rally Champion and 11-time X Games gold medallist, Travis Pastrana.

The 27th November 2011 could be the last day anyone can say that a Porsche has never won Safari. Fingers crossed, the one that breaks the drought will be powered by Waldegård, Tuthill Porsche and Race4Change. **911**

