



Premiere

Sicilian Passion

Sicily has the world's most beautiful curves. And the most passionate, too—even since Porsche premiered the Boxster S there. But this trip begins where a mid-engine sports car belongs: in the midst of life.

By
Michael Thiem

Photos by
David Breun



Passion is an ever-blazing fire, and the new Boxster S even has the right color for a country where *motore* still rhymes with *amore*. And where the fiery declarations of love in the old town of Marsala come in the form of a chorus of horns. The open-top Porsche is moved to return the homage with its own acoustics.

One cappuccino is not enough. Mario Balatore is sitting in the Café Garibaldi, in the heart of the historic old town of Marsala. He refills his cup once again, just to be sure. He's playing for time. The more often his glance through the window roams from the Piazza della Repubblica over to the Palazzo VII Aprile, the more the 68-year-old wants to know about the surprise guest parked there: a Guards Red Boxster S soaking up the morning sun in front of the imposing columned entrance. Balatore has put down his daily *Giornale di Sicilia*, for the real news is out there on the street. "Is that the new model?" "How did that Porsche get here?" "Could I touch it?" And, stalling for time again, to get to know the new arrival: "How about another cappuccino?" Sicilian passion is expressed through temperament. In the narrow lanes of Marsala, it's the enthusiasm of the people; just outside the port town, the wild romanticism of the landscape takes over. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, too, was captivated by it: "Italy without Sicily paints no picture in the soul. The key to it all is here." That's Boxster passion.

The big island in the middle of the Mediterranean and the mid-engine in the Porsche found each other early—at the Targa Florio, the road race that began winding its way across the island in 1906. On June 10, 1956, Porsche celebrated the greatest and until then most important racing victory of its yet-brief history. Italian race driver Umberto Maglioli stunned all spectators by scoring an overall win in a 550 A Spyder—putting the young company in Zuffenhausen on the map. An additional ten triumphs made Porsche the most successful brand at the Targa Florio, which ran for the last time in 1973. And, in terms of dy-

namics and charisma, the 550 Spyder has had a legitimate successor here since 1993: the Boxster. Its wheelbase, the ratio of its front-hood length to its windshield, its tight fenders, and its tail end bring together the heritage of six decades of Porsche convertibles. "It doesn't just look like a Porsche," says Matthias Kulla, the carmaker's head of exterior design. "It looks as only a Porsche can look—sensual and pure." The man in charge of the model series, Hans-Jürgen Wöhler, adds, "We wanted to take a good thing and make it even better."

Passion is when something tugs at your heart and brings forth a wild yearning. On this marvelous morning, it's tugging most urgently at your right foot. These aren't just spring feelings—it's a balmy 18 degrees (65 °F). The Superstrada 187 curls around craggy mountain peaks that appear in some places to reach all the way to the sea. The 3.4-liter six-cylinder engine of the Boxster S puts out 310 hp, 15 hp more than its predecessor, thanks to direct fuel injection. The 2.9-liter base engine of the ▶

Well-red: The Boxster S adds the color of love to the rainbow of this newspaper stand





Boxster offers 255 hp—an athlete, but an ascetic one, for with Porsche's new double-clutch transmission (PDK) the S-option cars return 100 km/9.2 liters (23 mpg). The base Boxster is even more frugal, with consumption of 8.9 liters per 100 km (24 mpg). The roadster's impressive weight-to-power ratio is noticeable in every curve, after every hairpin turn. Subjective measurement: top rate. Scientific addendum: in the Boxster S, each horsepower has to move only 4.4 kilograms (9.7 lbs). The sports car climbs effortlessly to 751 meters (2,500 feet) in altitude, glides around the bends, then accelerates ruthlessly toward its goal, the small mountain town of Erice. The roadster becomes a road star.

No need to look for a guide. As a descendant of the 550 Spyder, the new Boxster feels at home in Sicily. The Targa Florio is a thing of the past, but Porsche still builds mid-engine sports cars made for the island's roads.

