

# classic



## Longing for adventure

How the classic stars connect and enchant people around the world



Dear Readers,

Luxury for me, above all, means experiencing adventures. And this issue is full of them: our road story through Costa Rica, where people greet each other by saying “Pura Vida” (enjoy life), is sure to inspire you (p. 18). 17,000 kilometres by plane away, in Thailand’s capital Bangkok, an exciting big-city adventure awaits you (p. 76). City and countryside, America and Asia, West and East – classics with the star fascinate and move young and old worldwide. Speaking of young: in Austria, we visited a young couple who have taken over a classic car workshop. Their life: a pure adventure (p. 38)!

One more note on our own behalf: we, too, are subject to the enormous cost increases in the areas of energy, raw materials and distribution. However, as we want to continue to offer you moving and fascinating stories, we have decided to increase our prices after eleven years. From January 2024, the magazine will cost €8.70 as a single issue and €7.90 on a subscription basis from issue 01.2024 onwards (€31.60 for four issues). I find the price adjustment reasonable and fair. I hope you do, too. Please continue to stay connected with us. Pura Vida!

  
**Jörg Heuer, Editor-in-chief**

How do you like the Mercedes-Benz Classic magazine? What do you think of our stories and the topics we choose? We would love to hear your feedback!  
 → [classic.magazin@mercedes-benz.com](mailto:classic.magazin@mercedes-benz.com) (for data protection information, see p. 92)

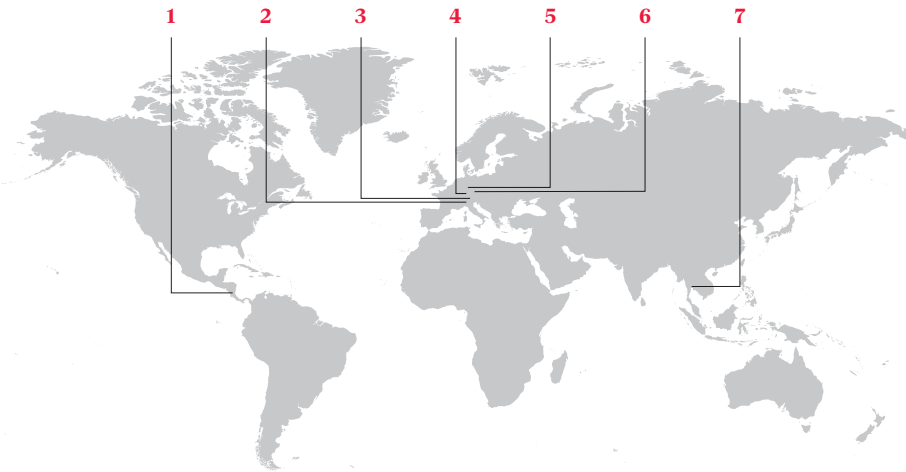


**Three stories, one longing**

In Costa Rica, we took part in a rally of a different kind (top photo). Kristy and Sayam cruised with us through Thailand’s metropolis Bangkok (middle photo). Lukas and Maria are in the process of establishing their own classic car workshop in Austria’s Alps. She is 20, while he is 23 years young. Two rising stars (bottom photo)!

# CONTRIBUTORS

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Around the world in 98 pages



## David Klammer

Photographer, Costa Rica, p. 18

“I was completely blown away by how the classics drove on gravel, clay and sandy tracks. They even mastered river crossings without any problems. Taking high-quality photos from a moving car was a special challenge, of course. Man, machine and equipment were thoroughly shaken up, as you can imagine. But it was all great fun, and a fantastic adventure in one of the most beautiful countries in Central America.”



## Christina Rahmes

Author, *The ICE*, p. 60

“Just scrolling through his Instagram profile clearly shows that Riley Harper is a big car fan, and likes to travel as often as possible. Writing about the stuntman from California feels like a road trip. No time pressure, all the freedom you want, and the adventure itself provided by the 34-year-old’s passion for driving special vehicles in extraordinary surroundings. This time on an icy slope in St Moritz. A nice cool-down for in between.”



## Ayhan Belge

Photographer, Tyrol workshop, p. 38

“I’ve been art director of the magazine for a few years now – but this is the first story for which I took the photos myself. And I was really lucky: the weather in the Tyrolean mountains in Austria was excellent on the three production days, the very young protagonists and the cool classics in their workshop could not have been better. I had never seen an Evo II before, for example – except in photos, of course!”

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# “Off for an adventure!”

