

VALKYRIE RACING

RENE BRINKERHOFF IS A REBORN EXPLORER AND PIONEER WITH THE GOAL TO AMASS 6 RACES, 7 CONTINENTS, 18 COUNTRIES AND OVER 22,000 MILES

STORY BY STEVEN KITTRELL
PHOTOS COURTESY RENE BRINKEROFF





It's times like we've seen in 2020 where we start to realize that life can take a long and unexpected turn, at any time. Maybe it's a global outside force, influencing you to go in one direction against another. Or maybe it's a completely internal and an organic strike of lightning, which illuminates a new path. For Rene Brinkerhoff, it was absolutely the latter. This mother of four, dedicated wife and family caretaker turned her path towards the open road and made history while doing it.

Rene is a reborn explorer and pioneer with the goal to amass 6 races, 7 continents, 18 countries and over 22,000 miles. From the La Carrera Panamericana in Mexico, the Targa Tasmania in Australia, Peking to

Paris in Asia and Europe, Caminos Del Inca in South America, the East African Safari Classic and soon to be the Sub Zero Race in Antarctica – Rene is doing more in the second half of her life than most do in a lifetime. One driver, every continent on the planet and a goal to reach millions.

When we spoke on the phone, Rene oozed a passion for life and motorsports, that resonated with authenticity. This wasn't for show or fame or any superficial purpose. The tuning fork in her body was struck, at the age of 57, which told her it was her time to get behind the wheel and rediscover herself, and in turn unearth destinations not yet seen by many, specifically a Porsche 356. This story isn't about a pedestrian tour of a region or state

and not even a single trip to find oneself before nestling back onto the couch. It all started with the saying, 'One day I'm going to....,' which is open ended and something she still lives by today.

It's been a long and courageous road for Rene and her crew. Countless flights, miles, fuel and smiles. Victories, breakdowns, main drags and backroads. A newly kindled attraction to a Porsche 356 A Coupe lead to enough adventure to bookend a lifetime. From frustrated and confused stay-at-home-mother to record setting female endurance racer, Rene has flipped the script on her own life and changed so many others in the process.

The connection to the Porsche 356 A



was the beginning. When she decided to start racing, she needed to find a car. A relative who had recently purchased a 356 with the intent to restore it, invited her to come and see it. As a first introduction to the Porsche 356 model, this was a great starting point and she immediately knew that this was the car for her. How could you not love the shape and its big curves, pairing well with the feeling of nostalgia it evoked? Its simple elegant dash, the lack of modern comforts and "save me" features drew her in.

"I do love cars from the 50s and 60s but there is something very special for me about this car in particular. My first car was a late 1960s souped-up VW bug, silver with pinstriping. The 356's sound and the way it felt when driving hearkened back to the fun I had in my teens and the first fun days of driving. I had an immediate connection with the car. Not to mention, the car and I are the same age."



Following a few driving lessons, Rene was ready to push all her chips in. After riding shotgun in a Porsche 356 the year before at the La Carrera Panamericana, she felt like she was ready to get behind the wheel of her own. Not only was her first race, ever, but a historic one. Like most races, a frantic sprint to get the car ready was the first challenge. The 356 got buttoned up and went on the trailer late on the evening before the team had to leave for Mexico. Everything was happening so quickly for Rene and her team.

"When we arrived in Mexico, I told our newly formed team that the race was going to be my driving school. I was going to have to learn by doing and hoped to make them proud. The evening of our first day of racing, they announced we had made history as a woman driven team – we were first in our class...and it was our debut race."

With her success in 2013 at the LCP, she rallied again in 2014 as the only woman competitor and securing a 2nd in class and 14th overall. But in 2015, a crash gave her a mental setback and time for her to reexamine some things. Taking 2016 off, she came back to Mexico in 2017 and

placed first again, becoming the only woman to ever do so. The same year, the 356 went to the Targa Tasmania race, where they placed in the Top 20 in the Shannon Classic Class. Off to Peking to Paris and Africa they went with their sights set on Antarctica.

Like any race teams, the Valkyrie staff has been instrumental in their successes. From the mechanics, support crew our car builders, to the navigators and familial support, nothing could have been achieved without them. A passionate dedication about everything they've done and have gone beyond and above what would normally be seen.

"Going without sleep at night to fix a broken car, to servicing the car in the middle of a race enduring the extreme body stresses at 16,000 feet. The stories are numerous. Not to mention my family's support which has been amazing. They have stood with us even while questioning the risk and danger we are exposed to."

As highlighted, her husband and children have been with her every step of the way but having both of her daughters directly involved has been as welcomed bonding time. Daughter Christina, her youngest, has been with the team from the first La Carrera Panamericana and in every race but two, photographing of capturing once in a lifetime video. Since 2018, Christina has been working with Valkyrie Racing full time, operations. Her oldest daughter, Juliette, has traveled with the team and in East Africa, she navigated for Rene. Juliette has also been involved with Valkyrie Racing's efforts to fight child trafficking along with Christina with their charity Valkyrie Gives.

There have been countless challenges, and more than she could ever begin to communicate to me or you the reader. Rene did say the most challenging stretch of road she had faced to date was the roads of East Africa. The year they rallied was the rainiest in 20 years and the route chosen were the most difficult terrain to drive. The mud and sand with all its variations, many stretches were so thick with muddy ruts and water, which were then followed by deep sand that seemed to grow in length



before you.

"Our crash in 2015 was a big moment to stop and reevaluate. Not only did the car have to be rebuilt, my confidence was also broken. Everything we had accomplished and how we had gotten there was revisited. Why we raced and why we took on the dangers of the La Carrera, was thought over again," Rene recalls.

Beyond the race itself, the global response to Rene and her mission has been well accepted. From the many race days around the globe, to on the lawn at the Quail Motorsports Gathering during Monterey Car Week. But it's the reach to the empowered female demographic that she is most proud of. It's not uncommon to find a crowd of women of all ages waiting for her when arriving at the end of a long day.

"We've had great enthusiasm everywhere we've been. Many countries where we've raced have never seen a 356 before and often, they've never seen a woman driver. The sight and sound of the Peruvian people yelling Porsche in the distance and then seeing their clapping hands and cheering voices," Rene said with humbleness in her voice. "They are inspired by what we are doing and have sincere thanks for giving a place for women in a man's sport."

Although delayed by outside forces, she's still on the verge of making history and still driven to reach the milestones her and her team made many years ago.

"I think the emotions and memories will be reflected on when we finish our goal. Right now, and throughout this journey, the planning, logistics, and everything thing else that goes into doing these immensely difficult races, has been in the forefront of all our thoughts."

