

PORSCHE ON ICE

Learning to master turns and slides on roads of ice and snow at speed is ideal training for perilous real-world driving conditions. Dan Avila gets behind the wheel of the Porsche 911 Carrera in Canada to do just that.

It is minus-25 degrees Celsius a few hours' drive north of Montreal in Quebec, Canada, and I am sitting in a brand-new Porsche 911 Carrera 4S on a track of pure ice.

A voice crackles over the radio: "OK Dan, I want you to drive through the slalom course, making the car slide sideways through each turn, got it?"

Not wanting to abuse the privilege, I respond, "So, shall I give it a bit of a boot?"

"Yeah, you're good to go. Drive it like you stole it."

Not just fun and games

That was the start of my most exciting driving experience at Mécaglisse in northern Quebec, the Camp4 driving facility that brings together Porsche driving enthusiasts from around the world for a masterclass in handling the iconic 911 Carrera on ice.

There is a serious side to the experience, too, that the instructors demonstrate by allowing drivers to make errors and get themselves into a slide situation. Handling an icy road or recovering from a loss of control on the ice is not necessarily



an intuitive thing. It is a learned skill set that, once mastered, can become muscle memory allowing for instantaneous responses and recovery in a real-world loss-of-traction situation.

This is also an opportunity to drive as fast as you dare, *Tokyo Drift*-style, around race circuits, applying advanced rally-driving techniques that make you feel ready (although you won't be) to sign up to the elite Porsche pro-drivers team.

The Porsche driving school was first introduced in 1996 and initially held in Rovaniemi, Finland. Since then, Camp4 has grown into Porsche's premier winter driving program held by dedicated Porsche event teams in Finland, Switzerland, Italy, China and

After grabbing some photos on the ice, the participants were buddied up in pairs and put into teams. The orientation before the driving program starts is quick yet detailed.

The vehicles are slightly modified to suit the conditions. The original front mesh grills are replaced with open grills so snow can easily be removed if a driver buries the nose of the car in a snow bank. (I only did this once.) The tyres are metal-studded ice editions that ensure some, but not too much, traction.

The 911 Carrera S and 4S

The modern 911 Carrera S (rear-wheel drive) and 4S (all-wheel drive) are machines of precision and beauty.

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Canada. Porsche has developed four progressive training programs with drivers needing to graduate from one program to advance to the next. Starting with Camp4 – Precision, drivers can then move on to Camp4S – Performance, ICE-FORCE – Masters and the ultimate ICE-FORCE+ – Masters.

The Canadian Camp4 experience was launched in 2011 and is open to participants from around the world. Arriving from Australia, which is a little like an intergalactic trip at close to 45 hours, we left a warm Australian summer and arrived to a world of ice and snow. Porsche was kind enough to assist in the acclimatisation process with day one on fast-moving snowmobiles. This adrenaline aperitif set the scene for the following day on the ice.

The Camp4 experience is run like a well-oiled German machine. Accepting the offer to arrive a couple of hours ahead of the pack, I left the picture-perfect town of Estérel with two of the Porsche race drivers in the team's Porsche Cayenne Turbo 4WD support vehicle, arriving (very quickly) at the Mécaglisse circuit in the predawn darkness.

The event management team opened a shed the size of an airline hangar with the fluorescent lights flickering on to reveal a sea of brand-spanking-new 911s in all colours and configurations like a billionaire's packet of Skittles.

The 911 Carrera is true to its heritage with rear-mounted six-cylinder engines, but gone are the days of sacrificing comfort for performance. In some race-ready marques, a day on the circuit requires a post-race massage; not so in the 911. Simply re-engage traction control, deselect sports mode and drive off to make the shopping run.

At the end of a day of training, drifting, fish-tailing and sliding on ice and snow, drivers can be forgiven for thinking that perhaps a career with Porsche racing is on the cards. My delusions of grandeur were rapidly dashed with a final hot lap of the entire circuit – this time as a passenger with one of the Porsche race driving team at the wheel. I left convinced that I clearly need to join the rest of the advanced program before my triumphant ascendance to Porsche racing greatness. Perhaps Finland next time? ♦

Travel file

Experience

porscheexperience.ca/en/camp4

Getting there

Air Canada flies from Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Auckland to Vancouver with connections to Montreal. aircanada.com

Accommodation

Accommodation at Estérel Resort is part of the package for the Camp4 experience. esterel.com/en

