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This Girl has Drive

When character shapes performance Maria Sakkari unveils the challenge of controlling body, mind and soul in the contemporary tennis world.

The note on my calendar app about my appointment with Maria Sakkari is followed by a couple of exclamation points, maybe more. To find an opening, we had to really study her busy schedule that is chock-full of tournaments, Grand Slams, training sessions and endless travelling. In the past few years, Maria has been constantly living with a suitcase attached to her and a boarding pass in hand.

After countless back and forth to find time for the photoshoot, today is the day. Thankfully, the weather is on our side. The sun shines bright on the urban setting—Athens is blessed like that, often even in the winter.

I've never met her before. But I know her, like almost everyone else in Greece. You see, Maria Sakkari is the best Greek female tennis player right now. It is true that she represents a country with no real tennis background. However, something serious and interesting is unfolding in Greek tennis lately. If you follow the sport, maybe you've caught wind of it.

She is no. 23 in the world ranking. If you enjoy technical details, she is right-handed, employs a two-hand backhand. She has worked fiercely on her forehand over the last

few years and doesn't really have any weak points. She is 1.72 meters tall and really tough. Another very strong point of hers are her legs. She covers a lot of ground really quickly, and is never out of breath. She really likes the grass at Wimbledon, but also the Rolland-Garros red clay. Maybe she even prefers the clay a little bit. Maybe.

She is only 24 years old. She has tennis blood running through her veins. Her mother was also a tennis champion. Her grandfather was involved in the sport too. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to play out the rest. Maria was on the court with her racket in hand since her first memories—she was barely five when she first played. She participated in her first tournament at the age of 14. She remembers it as clear as day—that unripe, innocent touch with the sport. Word is that, to this day, she plays with the same, unmitigated enthusiasm. Just like back then.

Standing at our meeting point, I see a white Porsche Cayenne Coupé driving towards me. It is quite a sight. The car approaches, the motor turns off. Maria hops off the driver's seat, to the soundtrack of subtle crackles and pops as the metal cools off. We greet each other. She carries with her all the necessary equipment of a tennis player, like



The hard facts: Maria is no. 23 in the world ranking at only 24. She is right-handed, she has worked fiercely on her forehand over the last few years, and doesn't really have any weak points.

All about Maria

Born:

July 25, 1995

She listens to:

U2, Coldplay

She loves:

Spaghetti with minced meat sauce

She rests:

on Syros

She believes that:

you need to remain grounded

She strives to:

beat her fear of heights

Her favourite tennis player:

Kim Clijsters

She enjoys:

driving her Porsche Cayenne Coupé on twisty roads

She is:

a hard worker



Physical skills alone are not enough. What makes the difference is the mentality.

you've seen on TV. Thankfully the boot is big enough to accommodate all of it with ease. There she is then, right in front of me, a fresh, athletic girl that, even if you don't know her, you can tell from a thousand miles that she is 100 percent devoted to her sport. Even in her school years her life looked a lot like training-class-back to training, rinse and repeat. My first thought is "this is one bright, strong girl that looks you straight in the eye." There is nothing snobbish or cold about her. She is polite, feels familiar somehow and radiates a kind of Mediterranean energy. This is it! If I had to describe her with just a phrase, that would be it, Mediterranean energy. She channels it with her strong handshake, her enthusiastic demeanor, her readiness to accommodate the needs of the photoshoot, her bright smile.

We find a quiet spot to sit and I hit record. We start with what the lessons were that 2019 taught her. "I learned," she responds, "that you need to reward yourself and not be too hard on yourself. This was my biggest mistake in the earlier years. I learned to be more positive and this brought better results in my sport. I am a perfectionist and I know very well that being one has its downsides. So I learned to be more forgiving with myself—when it's necessary." This last phrase, "when it's necessary," has a very important meaning in her life. Because it is well known that she is anything but forgiving when it comes to training. She works hard, very hard. It is well known in the tennis world that she is not one of the athletes that crack under pressure. In her own words "there was not a single coach of mine that saw me struggle even in the most demanding training. They knew I'd push through." I believe her. The easy, skin-deep proof is her body. It is chiseled with all those telltale signs of endless hours of training. She is also very aware that, in the crème de

"I want to be the best tennis player in the world, it's as simple as that."

