



Catching a Ride

Iron Will

By
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Photo by
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Name: Harald S. Stegen
Born: 1946
Family: married, two sons
Profession: architect
Connection to Porsche: President of the Porsche Diesel Club Europe

Roads not traveled are avenues not explored. With this idea as its guidepost, *Christophorus* takes a seat in the cars of people who drive—to find out what drives them. This time, we meet Harald S. Stegen, expert on Porsche tractors.

The one-cylinder, four-stroke engine is pounding rhythmically, like an iron heart; you can count the revolutions. The vibrations are passed on to the seat of the tractor and to the driver. Harald S. Stegen opens the throttle a little more—the diesel engine with fourteen horsepower raises its thunderous voice, and the man at the wheel emits a cry of joy. “Doesn’t that sound great?” he calls over to his companions. “A real Porsche! There’s nothing I like to hear more.” Then he thumps away at 25 km/h (15 mph), riding a Porsche “Junior” tractor that is half a century old.

Stegen is from Bremen, 1.90 m tall, weights 100 kg (6'3"; 220 lbs), and embodies the Porsche philosophy of courageously exploring limits: Everything he touched has brought forth something new, and much of it has made him very successful. It began with learning to ride horses at a young age on his parent’s farm near Lüneburg; today he breeds racehorses. At fifteen, he tore across the fields near his home on his off-road motorcycle; ever since, no motorcycle can be heavy enough for him. He enjoys preparing food, so naturally, he wrote a cookbook. He was fascinated by the half-timbered houses of his homeland, so he trained as a carpenter, studied architecture, and has been running his own architectural firm for thirty years.

The intriguing question as to what would happen if this paragon of decisiveness ever came into contact with Porsche leads to the almost inevitable answer: Harald S. Stegen becomes president of the Roland Porsche Club in Bremen in 1976 and is given the nickname “Turbo Stegen” —because he buys all the turbo models from Zuffenhausen as soon as they hit the market. But then he recalled that Porsche built farm tractors from 1949 to 1963, and immediately the typical Stegen single-mindedness set in. A few years later, he owned no fewer than seventy of them—“Junior,” “Standard,” “Super,” and “Master” models. He buys, restores, and sells the tractors. In 1996, he and six other enthusiasts founded the Porsche Diesel Club Europe. Who’s president? No need to ask. He reduced his own fleet of Porsche tractors to four. In return, he recruits aspiring members and is extremely successful at it: The 400 current members from across Europe own over 2000 Porsche diesels in the characteristic blazing red with champagne-colored wheels.

They’re lucky: Porsche built some 120,000 tractors, but as the importance of agriculture decreased, the farm Porsches also faded into oblivion. Stegen literally saved the Porsche diesel from being totally forgotten. Today, they are coveted by collectors and aficionados. The club is flourishing, the supply of spare parts runs smoothly, and the restoration work is carried out with flawless craftsmanship. “Yes, it is quite *en vogue* to own a second Porsche,” the tractor man jokes. “Nothing against the sound of an Eleven. But can you imagine how the air vibrates when, on one of our little outings, fifty Porsche tractors come roaring down the hill?”

Stegen is sitting on a “Junior” in front of his estate outside of Bremen. The one-cylinder engine sends a rhythmic Porsche diesel sound out across the meadow where the racehorses cavort. “I’ll be going back to the Lüneburg area soon,” he says, and we suspect that he is not planning to retire. Sure enough: “I have a spring there with the best water around, one hundred meters under the ground. I’m going to build a bottling plant and market the water.” We get the feeling that there is no watering down Harald S. Stegen’s enthusiasm for new projects.