Impressive Collection: A Passion Spanning Generations

10/07/2026 Ivaylo Popivantchev, a Porsche importer for Bulgaria and classic car enthusiast, shows us around Sofia, his city of birth, in a customized classic car.

With traffic at a standstill across all three lanes of Boulevard Tsarigradsko Shose, there's not much movement to start with. Ivaylo Popivantchev drums his fingers impatiently on the steering wheel, then sees a gap and makes a move for the exit, and we suddenly find ourselves in downtown Sofia.

It's spring, and the cloud cover that has hung over Sofia for days is beginning to lift. The young shoots of trees and shrubs glow like green flames. The impressive panorama of towering snow-capped peaks surrounding the Bulgarian capital emerge out of the haze, some exceeding 2,000 meters. Sofia is surrounded by three mountain ranges – the Vitosha in the west, the Balkan in the north, and the Rila in the south. "We could be in a ski region within half an hour," says Ivaylo Popivantchev with a wistful smile that won't make much sense until later.

Collection at the Porsche Center in Sofia

Popivantchev is a reserved man. He has a strong handshake, without being dominant, and a clear but soft voice. The 62-year-old is one of the most successful car entrepreneurs in eastern Europe and a Porsche brand importer for Bulgaria and collectors of classic cars. Much of his impressive collection is open to the general public at the Porsche Center in Sofia. Vitosha Sports Cars, named after the mountain range of the same name, received one of the 2024/2025 Classic Partner Awards in the category “Best Point of Experience – Showroom Setup” for its extraordinary concept. Coveted among certified Classic Partners – Porsche Service Centers responsible for the care, maintenance, and restoration of classic cars – the award went to eastern Europe for the first time ever. “An extraordinary honor,” says Popivantchev. “It means the world to me.”

He has selected a special model for the drive through Sofia, a 911 Carrera 2 (964) Cabriolet in Turbo look, built in 1993. “The ideal everyday vehicle,” he says as he allows a clanging tram to pass by. “Uncompromisingly sporty in its appearance, and yet comfortable.” Nearly all the details are exactly as they were when the car was originally delivered. Each and every piece of leather, bolt in the engine, and component has to be authentic for “a classic car to be a true classic,” says Popivantchev. Then he notices his passenger’s gaze, which has come to rest on the central console, where his cell phone is wedged in a mount that definitely wasn’t there in 1993. “A small nod to the present,” he says and laughs. “I use the car year-round as my daily driver. Quite a challenge. That’s why I took the liberty of adding a few things – such as a hardtop roof for the winter, more modern headlights, a Porsche Classic audio system, and Speedline wheels.”

Old things shine with new luster

Popivantchev brings the car to a stop at the edge of the road and points to a long building, Bulgaria's oldest market hall. Built in the Neo-Renaissance style around 120 years ago, it features a glass roof and a green metal frame produced by the foundry of Gustave Eiffel, who erected the Eiffel Tower in Paris. “Restored to perfection,” says the expert, who apparently has a natural affinity for old things with a new luster.

The Romans, Huns, Ottomans, and Russians have all left their mark on the city of Sofia, which has been a pawn of many forces throughout the ages. Kings, emperors, and czars have all ruled here, where archaeological finds attest to continuous settlement for more than 5,000 years. The city in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula is located along the western edge of Bulgaria, an EU member country. Serbia and North Macedonia are closer than you'd think, just 60 and 75 kilometers away, while the Black Sea, a popular tourist attraction, is located approximately 400 kilometers to the east.

We drive past renovated old structures alongside grey buildings with balconies hanging at alarming angles, as well as the occasional monumental structures in Stalinist style, like the current parliament building, Partiyniya dom. Then we pass through districts where gleaming glass office buildings bear

witness to the city's current boom.