Maria SAKKARI

la crème of the tennis universe, the so-called Grand Slam, there is no space for compromises. It is a strict, lonely sport, with an almost Victorian code of conduct, full of bows, automated moves by the ball-boys, and bleaches so silent you think you're in the opera house.

There might be a full team supporting you and getting you ready, but on the court you are all by yourself. Even the faintest nod from your coach is punishable. There is nobody to guide you. There isn't a football-style halftime, nor a basketball-type timeout to get a pep talk from the bench. In the strict and polite world of tennis, you cannot curse, you cannot relieve the pressure. The viewers will scoff at you if you break your racket—and you really don't want that. It will work against you. There is only the pressure, the opponent, ball, net and you. That's it.

With this as a working hypothesis, Maria seems to focus a lot on the mental aspect. Her touchstones for handling pressure, as well as her favourite players, are Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin. Both Belgian, by the way. She also really respects Serena Williams. "They have a different culture, of course. I am much more expressive as a Greek, much less quiet. But if you don't possess Serena's immense self-control, you cannot reach that high. Physical skills alone are not enough." This last phrase is food for thought, and a new piece of info. "In women's tennis, the differences among us are few," she explains. "It's nothing like men's. We are more or less the same on a physical level. What makes the biggest difference is how each player handles herself psychologically."

I watch her standing up straight, focused, as if expecting me to "serve" the next question. So, what are her goals? She doesn't think twice: "some players are content if

they reach 50th or 30th place in the global ranking. They are happy to remain there. There is money, a dose of success, some fame. Not for me though. I want to be the best tennis player in the world, it's as simple as that. I don't doubt a small child would say the same, but I believe in myself and I'm giving it my all." Her immediate goal is to reach the world's top 10, to keep getting better and "once there, everything is possible." Maria enjoys pushing herself, facing challenges. When she travelled alone, just 18 years old, to train in Spain, she was at peace with the fact that she would have to be away from her family and friends for four years. "There was a lot of loneliness, I would maybe go out to dinner once every two weeks and that was it. It was just training and being by myself. However, this hardship made me grow up—I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for this experience."

Today, at the age of 24, her lifestyle hasn't changed so dramatically from her post-adolescent years or even her first tournament, ten years ago. The only thing that's missing is school—everything else is there. Competing, training, competing, rinse and repeat. Stir in the Grand Slam tournaments that she's been taking part in since she was 20, and you have the whole picture. And there, exactly, lies the whole secret. Her eyes sparkle as a reflex when I intentionally say the word "routine." This is the way that Maria Sakkari wants to live her life, with hard work and competition. She is terribly bored when she's not on the move, she can't just sit at home. A week of rest is too much for her. This girl has so much energy, Mediterranean energy, a fighting spirit. I see her pulling away in the white Cayenne Coupé. She's accelerating hard. Just like her career. •

By **Giannis KONSTANTOPOULOS**

Photos by **Radu CHINDRIS**



Making a Love Brand for the Future

The dreams factory Building a Porsche is more than a car manufacturing process. Because Porsche has managed to be more than a car manufacturer. Its story builds on the passion for driving and it transformed the once very small brand from Zuffenhausen into a Giant Love Brand.



I wouldn't see myself working for another car brand and it has always been my dream to work for Porsche. It is what I like most to do and maybe this is why I don't feel like working when I am around these cars. It feels unique to fulfil other people's dreams." This is how Fabian Haug leaves me speechless while I am following him around the fascinating Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur showroom. He is around 40 years old, and is dressed elegantly but in a smart casual manner because he is here to make me feel comfortable and relaxed. The Manufaktur department is where a "normal" dealership steps aside and sends its creative customers to turn their wildest dreams into reality.

"Here we prepare the Interior Lines, the special editions developed for several markets but we go up. We develop Limited Small Series for various models and we can also produce one-of-a-kind cars which are finished exactly here in our dedicated

workshop." As a "standard" procedure for what should be the best time of a client's life, coffee is always an introduction before a short tour to see and realize that there are thousands of combinations Porsche can apply in order to transform cars into perfect mirrors of their drivers' style and personalities. The configuration saga follows and everything is later turned into special codes that will define a car to be loved forever.

