

DRIVING

By Elmar Brümmer Photos by Daniel Reinhard

PASS TIME

Where the ideal line runs a zigzag course, the 911's suspension can enjoy a veritable field day. Precision is always in demand on the mountainous terrain of Switzerland. The Gotthard, Furka, and Grimsel pass routes are the traditional territory of the famous PostAuto buses. This trip takes driving pleasure to new heights.

There is a definite rumbling. Satisfied, yet insistent. With every meter the 911 ascends, its six cylinders seek to live out an agile response almost too perfect for this tour. But there is no way around it. If ever there were the right place for the German expression *jetzt geht die Post ab*—roughly, “off we go”—this is it.

Before we devote high praise to our mountain-climbing tour along the Gotthard, Furka, and Matterhorn—with an appearance by the Rhone Glacier—it is important to note a crucial tonal sequence: C-sharp, E, A. This unmistakable signal tells us we have entered the world of the PostAuto buses. Their horns are music not only to the ears of nostalgia buffs; these vehicles continue to provide public transportation to the farthest corners of Switzerland, and they seem to have chosen the most fabulous routes to do so. These roads are so twisty and narrow that one cannot imagine driving them without leaning on the horn from time to time to warn other motorists. C-sharp, E, A.

This is a drive up into the forces of nature, to the limits of cell phone reception—and beyond. The serpentine encounter between driver, vehicle, and road is reflected on the navigation display: the orange line of the road is as jagged as the path of a seismograph. That display is absolutely accurate, except for the color. For

Yellow fever breaks out in the mountain passes: a 911 follows the routes of Switzerland’s famous PostAuto buses.

here the dominant hue is yellow, a yellow so emblematic that the Swiss postal service has registered it as “intellectual property.”

There’s no question our speedy yellow car can hold its own in the color category as well. The hue fulfills its purpose even when the weather changes at every hair-pin bend. It is astonishing how many different shades the cottony billows of fog can have as they rise from the valley up the steep mountain walls—which are often just a hand’s breadth from the side mirrors. The Carrera positively glows in this milky soup. A few more curves are needed before enlightenment reaches its crew from the flats, however. By then it is clear the fog no longer holds sway; we have reached and transcended the cloud line. The steering angle is of course unfazed by meteorological conditions, but for the driver it is an eerie feeling to make what looks like a sharp turn into nothing.



Flowing motion:
Learning curves in the mountains of Switzerland show a steep upward slope



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For drivers and sports cars alike, the key to success in surmounting these passes is “Onward and upward!”

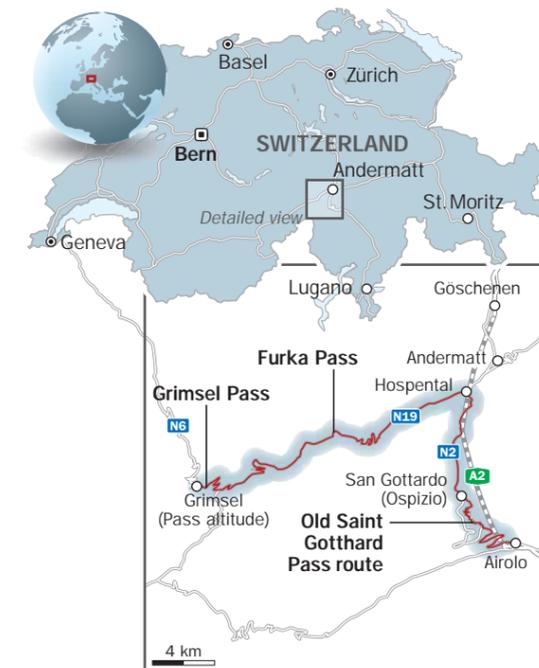
Massif structure: Nature grants a moment of shelter to our 911 on its climbing tour



namely, the right to stick to the safer mountain side of the many tight bottlenecks, has been preserved even though the steep segments have since been reinforced. Still, there are often moments when it is best not even to think of the depths right over the edge of the rather low road barriers. Such moments are an essential part of the mountain experience, and not only on the old Gotthard Pass, which is revered far and wide as the “king of passes.”

Waiting at the parking bay of the Hotel Belvédère, one’s gaze turns to the pass route across the way. In a setting that from this vantage point looks like a model train layout (including a real steam locomotive at the Furka Pass), the bus might as well be a drop of yellow paint. A sense of grandeur comes over us, but quickly settles back into perspective—for we too will soon be one of those drops of paint sprinkling the ridge of peaks. The Alps, so to speak, have acquired freckles.

THE ITINERARY



Weather conditions may necessitate closure of the pass routes.