#thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning

25/09/2026 Driving the entire Pan-American Highway – in just 100 days. That was the dream of Rainer Behrendt and Jan Bongers. In the spring of 2026, they set out on the journey of a lifetime in a Cayenne, covering more than 40,000 kilometers through 15 countries.

Somewhere high in the Andes, Jan Bongers's body reaches its limit. For days, he and Rainer Behrendt have been driving through the world's longest mountain range. Their challenging route between Salta, Argentina, and San Pedro de Atacama, Chile, climbs to elevations of more than 4,500 meters. Then it hits without warning: racing thoughts, dizziness, difficulty concentrating. Altitude sickness! As if that weren't enough, the Cayenne begins acting up as well. Only a few days into the trip, the expedition that is supposed to bring the two friends from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska suddenly hangs in the balance.

With their *#thepanamericana100project* , 54-year-old German Rainer Behrendt and 57-year-old Dutchman Jan Bongers are fulfilling a lifelong dream: driving the entire Pan-American Highway in just

100 days. The two have been close friends for more than 15 years. Porsche road trips through the Alps have long been a tradition. But in March 2026, they decide to raise the bar dramatically with a journey from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska. Naturally, they choose the Cayenne, Porsche's consummate all-terrain SUV. For Behrendt, president of the Porsche Club Mainz, there was never any question. But the expedition is meant to be more than an adventure. Behrendt's mother-in-law lost her life to ALS the previous year, so the pair intend to raise awareness of the devastating and still incurable disease while collecting donations for ALS research. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) gradually destroys the motor neurons in the brain and spinal cord beyond repair. The disease is fatal, and research around the world depends heavily on donations. Their Cayenne, wrapped in eye-catching graphics bearing the slogan "Race against ALS," quickly becomes a conversation starter. Everywhere they go, it opens doors to unique encounters. *Christophorus* spoke with Behrendt and Bongers about their expedition, gaining a rare glimpse into a modern-day adventure. This is their story.

Rainer Behrendt: At the End of the World

March 2026: southern Tierra del Fuego. Standing at the rail overlooking the Beagle Channel, I feel a tear roll down my cheek. It's the first quiet moment I've had in weeks. So much has happened. My mother-in-law passed away a year ago. Months of preparing for this journey followed. After 27 years with the same employer, I resigned so I could finally make this dream a reality. Then came our arrival in Buenos Aires, the road trip south, and now we're here: Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, the starting point. We've already come so far, and yet we haven't even begun. Ushuaia isn't a particularly beautiful place. But it's a place unlike any other. For us, the end of the world is just the beginning. In two days, we'll set off.

Jan Bongers: On the Ice

From Ushuaia, there's only one direction to go: north. Every stop has to be planned carefully because the beauty of Tierra del Fuego is a constant temptation beyond the windshield. You want to pull over, step outside, and simply absorb this surreal landscape, savoring every moment. Around 1,000 kilometers later, the Perito Moreno Glacier rises to the west in Los Glaciares National Park. A must-see! One of the planet's greatest natural wonders, it is also one of the few glaciers that has remained stable, or is even growing, despite climate change. The moment we step onto the ice, we realize what this journey truly means. It's a privilege to be here.

Rainer Behrendt: The Andes

For days, we make our way through the Andes. We climb some of the steepest mountain roads imaginable, ascending to nearly 5,000 meters, only to descend again on the most spectacular winding roads I've ever driven. The scenery shifts constantly – from lush green valleys to vibrant rock formations. We cross vast salt flats and volcanic landscapes that look almost lunar.

Then the Cayenne speaks up. We deliberately chose a second-generation Cayenne Diesel with the 100-liter fuel tank. Now that decision presents us with a very un-Porsche-like problem. At these elevations, the thin air prevents the diesel particulate filter from regenerating properly. Altitude sickness for the Cayenne: The vehicle drops into limp mode, refusing to rev beyond 2,000 rpm. The engine fights valiantly as we crawl up the steep mountain roads in second gear while trucks stack up behind us. Then I notice that something isn't quite right with Jan.