The new generation of the 911 is meant to be loved even more than its previous versions. The front grill is now more square and the bonnet integrates angles from the first generation. In the interior there is also a lesson about "less is more." While making the right steps into digitalization, the flagship of Porsche is getting simplified so you won't be bothered by any future gimmicks while driving. A classic atmosphere is what you also feel when visiting the exact place where everything started for Porsche, back

- 1 Limitless imagination**
When entering Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur it feels as if even the wildest dreams can turn into reality.
- 2 Elegance meets technology**
Classic details are taken into the newest fully-electric model at Porsche as a seamless continuation of the brand's identity.



Each 911 generation serves as a continuous inspiration for making Porsche a Love Brand.

no need for any other car manufacturer in the world. He takes me along tidy assembly sections where happy people proudly put together dream cars. I see smiles on the faces of a team trained to complete a new car in less than three minutes and working in two shifts from 5:30 in the morning. The robots are hardly visible and I get the feeling that even if we are talking technically perfect sportscars, the human factor is still the main ingredient.

I think everyone at Porsche has all the reasons to be proud about where the brand is standing nowadays. The 911 is maybe the best incarnation of Porsche in the new millennium. We are talking about the most comfortable and most technologically advanced generation ever. And if I am thinking of one example only, it would be the Wet Mode. This intelligent system detects the risk of aquaplaning by actually "listening" to the road condition with sophisticated microphones. The car signals when the Wet Mode should be switched on

and activates all the necessary assistance systems. You could say the car protects you in one way.

Still, when you just drive, all the technologies slowly leave your mind and you just know that being in a 911 is a kind of pleasure that makes you smile regardless of the road. It's no longer about the scenery you're in, but rather the state of mind it takes you to. The 911 may be defined as a car that offers you the best driving sensations and wants nothing in return. You don't have to wear a suit and tie to access the ultimate level of refinement. It is somehow the new definition of luxury, if luxury is still worth mentioning in our times. Something like how we choose our favorite restaurants nowadays. Serving simple dishes but always prepared with the best ingredients and in a setup where you do not feel like wearing those uptight clothes. •

By **Constantin BACHES**
Photos by **Radu CHINDRIȘ**

The roots: The iconic Werk 1, which would translate as the First Factory, is still the heart of everything the brand stands for today.

It's no longer about the route you're driving onto, but the state of mind it takes you to.

in 1938. The iconic Werk 1, which would translate as the First Factory, is still the heart of everything the brand stands for today. Porsche won't leave its heart of production. On the contrary, it agrees to invest even more in order to fit modern technologies into an architecture conceived long before the word "computer" was invented. It is no coincidence that

Zuffenhausen is where the 911, the 718 and recently the 100 percent electric Taycan are produced. And now, when the young generations feel like owning almost nothing, the car manufacturer from Zuffenhausen is betting everything on Love. In other words, the future will treasure only the Love Brands which anyway will compete among themselves whether they are cars, watches,

travels or any possessions able to trigger Emotion. And Fabian is not the only person at Porsche to give me a hint I am about to fall in Love with Porsche—over and over again. While on a tour inside the actual production line, Martin Radi, my guide who has worked for the brand for 21 years, delivers a perfect mix of jokes and technical details that would make anyone feel there is



Istanbul's Rising Women and Their Porsche 356s

Normalising contradictions The Porsche 356 has become one of the staples of Istanbul's car scene. It speaks in a unique way to the city itself, and also, interestingly, to the city's female car enthusiasts.



Setting new norms

Dr. Çiğdem Öngün is one of the women of Istanbul with high-powered jobs driving high-powered cars. They are the example of the direction Turkey is heading as a country, with Istanbul leading the way.



The Porsche 356 has long been one of the world's most popular classic sports cars. In 2004, the 356 was ranked amongst the top of all 1960s sports cars by *Sports Car International*, and it's no surprise. It's one of the most drivable of all the beautiful vintage driving machines of the 1960s. The *New York Times* wrote in 2010 that "Experts generally agree that the best choice for a first-time collector is a 1961–63 coupe, the 356 B hardtop." Turkey has a very small yet very active and devoted Porsche scene. It's safe to say that the 356 and the early 911 generations are the most popular amongst the car collectors of this scene. Perhaps

scene is not the accurate word for it, since this community does not collect cars to politely place them in a garage—people in Istanbul really love to drive these sources of joy. Istanbul is often described as a city of contradictions and there is some truth in that. There is still a conservative element in the country that believes a woman's role should be relegated to an imagined traditional role. In this context, women with high-powered jobs driving high-powered cars can be an exceptionally striking example of the direction Turkey is heading as a country, with Istanbul leading the way.