With two roadsters, a coupé and a saloon from Costa Rica's capital San José to the Pacific Ocean and back: 700 kilometres through jungle, cloud forests and rivers, over beach and high mountain tracks

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*TEXT Jörg Heuer · PHOTOS David Klammer*



# A meeting of star enthusiasts at Hacienda Equis near San José

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**1 Cars and cool people**  
Star aficionados from the capital San José and the surrounding area meet for Sunday brunch together. In the rear right of the 450 SL rally sits Daniela. At 13, she is the youngest of the Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts present. She came together with her grandparents Daisy López and Norberto Izurieta in the 450 SLC in Silver Green metallic (rear left).

**2 This one's got music in it**  
Alexander Lutz Villalta is a freelance architect and guitarist in a rock band. He affectionately calls his 108 model series saloon "Grandfather".

**3 Hacienda Equis**  
The property, made of wood and natural stone with floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows, has 900 square metres of living space, and the hillside plot with a well-maintained tropical garden is one hectare in size.

**4 Globetrotters**  
Mr and Mrs Bartsch come from northern Germany, have known each other for 30 years and have lived in many countries. Costa Rica has been Inga and Ingo's home since 2006.

**5 Sports car fans**  
In total, Inga and Ingo own four classics of the 107 model series. On the left their 380 SL, on the right the 450 SL. They are currently having a 560 SL and 450 SLC made suitable for the track: "Higher, wider, faster - like the legendary factory R/C 107 rallies of the 1970s and 1980s," says Ingo.







Colourful birds blare their songs from blossoming bushes and trees at the roadside. Palm trees sway in the mild wind. Many of the houses along the way from San José Airport are colourfully painted. Quaint street restaurants, small shops, bustling markets. We are invited to a Sunday brunch in the tropics of Central America in Aserrí, not far from the capital San José. Strictly speaking, it is an exclusive meeting of a few star aficionados from the area.

The slope leading to the 1,300-metre-high Hacienda Equis of Ingo Bartsch, 54, and his wife Inga, 53, goes steeply uphill. In some places, you can only drive on it in first gear. To pass through the first gate, you type in a four-digit code. At the second gate, about two hundred metres further up the narrow private track, you pull on a long rope and a bell sounds. The electric gate opens – and you enter an immediately enchanting, one-hectare, extremely well-maintained property. There are two R 107 models in the

carport. A white 450 SL rally from 1974 with additional headlamps, a matt black bonnet, spoiler and blue leather seats. And a 380 SL from 1981 in Inca Red metallic (DB 581). Inga and Ingo have long since had the white one converted into a rally car. “Underride guard, raised higher, made wider and faster,” says Ingo. “Our passion for these classics is also a tribute to the unique rally tradition of Mercedes-Benz.” They bought the Inca red model a few months ago. Another 560 SL and 450 SLC are currently being prepared by a specialist for the great adventures on Costa Rica’s roads – and above all on the tracks of the country that is considered the Switzerland of Central America. Opposite the carport is the swimming pool with the “rancho” – a covered barbecue bar. The house is built on the slope of the property with a tropical garden – with mango trees, palm trees, banana bushes, tree-high bamboo and flowers in the most magnificent colours. Made of wood and natural stone, with panoramic windows

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1

#### Blossom splendour

Inga does most of the work herself in her garden, where flowers shine in almost every colour.

2

#### Car mechanic

Arturo Ramos owns a “Stroke Eight” and, together with his brothers, runs a workshop that specialises in Mercedes-Benz classics in what is already the fourth generation.

3

#### Party time

The classics park on the driveway and lawn, the guests and hosts have many topics to discuss and lots of fun.

4

#### Departure

Seven star fans set off on a three-day road trip towards the Pacific Ocean with four classics.





and views of volcanoes, mountains and the capital San José, which lies slightly below at 1,100 metres above sea level in the high valley between the Talamanca Mountains in the south and the volcanoes in the north. There are three guest flats, a guest house, and several streams here. “Right now they are peaceful rivulets, but they can also be quite different,” explains Inga.

