

PROJECT ■

That Petrol Emotion

WORDS KINGSLEY SINGLETON IMAGES REMO NEUHAUS

Photographer Remo Neuhaus's passion for extraordinary vehicles and his fascination with their owners has led to the creation of a new book, *Motorheads*, in collaboration with Denis Jeitziner

The Aare river swerves through Bern, forming a huge chicane. It tightens into the bends, slips easily back into straights and accelerates towards Lake Biel in the west of Switzerland. Finally it changes lanes, becoming the High Rhine and heading north to the sea. It has wound through Bern in this way for centuries, unsurprisingly serene. But today there's something new on the banks.

Photographer Remo Neuhaus is orchestrating the launch event of his new book, *Motorheads*. For this he's gathered over 30 amazing cars, bikes and other vehicles at the beautiful water-side Schwellenmätteli restaurant location. A cacophony of V8 engines drum the ears and the sun sparkles from race cars' freshly polished chrome. It's a surprising sight. Something special is happening.

The book Remo is launching into the world is no less captivating than its real-life subjects; a collection of his portrait photography accompanied by essays and interviews from author and co-creator, Denis Jeitziner. The book is the culmination of two years of work, and features 33 subjects across its 200 pages. From 'Töffbauer' chopper bike riders and Panzer tank collectors, to Ford Mustang freaks and dragster drivers, it's an exciting trip from the first page to last.

So where did the idea come from? And how did such a large project come together, from inception to publishing and launch? Let's go back to the beginning.



"I like to have nice cars. I'm particularly fascinated by the visual impact of vehicles"

Remo has long held a fascination for cars, but the project started with a chance conversation with friend and fellow image maker, Raphael Brügger, another co-creator of the project. "I like to have nice cars, and I enjoy the noise of engines – I'm also an ambassador for BMW – but as a photographer, I'm particularly fascinated by the visual impact of vehicles." With his specialism in portraiture, Remo also wanted to explore how the vehicles'



owners and drivers interacted with them; how one influenced the other.

Now he needed an author and immediately thought of Denis. "We've known each other a long time and Denis had already published several books. I asked him if he'd join the *Motorheads* project and he was instantly enthusiastic." Another colleague, Mitch Haussener, completed the team, organising production amongst other things.

Like all projects, *Motorheads* was a fine mix of planning, experimentation and pure endeavour. Shots needed to work with the participants' schedules, as well as Remo's vision. And they evolved, sometimes by the hour, based on the content that Denis was creating in his interviews. "All these personalities have great stories to tell," explains Remo. "We have in the book a world champion and a former Formula 1 driver, but also quite crazy characters."

Crazy in this case means the likes of Thomas Hug, who collects tanks; Zoe Scarlett, the most famous pin-up girl in Switzerland and owner of a living room furnished with engine parts; and Roland Gueffroy, who drove the 3,945km of USA's famous Route 66 on his moped 'Lucy'. How did Remo deal with such disparate subjects? "Of course, I try to think about the story first; how is the personality to come across?" You might have ideas before meeting them? "Yes, but visual inspiration also comes on the day, as I'm shooting and interacting. Sometimes, for instance, while I'm working to light the scene, I hear things in Denis's interview that inspire me. It was like this with Thomas the tank collector: he says to Denis he has a huge park of tanks, so when I hear this, I realise I must show him in the middle of his many tanks. That shot was actually three pictures, since the hall was so big!"

To keep things efficient, and to enjoy this collaborative spirit, Remo and Denis always went together to interview and shoot the *Motorheads* subjects. "We usually covered two per day," says Remo, "and of course we'd previously researched them. We also had Mitch to help me set up." Rarely, though, did he preconceive



the lighting setups. "That was always more spontaneous, decided once we'd got to know each other a bit, and Denis had started interviewing."