At home behind the wheel

Dr. Çiğdem Öngün is a lawyer specializing in technology and the founder of SRP Legal in Istanbul. She clearly sees the Porsche through this lens of history, nostalgia, and the city she lives in and loves. "My father had a VW when I was a child, the shape of which always brings me fond memories. The first Porsche I drove was a 997 Turbo and I was instantly impressed with how I felt at ease sitting behind its wheel. I believe that the motoring press regrettably still features a limited coverage of women. There are literally millions of women around the world who work hard and have become



Time staples: Merve Koyunsağan built a successful career in fashion and design business. She sees the analog experience of driving the Porsche 356 and the nostalgia around it as the perfect fit for her life in Istanbul.

massive car enthusiasts, but the broader narrative focuses on men's love of cars. But this isn't to say I love my 356 in the exact same manner as my husband. I love the car's character, driving her feels as natural as wearing a glove. The curvaceous lines highlight the craftsmanship as much as the driving experience. I spend the work-week looking forward to the weekend when I can take her out for a spin and reconnect with her." It's very tender how she refers to the 356 as a "she," not an "it." It's easy to see where Istanbul residents feel an admiration for the 356 in particular. Istanbul is a city whose history is indelibly a part of every piece of the city. Residents feel as if

they are walking through the city's past and its present every time they walk down the road. The atmosphere, the palaces, the shopping centers of the city all are historic and help create a sense of nostalgia for the past even while walking along in the present. Its winding, cobbled streets make it perfect for zipping along in a small, quick car like the 356. The city is full of such streets—many with spectacular views out over the deep blue of the Bosphorus.

Passion for history

Maria Christina "Tini" Ünsal is a fashion and jewelry designer who was born in Vienna and has lived in Istanbul since 1999.

"Even though the 356 is six years older than me, I see her as our daughter. I work as a freelancer from home and I love just looking through our window at the garden and see the car sitting outside, looking lovely and happy.

Classic cars and racing have always been a part of my life. My elder brother Tom and my father were enthusiasts, and now my husband and my son are as well. We joined the Monte Carlo Challenge in 1999 with our 356, with many other rallies after that. Moving from Vienna to Istanbul, history has always played a critical role in my life. It's always fascinated me, and now there's

nothing I love more than to take out my 356 and go exploring the beautiful countryside around the city. I believe that everyone has a car that they love more than any other they have had over the course of their lives, and for me that passion is ignited only by our 356 and the 20 years we've spent together. It's a point of personal pride that I've passed that passion for the 356 down to my son, so this car will stay in our family for generations to come."

The historical craftsmanship of the 356 blends harmoniously with its well-shaped personality which makes it authentic and somehow current, even modern in a way.

This unique character matches perfectly with the Istanbul lifestyle. Despite Istanbul's conservative element, women have grown ever more powerful in the workplace and society as a whole. According to International Labor Organization (ILO) statistics, Turkey has the second most female executives in the 108 countries studied (after Norway). Female leaders across society are incredibly common up to the highest level, with Turkey's first female prime minister elected in 1993, well before most European countries.

Appreciation for technology

Merve Koyunsağan is the owner of a design and retail specialist business in the fashion

and textile industry. "It's the driving experience and sense of nostalgia that attracts me most about classic cars. There's a pleasure that comes from driving together with an impeccably built machine from a time gone by. New technology pops up every day and it steadily replaces whatever came before it. There's something refreshing about being a part of a technology that's still just as wonderful to use as it was when it first appeared 50 years ago. Whenever people see me in my car they stop and stare. I enjoy its speed and pace, the power, everything about my Porsche 356, it's perfect for me and perfect for this city." In the social fabric of life in Istanbul, women

"Whenever people see me in my car they stop and stare."