A Journey into One's Personal Past

The drive through Sofia is also a journey into Ivaylo Popivantchev's personal past. He used to play soccer there on that side street. And up there, that's where his grandmother lived. And all the way back there, along the horizon, that's where he learned to ski and even worked as a ski instructor after his studies in economics. There weren't many groomed slopes back then. To this day, he prefers to ski on natural terrain – with his 19- and 23-year-old sons, who, like him, love nothing more than to freeride in deep powder. That's "the epitome of freedom," the "joy of motion," and the "feeling of dynamism, of physical powers." Those are the words of an avid athlete, a freerider, and Porsche enthusiast.

Up there, he says, where there's an office building now, that's where his father had his watchmaking business. Popivantchev's voice goes soft. There, a young Ivaylo would spend his time after school adjusting the tiniest screws, springs, and gears using fine instruments until everything fit together again. His passion for using complex mechanical machines is no coincidence.

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Sofia's most iconic landmark and one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world, is located along the drive to the Porsche Center. Popivantchev parks the car out front and makes his way to the entrance. He purchases four candles, including one for his companion. Inside, the priest recites a litany, after which the choir breaks into song. A dozen worshippers kneel on the cold stone slabs, each of them lost in their own thoughts. The traffic rushing past outside feels far, far away. A brief moment of reflection, and then we head back to the car. The 911 in the original paint, Wimbledon Green Metallic, pairs perfectly with the verdigris copper roofs of the cathedral.

A Look Inside the Showroom

We arrive at the Porsche Center on the city outskirts. The showroom houses most of Popivantchev's private collection, which now comprises more than a hundred vehicles. In a large exhibition hall, newer models are parked alongside lovingly restored cars from every era of Porsche history. There's a showstopper just to the right of the entrance, a white 356 1500 Cabriolet built in 1953, then one of the first 911 Targa models from 1966 and, not too far off, a 911 Carrera 2.7 Targa (G-Series) from 1974. The list goes on and on, but Popivantchev has one more thing on his agenda – and that's a visit to his private garage.

A short time later, we find ourselves in front of his house – and his garage built into the hillside below it. "Ali Baba's Cave" reads the sign just outside the entrance. Inside it smells like gasoline and oil, like leather and metal. Popivantchev talks about how he switched from the university to the ski region, began importing American cars after the collapse of the Soviet Union – but discovered his passion for Porsche after buying a 356 A Coupé and a 911 2.4 Targa (original model). He describes how his company continued to grow until he became the official Porsche importer for Bulgaria three years ago.

He shows his visitor the 356 B Coupé from 1963, the year of his birth, which he acquired from a collector in Texas. Popivantchev had it restored to its original condition, and now it shines in Bali Blue once again. The car was painted red when he got it, “Perfect craftsmanship – but not in the original paint.” This originality is his credo when it comes to classic cars. The engine's exhaust manifold is in good shape, but from the wrong year? Replace it. That's not the seat leather that the car originally came with? Replace it. Popivantchev has his own shops in the workshop area of the Porsche Center: carpentry, paint, upholstery, metalworking, and engine. The employees are trained here on-site, as automotive expertise with a focus on Porsche is thin on the ground in Bulgaria.

Popivantchev grabs his brown leather bag, which he's had with him all day. He takes out his laptop, opens it, scrolls through some files, and mumbles something to himself in Bulgarian. What's this all about? He opens a video showing three skiers on a slope covered in powder.

The first hurtles straight down the steep mountainside and over a jump, does a backflip, and then lands. Freeriding at its finest. “My son Mateo,” says Popivantchev. The second man takes off, does a flip, and lands perfectly. “Rodin,” says the father with pride. When the third begins his descent, also a straight line down, he closes his laptop. “Oh, that’s just me …” he says. Does the descent end with or without a flip? Ivaylo Popivantchev only smiles.

Info

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Consumption data

718 Cayman GT4 RS (WLTP)*: Fuel consumption combined: 13.0 l/100 km; CO_2 emissions combined: 295 g/km; CO_2 class: G

*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

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