Jan Bongers: Altitude Sickness

Suddenly I feel awful. Nausea. Dizziness. My thoughts begin racing. It has to be altitude sickness. In severe cases, it can even be fatal. Fortunately, I had seen a travel medicine specialist before we left and packed the necessary medication. Now there's only one solution: Lose altitude. Rainer gets us safely to San Pedro de Atacama, the oasis on the edge of the desert, sitting at a much more manageable 2,500 meters. Three days later, the ordeal is over.

We continue north, driving another 1,500 kilometers along the Pacific coast toward Santiago de Chile. The Cayenne is still in limp mode, but even under extreme conditions it proves utterly dependable. Then an unexpected message arrives via social media. The Porsche Club Andino wants to meet us. Breakfast together the following morning becomes my first real introduction to the Porsche Club community. We had never met these people before, yet our shared passion instantly connects us. As president of the Porsche Club Mainz, Rainer is already familiar with encounters like this. For me, it's a revelation. And it won't be the last. Thanks to the local members, we immerse ourselves far more deeply in each country's culture than we ever could on our own. Even though our visits are brief, those authentic encounters leave lasting memories.

Rainer Behrendt: Cable Cars in La Paz

Fuel is surprisingly hard to come by in Bolivia. The government regulates fuel sales to foreigners, so different prices apply to us. Not every gas station attendant is able or willing to properly handle the transaction. Additionally, diesel isn't available everywhere. One day, we stop at six different gas stations before finally finding one that can help us. Still, we press on. We cross the Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt flat, before reaching La Paz, Bolivia's capital, perched 4,000 meters above sea level. It's one of the most extraordinary cities I've ever visited. Until less than a decade ago, the city was effectively divided along social lines. The largely Indigenous population, often poorer, lived on the high plateau, while wealthier residents lived down in the valley near the city center. Then the city built its barrier-free cable-car network, transforming everyday life and the city's social fabric. Journeys that once took an hour can now be completed in just 10 minutes. A remarkable example of how thoughtful urban planning can improve people's lives.

Jan Bongers: In the Footsteps of the Incas

Leaving La Paz demands everything the Cayenne has to give. For the past two weeks we've been driving in limp mode, the engine refusing to rev beyond 2,000 rpm. Yet we have to climb out of the valley. The road winds relentlessly uphill, one hairpin after another, first gear, barely 10 kmh. Suspense unfolds in slow motion. Lima, the Peruvian capital, is still just over 1,500 kilometers away, but the team at the Porsche Center there have already been alerted. Then we're there.

The technicians throw themselves into the job. None of them has ever worked on a Cayenne Diesel before. We use the time that we have to wait and meet Luis Fischer, known as Lucho, president of the Porsche Club Perú. When he hears we're planning to visit Machu Picchu, he makes us an offer we simply can't refuse. Luis owns a hotel in Cusco, the former capital of the Inca Empire, and arranges everything for us. Three days later, the Cayenne is back on the road. The diesel particulate filter has successfully regenerated. A new oxygen sensor has been installed. And limp mode is history. What a relief!

A few days later, accompanied by a guide, we make our way from Cusco to Machu Picchu. The ancient Inca citadel in the Andes is one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. Standing before the immense terraces, built more than 500 years ago, we're almost speechless. It feels like traveling through time, into another world, into the heart of the Inca civilization.

Rainer Behrendt: An Unplanned Stop in Ecuador

After more than 2,000 kilometers, we reach Ecuador – and suddenly everything changes. The deserts, dust, and sand of Peru give way to banana plantations, tropical heat, and lush greenery. Gravel roads become smooth pavement. Then the Cayenne interrupts us once again. The AdBlue tank needs refilling otherwise the engine will eventually refuse to start.

But nobody in Ecuador seems to know what AdBlue is. A urea-based fluid used in diesel exhaust treatment? They've never heard of it. We have fewer than 1,000 kilometers left before the system locks us out. From that moment on, we never switch the engine off, not even during breaks. Too risky. Eventually we pull into a hotel in the middle of nowhere. The Cayenne is barely hanging on. Our search for AdBlue has been dragging on for days until someone finally gives us a tip. A shop in Quito, about three hours away, supposedly has some in stock. The engine starts one more time – salvation is within reach.

Jan Bongers: Pablo Escobar's Brother

Problem solved! We continue north, spend a night on the equator, and eventually arrive in Colombia. Following the advice we've been given, we stay on the main highways, avoid driving after dark, and

finally reach Medellín. Pablo Escobar once made the city infamous, but today we discover a modern city celebrated for innovation, art, and technology.