Passion is burning desire. In Erice, that extends to the culinary realm. Like a deep-fried pasta roll filled with fresh ricotta cream. In the little town with its narrow lanes, arches, and hanging flowers, sweet seduction is everywhere. There's cannoli with vanilla, cocoa, chocolate, or candied fruits. Heavy-duty, but hard to resist, especially when it comes with a cup of *latte di mandorla*—almond milk—which tastes almost like liquid marzipan. Yet body curves aren't necessarily a bad thing.

The Boxster features the kind that it can flaunt with self-confidence—and with no excess calorie consumption. The enlarged air intakes in the front set the tone for its sporty design and underscore its commitment to performance. Two integrated cross-bars in the lateral intakes are painted in the car's color in the Boxster, but highlighted in black in the Boxster S, with LED parking lights and fog lamps arranged horizontally above them. The turn signals are integrated into the new halogen headlights, with a twin-tube look reminiscent of the Carrera GT supercar.

Passion is when you become one with your thoughts and feelings. The drive to Customaci through innumerable double bends and then on toward San Vito Lo Capo sets your head free. The Boxster S rolls toward the seemingly boundless horizon. The signs warning of the "winding road" ahead are more of an invitation, both for the car and for the driver. If there's one thing the Boxster doesn't need right now, it's the top up. For there's no alternative to open passion.

Passion is a scent you can smell. A fresh sea breeze accompanies us on the way to the Zingaro Nature Reserve—the first nature reserve in Sicily. The water of the Golfo di Castellammare shows all shades and sheens between green, turquoise, and deep blue. Below the deserted shepherds' village of Scopello, the landscape is overgrown with flat *macchia* shrubs, supplemented by a natural-style mixture of almond and olive trees returned to the wild, dwarf palms, and many aromatic bushes. Inhale, exhale, start your engine. The Boxster S grips the curvy road with its 18-inch wheels, with 235/40 ZR-18 tires up front and 265/40 ZR-18 in the rear, as it climbs and descends. The retuned chassis has greatly improved the dynamics; the driving sensation is still sublime. The combination of an ideally proportioned wheelbase and ▶

track—together, of course, with the mid-mounted engine—yields extremely dynamic handling and stability. Along with 18- or optional 19-inch wheels, a locking differential for the rear axle is optionally available. That considerably improves traction and stability, which provides an additional gain in performance—and driving pleasure—on winding roads.

Passion is an ever-blazing fire. That's why there are Sicilians who, on this day, are admiring the red Boxster S when the light turns green—and just stay where they are. The roadster winds its way through the labyrinth of Castellammare del Golfo's lanes and is welcomed by the natives with a chorus of horns. The acoustic pleasure with which the Boxster answers the homage

can even be turned up a notch. At the flip of a switch, two flaps open and allow the exhaust to by-pass a muffler.

Passion is timeless. Fisherman Niko Cesare has tied his boat, the *Anastasia*, to the dock. When he sees the Porsche at the edge of the harbor, he spontaneously offers to trade his entire catch of cod for the car: "Una macchina fantastica," a fantastic car. Then he tells of how, as a boy, he used to follow the Targa Florio road races through the winding 72-kilometer (45-mile) course through Sicily's Madonie region, with its more than 6,000 curves and innumerable grades. What's left are memories and the love for Porsche. What a catch—a meeting with the modern mid-engine sports car!

Back in Marsala. Here, passion also means perseverance. Mario Balatore of the Café Garibaldi is right where we left him. He tells us of a wine cellar, on the seafront, just a mile away from the town center. Back in 1773, an Englishman named John Woodhouse sent the first barrel of Marsala dessert wine back home. Vincenzo Florio, who later took over the cellar, was the original sponsor of the first edition of the famous road race in 1906. We have come full circle. Balatore is now in top form, with tasting as his duty. "Fenomenale," he says, raising his glass. His gaze wanders out the window, to the Boxster S. Passion, revisited. ▲