#### **Exclusive: starry splendour above San José**

Then the other guests arrive for the star brunch, to which Inga and Ingo have invited a few classics fans from the area: a green 450 SLC drives through the gate, a white 220 D (W 115), a light blue 280 S (W 108), a Unimog 404 S and two blue classics of the future: E-Class models from the 210 model series. Cars park on the lawn, as well as on the driveway below the house. The barbecue is hot, and meat specialities, home-made salads, cakes and desserts,

and various drinks are ready. Daniela, 13, is the youngest of the guests. She came with her grandparents Norberto Izurieta, 74, and Daisy López, 69, in the 450 SLC – for Daniela “the best car in the world” that she refers to only as “Rápido-Rápido” (Faster-Faster). The brothers Arturo, 39, and Otto Ramos, 34, are here with their wives Vanessa and Maria in the “Stroke Eight” and E 320. They run a workshop that specialises in Mercedes-Benz classics. And then there’s Alexander Lutz Villalta, 39, an architect and musician in a metal band, along with a few others. He has his guitar with him. The programme for the next few hours: splendid atmosphere, car shop talk, chilling in the classic cars and hammocks, everyone dipping their feet in the pool. When most of the food and drink has gone, some arrange to go on a three-day trip west towards the ocean the day after tomorrow. And Ingo exclaims in joyful anticipation: “Off for an adventure!” →

A tropical landscape with palm trees and a dirt road. The scene is slightly hazy, suggesting a misty or dusty atmosphere. The palm trees are in the foreground, and a dirt road or path leads into the distance. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and earthy tones.

DAY 1  
FROM SAN JOSÉ TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN,  
320 KILOMETRES

Over dusty tracks and  
challenging passes





The day after next, Tuesday, the engines start early in the morning. Inga and Ingo are in their white rally SL, Alexander is at the start in his 280 S, Norberto and Daisy are in the 450 SLC, and Bettina, 71, and her husband Gustavo, 62, are driving the Inca Red 380 SL they borrowed from Inga and Ingo for this road trip to the Osa Peninsula in the southwest of the country. Roadster, coupé, saloon, you name it. And apart from the German emigrants Inga and Ingo, who have been living in Costa Rica since 2006, no one has a clue what kind of daredevil piste adventure actually lies ahead of them.

It begins after just a few kilometres in the mountains, which are up to 2,200 metres high. Suddenly, the well-built asphalt road ends and becomes a gravel track, and later a clay track washed out by countless tropical downpours. Potholes almost as deep as a pitfall, extreme climbs and descents with corresponding yellow and black

warning signs included. Sometimes dust from the rotating tyres billows up like an almost opaque veil, sometimes brown mud and water fountains spout up from the puddles. Alexander in particular, who spontaneously decided to join the ride at the Sunday brunch the day before yesterday, is delighted with the challenges of the route. "I'm totally happy," he says during a picnic break in the middle of the mountains – with a wide view of lots of greenery. "I see that I can rely on my car even away from normal city road traffic. It is over 50 years old, but still in excellent shape. A real Mercedes!"

#### **In love: Grandmother called the car "Blue Prince"**

And then the freelance architect and guitarist of the band NORKO, which is not unknown in Costa Rica, tells the story of his 280 S: "My grandparents bought the saloon in 1972. Grandmother used it mostly, for a good 20 years. She was totally in love with the colour

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1 + 2 + 3

#### **The rocker in the 280 S**

"That's how adventures are," says Alexander. "I know that I can rely on my car. It's past 50, but it's still in excellent shape."

4

#### **The 380 SL in the jungle**

The 42-year-old roadster in which Bettina and Gustavo are travelling is also fully in its element on rain-soaked jungle tracks.



and always just called the car Blue Prince. Then the car was gone. Lost, passed into other hands. I searched for it for a long time. The 280 S is very striking and quite rare in Costa Rica. I thought I had a good chance of tracking it down. In 2009, I finally succeeded. I bought the car back and had it refurbished."

Is it still the Blue Prince? "I have renamed it and call it 'Grandfather'. Very respectfully, of course," Alexander replies. How does he normally use the car? "I mostly ride my motorbike, but I drive the saloon at least twice a week, going shopping, to the gym or sometimes to band rehearsals. My mates are keen to come along for the ride. And sometimes I visit classic car meetings. But one thing is certain: this will definitely be not only the most exciting, but also the longest trip with Grandfather. I think our relationship will become even closer and more trusting through this trip." The four classics bravely battle their way through breathtaking

dream landscapes – and around the potholes in permanent slalom. The tropical rain briefly drums on the windscreens. Only a few settlements along the way. Hardly any traffic on the slopes to the southwest. An open road ahead for the adventurers. The group's destination is the Kunken Lodge in the province of Puntarenas, located directly on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, a good 300 kilometres from San José.

