A Road Trip in the 1950s: From Paris to the North Cape in a 356

22/07/2026 When Frenchman Louis Malavieille purchased a Porsche 356 in 1955, he was thinking of one thing only: a sports car adventure with his family. The spectacular road trip from Paris all the way to northern Scandinavia was forgotten over time, until a color photo from that summer reappeared not long ago.

Paris, July 1955: Louis Malavieille was planning a trip of a lifetime. The 48-year-old Frenchman had just made his dream come true by purchasing a new sports car – and was now standing in front of the silver 1953 Porsche 356 1500 S Coupé, stowing the family's luggage along with the camping gear, and looking forward to what lay ahead of him, his wife Madeleine, and their sons Patrice and Franc-Loup: a four-week trip, of roughly 10,000 kilometers, from Paris to the far north of Norway and back again. Even today, on fully tarmacked roads, this would be a daring expedition. But back then, when the European road network was still in its infancy, Malavieille's plan could very well have been doomed. However, the family would be traveling in one of the most progressive sports cars of its time, a Porsche 356. And so, they were about to experience a trip they would never forget – and one that would have a lasting impact on their passion for Porsche.

We owe the fact that we can tell this story today to Øystein Asphjell. A passionate fan of the Porsche and Volkswagen brands, the Norwegian restores extremely rare rear-engined vehicles of both brands on his farm northeast of Oslo. While he was searching – as he often does – for obscure parts for one of his restoration projects, he came across a unique picture in one of the Porsche forums.

It appears to be an exceptionally well-preserved color photo showing a young boy next to a silver 356 with Parisian license plates. The boy is standing on a ferry, smiling into the camera, with a fjord and mountain range in the background. Asphjell was intrigued and wanted to find out the story behind this photo.

He therefore contacted the photographer, a Frenchman named Jean-Michel Malavieille, who informed him that the boy standing next to the 356 on the ferry in the photo was his father, Franc-Loup, aged 13 at the time. Franc-Loup, in turn, is one of the two sons of Louis Malavieille.

More than 70 years have passed

Shortly afterwards, Christophorus meets Franc-Loup Malavieille, now 83 years old, for an interview. More than 70 years have passed since the family undertook their adventurous trip, yet Franc-Loup's memories are still fresh. "It was a different time back then; you didn't need an SUV to go on holiday with your family," he says.

In the middle of the 20th century, the Norwegian road network was still basic, with only a few expressways. Most families in Europe had to make do with a VW Beetle, a Citroën 2 CV, or a Fiat 500, but Franc-Loup's father was no ordinary man. Born in 1907, Louis Malavieille was a trained architect and a successful entrepreneur in the field of vinyl cladding, an industry sector where he held a number of patents. First and foremost, though, Louis was an automotive enthusiast with a burning passion for motorsports.

His skills and ingenuity had secured him a job at French carmaker Renault, where he developed a computer-controlled gearbox long before this type of transmission would become standard in the automotive industry.

In 1955, Louis fulfilled his greatest dream – to own a real sports car – by buying the very 356 that is the main protagonist in our story: the car with the French license plate 1945CJ75. He wanted to take his family on an unforgettable adventure and drive them as far north as was possible in those days. In his opinion, the 356 was exactly the right car for this purpose, as it was both fast and reliable.

Today, you can reach the North Cape from Paris after traveling about 3,700 kilometers on tarmac. "The roads we were driving on at the time, however, were mostly gravel and in a bad state," Franc-Loup reminisces about the trip. "You couldn't drive all the way to the North Cape in those days; Honningsvåg was as far as you could go."

But even without the final leg, the trip felt like that of a family on a mission. From Paris, the route took them through Belgium and the Netherlands to northern Denmark. They continued by ferry to Sweden, and from there, there was only one direction: northward. Today, Franc-Loup can't recall every single detail of the trip, but he remembers the 356 all the better: "My father installed two yellow fog lights for us to see well in the night."

First big trip as a family

Other than that, the Coupé was standard. Father, mother, and their two sons Patrice and Franc-Loup, aged 11 and 13, had to fit into the sports car. "The rear seat had been taken out to make more space for our luggage and our tent – and Patrice and I had to sit on it. The heat from the engine helped make our little space quite cozy, and so we quickly forgot how hard it actually was." At the back of the cabin, there were four sleeping bags, as hotels were expensive and the family mostly stayed in their tent overnight when not in bigger cities. "It was our first big trip as a family," Franc-Loup recalls, "and we were never bored. The 356 also got us talking to locals, as that car was a rarity up there."

But Franc-Loup doesn't just remember the car and the encounters; the driving experience also left a lasting impression. The 356 was pushed to its limits at Geirangerfjord, today a UNESCO World Heritage Site. "Coming down on the mountain pass was exciting," he muses, "it was quite steep and very windy. I still recall the smell of the hot brakes." His father didn't say anything at the time, but obviously shared his concerns: Breaking down in this region would have catapulted the family straight into the next adventure. Therefore Louis acted with caution, stopping frequently to allow the brakes to cool down and to provide the family with fresh spring water. And so it was that the Malavieilles managed to drive their sports car all the way to what was then the most northerly point reachable by car. Their trip was slightly ahead of its time, as the road to the North Cape wasn't completed until a year later in 1956. However, the expedition wasn't over in Honningsvåg – the return journey also had a few surprises in store.

While gravel roads still defined their progress, the return route through Finnish Lapland fascinated with an entirely different natural landscape. Instead of Norway's rugged mountains and vast fjords, Finland, the "Land of a Thousand Lakes" – due to its more than 180,000 lakes – captivated the travelers with its beauty. On some images, the Porsche can be seen adorned with juniper twigs and also reindeer antlers sourced from a Sámi camp.

Visiting the homesteads of the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia is another experience Franc-Loup has never forgotten. "For us kids, it was kind of scary, as those antlers still had the blood on them from the slaughter," he remembers. "The Sámi knife my dad bought me shortly afterwards in Enontekiö is still on my desk in Paris today."

10,000 kilometers on the odometer

When Franc-Loup thinks about this monumental trip, he doesn't just recall his memories, as his dad

was also a passionate photographer. While in the 1950s most family photos were taken in black and white, Louis used Kodak color films. More than a dozen photos have survived. They tell this unique and fascinating story of a family and their sports car. “By the end of the trip, the car had covered more than 10,000 kilometers – and it didn't break down once,” Franc-Loup says.

Back in Paris, their love for Porsche had been cemented forever. Shortly afterwards, dad Louis bought a new car: a red 356 A 1600. His sons Franc-Loup and Patrice had caught the Porsche bug as well.

Today, the whole family is very well connected in the French Porsche scene. Franc-Loup owns a 911 Carrera 4S (991), just like his son Jean-Michel who started telling this entire story by publishing that very first photo. Since then, he has also been on another quite personal quest: to find the 356 that belonged to his grandfather Louis. So far without success.

However, Franc-Loup was successful when he returned to Norway two years ago. Although he didn't go all the way to the North Cape this time either, the fjord regions stirred in him a sense of melancholy. “Because the best memories,” says Franc-Loup with a smile, “are the ones you make as a child.”

Info

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