We want to understand its history more deeply. Our guide takes us to the Casa Museo Pablo Escobar. The museum remains controversial as many believe it romanticizes the drug lord, portraying him almost as a kind of Robin Hood while recounting the history of the Medellín Cartel. For us as Europeans, it's a fascinating experience. Then the controversy suddenly took shape. We shake hands with the museum's founder. Roberto Escobar, Pablo's brother and the cartel's former chief accountant, spent more than 11 years in prison. Who would have imagined we would suddenly find ourselves face to face with someone who had once stood at the heart of the Medellín Cartel?

To continue north, the Cayenne has to be shipped to Panama City. The Darién Gap, with its swamps and dense rainforest, makes an overland crossing impossible. In Panama, we once again meet members of the local Porsche Club. My fascination with these encounters only continues to grow. From Costa Rica to Honduras, the Porsche Club community throughout Central America is remarkably vibrant.

Rainer Behrendt: Across Central America

In Nicaragua, we never quite feel at ease. Not because of the people, but because of the political climate. Even at the border, we're instructed to unpack and repack our entire vehicle several times. Drones are prohibited, so we mail ours ahead to Honduras – well, almost all of them. I'm smuggling the small one. This country is governed differently from anywhere we've visited before, and police checkpoints are a routine part of everyday life. Yet the people couldn't be more welcoming. For example in Estelí, where the driver of a pickup truck waves us over one day. He'd already discovered our journey on Instagram. The cigar manufacturer now invites us for coffee. Then, we receive an invitation via social media, and the next morning, we find ourselves at a small, private brewery and lemonade factory. These wonderful moments quickly make us forget our first impression at the border.

Our next stop is El Salvador. Less than a decade ago, it ranked among the most dangerous countries in the world. But in recent years, a new political direction has been taken. When we meet members of the local Porsche Club, they tell us that not long ago even Porsche Club drives required armored vehicles and security escorts, even for locals. Today we experience a country defined by extraordinary hospitality and stunning natural beauty. We'll definitely be back.

Jan Bongers: On the Volcano

Pedro Soles, president of the local Porsche Club in Guatemala, recommends hiking up the Acatenango volcano because its summit offers the best view of the still-active Volcán de Fuego. The two-day trek proves to be one of the toughest, yet most rewarding, experiences of the entire expedition.

Every quarter of an hour, the volcano steams and smokes, while lava flows bubble up. Watching this

spectacle with our own eyes feels almost unreal. Time briefly stands still – and before long, we're back behind the wheel of the Cayenne, heading toward Mexico.

Carlos J. Pani Villalobos, president of the Porsche Club México, becomes something of a roadside guardian angel during this leg of the trip. As we approach Mexico City, he guides us through the sprawling metropolis via smartphone, steering us away from the expressway we'd planned to take around the city. The relentless traffic makes driving a challenge, but our mission keeps us moving forward.

Rainer Behrendt: A Detour on the Racetrack

Entering the United States turns out to be surprisingly easy, as the border officers are unfailingly friendly. At the same time, the truly exotic part of our journey is now behind us. From here on, we're traveling through more familiar territory. Because we lingered in Central America longer than planned, we now have to make up time if we're going to finish within our 100-day goal. Still, there are certain highlights we simply can't pass up. The Porsche spirit along North America's West Coast is unlike anything else. It's time to experience it for ourselves. In Los Angeles, we stop at the Porsche Experience Center and tackle its off-road course. Then we continue to Laguna Seca, one of the world's most legendary racetracks. Allen Serban, our instructor, hurls us around the circuit in a Taycan – I've never experienced anything like it. The ride inspires us to pick up the pace ourselves because my wife is waiting for us in Vancouver. Arriving late isn't an option.

Jan Bongers: The Final Push

As a Dutchman, I especially enjoy exploring Vancouver by bicycle. But before long, it's back behind the wheel. We continue to Vancouver Island, surrounded by breathtaking forests and lush vegetation. Black bears, brown bears, and grizzlies cross our path; moose and bison graze beside the road. Back on the mainland, the Rocky Mountains accompany us for days. We stop for a hike by Lake Louise and agree that this mountain range is among the absolute highlights of the entire trip.