When we arrive at the lodge, dusk has long since set in. From the rainforest, which merges directly into the ocean, you can hear the howler monkeys roaring so loudly that they seem to be gigantic, towering over you in the trees above. The call of the toucan, whose beak is four times bigger than its head, can also be heard. The dark ocean sways gently. Whale sharks, dolphins and turtles swim within. And the cicadas, up to seven centimetres long, chirp deep into the sweltering, tropical night. →



A lush tropical river scene with dense green foliage and a small waterfall. The water is a murky green-brown color, and the surrounding vegetation is thick and vibrant. A large fallen log lies across the river, partially submerged. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

DAY 2  
ALONG THE COAST TO PIRATE BAY,  
60 KILOMETRES

# Upstream to the Bahía Drake



Colourful macaws in the nearby almond trees at the edge of the jungle, whose fruits are obviously at the top of their menu, rouse you from sleep early the next morning with a loud caw. We are on the Osa Peninsula, home to one of the largest contiguous lowland rainforests in all of Central America. Pumas, jaguars, coatis, monkeys, tapirs, harpy eagles, crocodiles and snakes have their natural habitat here. The leaves and flowers, the insects and butterflies, everything is even bigger, more colourful, more lush here than in the highlands around San José. Many endemic species and one of the world's most colourful bird varieties can be found in the national parks on the wild, remote peninsula. Nowhere else in Costa Rica is the flora and fauna as rich in species as here.

Despite the whirring ceiling fans, one's clothes stick to their body and the humidity level approaches 100 per cent. The aromatic highland coffee in the lodge, the mysterious sounds from

the jungle and the Pacific, the prospect of another eventful day of adventure riding – all this quickly perks you up. At breakfast with locally harvested fruits and a view of the Golfo Dulce, it is a good opportunity to talk to Inga, a trained travel agent, and Ingo, who studied business administration. They met in their early 20s and have since travelled through many European countries with their own travel companies with up to one hundred employees, the globetrotters explain: Switzerland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Andorra – they have lived in many different places. They have lived in Costa Rica for 17 years. A travel report in an international magazine gave them the idea of emigrating to Central America. They have never regretted their decision. And a few years ago, they had the idea of offering rally trips with their classic cars. “We also own a few vehicles from other brands, but Mercedes-Benz is in the greatest demand and is simply the most

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1

**Colourful plumage**

Two macaws fly to the next almond tree, whose fruit they like to eat.

2

**Short break**

Alexander, Inga and Ingo (from left to right) enjoy a few cold drinks in the remote Bahía Drake. Sir Francis Drake, the buccaneer and circumnavigator, is said to have repaired his galleon “Golden Hind” right here in March 1579.

3

**Spontaneous encounter**

Alexander meets a cattle herder by the wayside. After admiring the car, the musician strokes the mule.

4

**Great heat**

Scorching sun, high humidity: when the soft top is open, only the umbrella provides some shade.





reliable,” says Ingo. “This is another reason why we are expanding our fleet of stars,” adds Inga. With classic and adventure fans from Canada and the USA, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Belgium, they have already been on tours of between nine and 14 days throughout Costa Rica, sometimes even as far as the neighbouring countries of Panama or Nicaragua. (Find out more: [oldtimer-rallye-reisen-mittelamerika.com](http://oldtimer-rallye-reisen-mittelamerika.com))

#### **Driven by passion: Sir Francis Drake was here**

One by one, the other five star enthusiasts arrive on the lodge’s breakfast terrace with a sea view. “If you want, you can stay here and explore the area on your own,” Ingo suggests. “Anyone who fancies a trip to Drake Bay, follow us.” He and his wife take their 450 SL again, Alexander starts his 280 S in anticipation – and the two reporters get to take the 380 SL. The asphalted coastal road is followed briefly,

then there is a right turn and only a dirt road. Vultures circle in the sky. Cattle pastures and small villages to the left and right. There is even a not-so-shallow river along the way. The two SL models cross it relatively easily, pushing a real bow wave upstream in front of them. Standing on the shore, Alexander watches in amazement – and then prefers to take a small detour with his saloon. “Maybe the level of difficulty is too high for Grandfather after all,” he says with a wink. “I don’t want to put him through too much.”

Bahía Drake, the legendary pirate bay, is located in the northern part of the peninsula. It is considered a natural harbour, used by the buccaneer, explorer and circumnavigator Sir Francis Drake in the 16th century. Today, apart from us, there are only a few backpackers on the road. A supermarket with a corrugated iron roof, a few bars, hotels and fishing boats – there is not much else here. But that is exactly what makes the bay so attractive. →





DAY 3  
THROUGH CLOUD FORESTS BACK TO SAN JOSÉ,  
300 KILOMETRES

From the ocean through  
the high mountains

# Beach concert on the shore of the Pacific Ocean

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1  
**Dream setting**  
Alexander has lit a campfire on the beach and plays a few songs on the guitar for his new friends.