What gear was used throughout the project? "In terms of lighting, I worked a lot with Elinchrom and Profoto flashes. Outside, I often use the Elinchrom ELB 400 or the Profoto B1. I love both and with them I mostly used grids, where I can control the light very precisely." And what about his camera of choice? "For this project, and much of my other work, I've ↵

IMAGES: Opposite page: Mat Rebeaud
Above: Rahel Frey



been shooting with the Pentax 645z. I'm an ambassador for Pentax and a medium format camera was just the right choice for portraits. The lenses are absolute top class and the dynamic range of the camera is incredible; it gives me flexibility, even in difficult light conditions."

One of the biggest lighting challenges came on the first shoot, featuring Danny Schneider who custom builds motorbikes. Fortunately it was an image with time to plan. "I made a big effort for this picture and it wouldn't have been possible to do it with all of the shoots, as we didn't always have that much time. We had to wait for the sun to go down and get a beam of light on the wall. The result was great, so it was worth all the effort and the timing."

Having met and shot so many subjects for the book, does Remo have a favourite; someone who stood out

“Seeing it in such a nice book is like playing in the Champions League”

from the others in terms of personality, or what they inspired him to create? "I can't pick a single one out," he laughs. "It's amazing not to have a favourite, but I actually think the range excites me on its own; that's what I really like." True, there is an eclectic cast of characters to be found through the 200 pages. "From well-known VIPs to completely unknown personalities, they come together, but they're all Motorheads and have this

amazing passion for engines. That's what makes the book a success for me."

What about the process of putting the book and the event together? Most professional photographers have undertaken exhibitions, but publishing a book is different, more exacting. It's a moment in time that can't be tweaked once it's left your hands. "The process was extremely interesting," Remo explains. "We had challenges with regard to layout and the overall design, but as we were working in our own time, there was less pressure than you'd normally find. I think that over the last two years it's taken around 50 to 60 days of my time. There were some weekends, but as with all free projects, the passion and fun take over. And the payoff of seeing it collected in such a nice book feels like playing in the Champions League." That feeling of having made something physical is

important? "Oh yes, that it's something that one can hold in the hands, and touch... In our fast-paced, social media age, that's very nice."

As for the event itself, Remo relied on his pre-photography background. "I was previously a gastronome and event organizer, so I have promotion in the blood. I wanted to make a great event to release the book. It was wonderful to have the 33 personalities with Lamborghinis, Porsches, classic cars, tanks, airplanes, and to hear so many stories on the release day. A real highlight."

Next he will exhibit the book to a wider audience at the Made in Bern show, which attracts visitors from the whole canton (also called Bern) and beyond, hopefully "for a bigger order".

Projects take time, of course, to come to fruition thanks to the required effort. And then, Remo says, they should

be enjoyed; a period of reflection before the mind begins to throng with new ideas. "A project like *Motorheads* matures, sometimes very slowly, then when you look back you suddenly see the progress." Like you appreciate the slow ascent of a Swiss peak, maybe? Remo laughs. "It's more like a birth, I think. When the 'baby' has arrived, you can take stock...and have some time for enjoying what you've created. Also to take time to learn from what was achieved."

One project inspires another, and as time moves on new ideas are already forming. "I have some really exciting commercial projects coming up, as well as another 'free' one. I'm fortunate that everyday life brings me back to beautiful locations: for the Tschui fashion store in Thun with Hackett and Belstaff, we're doing a James Bond-style shoot with the Swiss model, Rafael Beutl, on the

IMAGES: *Opposite page:* Danny Schneider
Above: Nick Eggenschwiler

Schilthorn mountain and in the St. Beatus Caves. Also with some great British cars.

"For the free project, I'm planning a trip in the summer of 2018, combining my two great passions: kiting and taking pictures. I'll be driving along European coasts for three months, from Tarifa, Spain – via Portugal, France, Denmark, and Sweden – to Lofoten in Norway. There are certainly some great pictures to be had." ■

remoneuhaus.com
instagram.com/remoneuhaus
motorheads.biz