Merve KOYUNSAĞAN

Runs in the family

Tini Ünsal joined many rallies in the Porsche 356. In each of them, she shared the cockpit with a family member and so the car became a part of it. She would never think of selling it.





Lifelong bond: Zeynep Atasever worked almost two decades in automotive industry driven by her passion for cars. Her Porsche 356 is the one that stole her heart.

were once seen as staples of life in the home. Now women dominate the workforce. 87 percent of women either work or are looking for paid employment, 17 percent over the global average, according to the ILO. In line with this, an appreciation for craftsmanship, for auto racing, and for the history of cars has grown and now plays an important role in society at large.

Powered by perfection

Zeynep Atasever worked in the automotive industry for 16 years, and is now retired. "Working in the automotive industry for 16 years, I spent hours at production lines for many different brands. I saw the details of production and perfectionist approach of manufacturers, and automobiles became a passion. My second passion has always been cinema. Grace Kelly was my idol. Her photographs in her Porsche Speedster 356

with a scarf on her head were on my walls when I was a teenager. Now, it's me who loves to drive our Porsche 356. My husband and I plan to make a European tour with our 356 B Cabriolet, and the car is at the heart of what I love to do and how I've spent my life."

These four women epitomize Istanbul and its car scene as we head into the next decade. All four are pioneers in their field, hard workers and providers for their families. They brought that same passion for life to their cars, seeking a car that matched their attitude and the city they call home. Coincidentally, the Porsche 356 has proven to be the perfect fit for this context for all four of them. Istanbul is a city whose past is an inescapable part of its present. The Porsche 356 matches this seamlessly, perfectly woven into their characters. It's an automobile well

crafted enough to be fantastic for modern usage. But it's the look and the feeling that bring a sense of nostalgia for an era gone by: you could never look at a 356 and think it was a modern car, no matter how well it was touched up.

As Istanbul steers its way into the future, it brings the past with it. And as its leaders—female and male—drive it forward, they make sure to bring a piece of the past with them along the road as well. The Porsche 356 and the women who drive it simply represent one of the sleekest, most aesthetic examples of this trend that bridges history along the roads of Istanbul, one of the world's greatest cities. •

By **Paul WILLIAMS**
Photos by **Tolga ILDUN**

Leading an attitude that drives their city forward.



Similar characters: Independently, Merve Koyunsağan, Çiğdem Öngün, Zeynep Atasever and Tini Ünsal sought a car that matched their attitude towards life and the city they call home. Coincidentally, they all found it in the same model.

Passion for Racing

From the Arctic Circle to Dubai Going to the Arctic Circle to drive sports cars might seem like a natural step to take when you are passionate about racing. There, in the utterly frozen lands of Finland, Igor Ganea met Jukka Honkavuori—and their shared passion for racing met too.



Success driven: Jukka Honkavuori won one of the most significant races of the Porsche Supercup, the Hankook 24 Hours of Dubai with the MRS Racing team.

The one

When Igor Ganea was 12, his father gave him his first driving lesson. With his feet barely touching the pedals of his father's work minivan, Igor knew right there that driving would become the passion of his life.

The other

Imagine being born in one of the coldest places, in the vastness of Lapland. When you think of career paths, becoming a racing champion might not be at the top of your mind. But Jukka Honkavuori thought differently at the age of five, when his father took him to a karting track for the first time. He could barely reach the pedals, but this was not going to stop him. The Finns use one simple word to describe the ambition for winning, the self-discipline in training and the strength of character that goes with it: *sisu*. In this respect, Jukka is a true Finn.

The passion

A similar *sisu* also took Igor to where he is now. Many years after the first drive in his father's minivan, Igor got himself a Porsche 911 GT2 RS. It was enough to get him hooked, and soon enough, he wanted to learn more, to break down the philosophy of racing to a molecular level and understand every last atom.

The idea

After their meeting in Lapland, they sealed their friendship with a commitment: that they will win at least one race together behind the wheel of a Porsche. Jukka won one of the most significant races of the Porsche Supercup, the Hankook 24 Hours of Dubai. In a year, Igor will join Jukka in a series of endurance races and this will be the next step towards their big dream—driving a Porsche to victory at Le Mans. •

By **PORSCHE CENTER MOLDOVA**

Photo by **Tim UPIETZ**

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