2  
**Sea view**  
From the terrace of the Kunken Lodge, you have a fantastic view of the Golfo Dulce.



3  
**Waiting time**  
Norberto looks for the car ferry, which takes a long time, but then also brings his 450 SLC safely across the wide mangrove stream.

4  
**Made to measure**  
Alexander is the last to steer his 280 S onto the ferry. The three R/C 107 models have already found space on the rusty barge.

5  
**Crossing**  
Over to Sierpe. This is one of the places known for having the most thunderstorms in Costa Rica.





The next day, the seven star aficionados meet an hour before sunrise. 300 kilometres from the Pacific back to San José lie ahead of them. It's not the same route they came, of course. Daisy and Norberto, Bettina and Gustavo, Inga and Ingo stroll down to the beach, where Alexander is already waiting for them. He has collected and piled up wood, lit a campfire and now wants to perform a little jam session on the beach for his new friends, accompanied by the sound of the sea and the quaint, eerie calls of the howler monkeys.

An armadillo pads across the dark sandy beach 30 metres away and looks over curiously before preferring to disappear again into the thicket of the jungle a few moments later. Meanwhile, Alexander leans casually with his guitar against the open boot of his saloon and performs a few songs. "It's quite romantic, it's really awesome," says Daisy. "Pretty unforgettable moments," says her

husband Norberto. Six happy faces on the ocean beach. Then there is applause, which also makes Alexander's features shine. As the morning sun bathes the bay in magical soft light, it is time to leave.

### **Strong: the classics prove to be suitable for the tropics**

We quickly have a last coffee and then check out. On the unpaved, difficult to traverse road towards the mangrove swamps, and the car ferry to Sierpe, the temperature quickly climbs to 28 degrees. Sun and rain in rapid alternation. We are drenched with sweat, but the classics prove to be suited to the tropics even now. Only the wind brings some cooling relief. The adrenaline level remains high. And it stays that way when the slope suddenly ends somewhere in the middle of nowhere, on a riverbank framed by mangrove forests. "This is supposed to be the ferry dock?" asks Norberto incredulously. "Seems so," Inga answers and looks across to the

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1

### **Cloud forest**

On the way back, the weather in the high mountains is extreme in places. The temperature drops from 28 to only ten degrees. Rain and fog restrict visibility, the windscreen wipers work hard.

2 + 3 + 4

### **Hideway**

Back at their hacienda above the capital San José: Inga and Ingo enjoy the view and look back with satisfaction on the three-day road and track adventure – around 700 kilometres of brilliant driving pleasure.



other shore. Nothing happens for a quarter of an hour. Then Ingo calls a telephone number. But the “ferry office” is apparently unoccupied. After another 20 minutes, something finally happens. The mangrove ferry, as rickety as it is rusty, starts moving, and shortly afterwards, takes the valuable cargo on board. The two roadsters, the saloon and the coupé only just fit on it together.

Norberto gets a call from his granddaughter Daniela. “Is our Rápido-Rápido doing well?” asks the 13-year-old, who would have loved to be part of this adventure on the slopes, but was not allowed to because of school. “The car is doing very well,” Norberto reassures his granddaughter. “We are too, by the way.” Daniela replies by saying that she is so excited to hear the stories from the road that her grandparents will tell her. And that, next time, she will definitely have to come along! From Sierpe, the route continues only on asphalt roads. Pineapple fields, banana, palm and coffee

plantations, also the Río Grande de Térraba, Costa Rica’s longest river, lie along the way towards the Cordillera de Talamanca, whose highest mountain is the Cerro Chirripó at 3,820 metres. Before the ascent and the view of the giant mountain, the roadsters drive with the tops closed. A wise decision, since the temperature drops rapidly in the high mountains. “From almost 30 to ten degrees within a few hours, I’ve never experienced that before,” Alexander comments at the next break, 50 kilometres before San José. A little later, when the traffic gets heavier and it becomes difficult to continue in the group, the seven star aficionados go their separate ways.

“It was lovely,” says Ingo, back at the hacienda and relaxing on the sofa in front of the panoramic window overlooking the capital. “Very lovely,” Inga replies, looking down at the twinkling lights of San José. The two SL models are back safe and sound in the carport – ready for the next adventures! ◆