In June, we cross the Arctic Circle and enter Alaska. The sun refuses to set – even at midnight, it bathes the landscape in warm golden light. Farther north, the scenery changes once again. The lush forests and wildflower meadows gradually give way to endless tundra. After standing at what felt like the end of the world in Ushuaia, we now have the strange sensation of arriving at the world's opposite edge. A harsh land, boundless space – utterly breathtaking.

Rainer Behrendt: The Lowest Point

The final stage on the Dalton Highway from Fairbanks to Deadhorse. My thoughts keep drifting. Jan and I haven't just tested a friendship that has lasted for years. We've also created a lasting tribute to my late

mother-in-law. Now those painful memories are increasingly joined by new ones that somehow make the burden easier to carry. I think of the man we met in San Diego who told us, with great emotion, that ALS had already affected his family three separate times. The truck driver in Fairbanks who noticed our Cayenne at breakfast and quietly slipped us 20 dollars for the donation fund. The couple who had also experienced ALS in their family and insisted on paying our restaurant bill.

And all the people who simply scanned the QR code on our Cayenne and donated. This disease causes suffering all over the world. There can never be enough awareness. That's why, for me, the fight against ALS won't end with this journey. We'll continue our fundraising campaign long after we've reached our destination.

We then arrive in Deadhorse. The dream is fulfilled. And yet, the moment is unexpectedly disappointing. Perhaps it's the place itself: a settlement of shipping containers with no permanent population, home instead to thousands of seasonal oil workers. Pipelines, industrial buildings, heavy trucks. But maybe that's not what's making me feel this way. Perhaps it's the realization that the dream has come to an end. Now what? I'm not returning to my old job; I'm starting over. But what I'm taking home is a new perspective. Whatever the future brings, I want to follow my passions. Just as I did on this journey that I'll be telling my grandchildren about.

Jan Bongers: Deadhorse

Standing in Deadhorse, overwhelmed with pride and emotion, I arrive at one simple realization: The fact that we were able to turn this dream into reality makes us incredibly fortunate. Today I feel as though I understand the world a little better. I've met remarkable people and discovered new perspectives. Many of the problems we worry about back home suddenly don't seem like problems at all. The encounters we've had on this journey will stay with me for a very long time. But now it's time to head home. And after so many weeks on the road, another realization begins to take shape. Home is a pretty wonderful place, too.

Info

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Image Sublines

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Ushuaia, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: Starting point: The mission for the Cayenne crew begins in Ushuaia.

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Rainer Behrendt, Jan Bongers, Perito Moreno, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: The first highlight for Rainer Behrendt and Jan Bongers (from left to right): Perito Moreno Glacier, one of the world's most spectacular glaciers.

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_4.jpg
Title: Cayenne, Plaza de las Banderas, Bolivia, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: From ice to salt: The Cayenne at Plaza de las Banderas on Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt flat.

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_5.jpg
Title: La Paz, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: High above the city: At 4,000 meters, cable cars are an integral part of daily life in Bolivia's capital, La Paz, connecting neighborhoods in the valley with those on the surrounding plateau.

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_6.jpg
Title: Rainer Behrendt, Jan Bongers, Machu Picchu, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: A lost city rediscovered: Behrendt and Bongers wouldn't dream of missing Machu Picchu. Built in the 15th century, the Inca citadel was rediscovered only in 1911.

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_7.jpg
Title: Rainer Behrendt, Cayenne, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: The vehicle: The second-generation Cayenne was equipped with off-road tires and auxiliary driving lights for the expedition.

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_10.jpg
Title: Cayenne, Alberta Parks, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: North America: In the United States, Behrendt and Bongers step on the gas to stay within their 100-day goal. In Canada, however, they once again slow down to meet up with a Christophorus photographer. While the Peru shoot was dominated by desert landscapes, this leg of the journey is defined by lush greenery.

Path: #thepanamericana100project: The end of the world is just the beginning/Images/img_12.jpg
Title: Jan Bongers, Rainer Behrendt, Cayenne, Panamericana, 2026, Porsche AG
Subline: Deadhorse: Outside a tool supply store stands the official end of the Dalton Highway, where the #panamericana100project is immortalized with its own sticker. Clearly visible on the Cayenne is the "Race Against ALS" livery and QR code that inspired donations all along the route.

Link Collection

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