

Words & Photos: Kieron Fennelly. Additional photos from FVD Brombacher

FVD BROMBACHER

Freiburg is famous for its historic *Altstadt* (city centre) and its green mountainous hinterland, the Black Forest. But for Porsche enthusiasts it is also the home of one of Germany's best known Porsche specialists, FVD Brombacher





Above: There's no missing the FVD Brombacher building when you pass by. Willy Brombacher (above right) started the business in the late 1980s

Opposite: Willy and his team pose with 911SC celebrating his company's 34-year history. The first product was a modified intake system for the SC

Below, left and right: FVD Brombacher will handle everything from a simple service to a full-on restoration and race prep



Willy Brombacher's father had a business making wood fittings and furniture. Car-mad Willy soon graduated to Porsches and he and some friends occupied a storage room at the back of the premises to modify a 911SC for the track. The SC proved noticeably successful yet it looked no different from any other of its largely standard 911 competitors. Willy's trick was to replace the flap air intake with a far more accurate air mass meter. Suitably mated with the SC's standard K-Jetronic fuel injection, this enhanced horsepower and torque sufficiently to give Willy's car a critical advantage.

Fellow competitors were obviously keen to know his secret and, seeing a business opportunity, Willy formed FVD

Brombacher to sell not just his air mass meter, but other upgrades, such as dampers and suspension parts. By 1989 he had moved to the premises at Umkirch just outside Freiburg and was offering to tune your 930 to 450bhp. His

most ambitious project yet used the 964 C4 as a basis for a 959 look-alike. TÜV certification in 1992 of his 300hp power kit for the 964 endowed FVD Brombacher with a certain official credibility.

FVD is an old German term, *Fahrzeugvertriebsdienst*, which roughly means motorcar distribution service, but these now obsolete initials have helped to give a useful exclusivity to the company's title. FVD Brombacher's

speciality has always been development, supply and fit, but Willy's own racing activity over the years also served as very effective advertising, especially in the late 1990s. It was then

"COMPETITORS WERE KEEN TO KNOW HIS SECRET..."



with his own 993 GT2 that Willy really came to the forefront: the return of GT racing heralded by the BPR series seemed made for the 911: the 964 RSR opened the batting, but the 993 GT2 was perhaps the most consistently successful participant over its six-year career, and an FVD Brombacher-prepared GT2 would win the German championship three years running.

Porsche did not replace the competition 993 GT2, turning instead to GT3, but by 2000 Willy had already decided to hang up his helmet and devote his time to developing his business, in particular in the US where he travelled extensively promoting his brand, establishing a parts warehouse in Florida which remains his US base. North

American sales today account for 20 per cent of FVD Brombacher's turnover.

Today the company carries out rebuilds and restorations as well as preparing client race cars, though its parts sales covering everything from the 356 to date are a larger business. Besides supplying proprietary items such as dampers, FVD Brombacher also develops and tests its own parts. Sales manager Alexander Ben Mahmoud says the company also supplies parts to other tuners. When asked about the danger of assisting competitors he says generously that the market is big enough and it is a measure of the esteem of Willy's engineering that others turn to his company.

A typical popular aftermarket FVD Brombacher part is a

Above: We were pleasantly surprised to see a 914 in for service, but FVD Brombacher has the experience to work on any model of Porsche, from the 356 to the current 991

A TRUE AIR COOLED DEVOTEE

Pierre Armspach is a seasoned club racer who long campaigned a 2.7 RS in French championships where he came across FVD Brombacher-prepared cars. He was already running his own business, Air Cooled 911, but after meeting Willy, they agreed to turn this into FVD Brombacher France, and Pierre represented the Freiburg tuner for ten years.

In 2004 his family circumstances changed and he had to give up his business. But rather than retire, such was his commitment to FVD Brombacher that he came to work at Freiburg where he is the air-cooled guru as well as the main point of contact for French-speaking customers. He says the company can supply virtually anything for the 356, but its heart, or certainly his, is in the air-cooled 911.

The French VHC (Véhicules historiques de compétition) series now includes the SC and Pierre sees a demand for rebuilding these cars for the track. Historic competition at top level can be almost as expensive to enter as GT3 because of the cost of preparing a forty-year-old 911, but once race-ready, running costs in VHC – tyres, suspension and engine parts – require far less outlay, and maintenance is relatively simple. He has even seen well-heeled GT3 exponents turn to VHC out of a sense of having missed something by not competing in historic 911s.

It is a long time since Pierre Armspach has done any serious racing himself, but he still does the occasional sprint or hill climb, 'pour le plaisir', with his RS replica and is always pleased to take customers along to give them a taste of historic motorsport, which, though he of course does not quite say so, you do have the distinct impression he thinks is altogether more fun!





beautifully made bespoke 987 exhaust which, thanks to its less restrictive shape and modified manifold, boosts both the power and drivability of the standard 3.4. The FVD Bromebacher 3.8 Cayman of 2006 was probably the first seriously tuned Cayman on the market anywhere.

But the 'old timers' are not left out – far from it. The company's catalogue shows thousands of parts ranging from software modules for the current 991.2 Turbo to components for Weber carburettors for the early 911s. FVD Bromebacher insists that it has proven all its catalogue items. In terms of customer demand, Alex says that owners of 356s and early 911s are simply looking for restoration and maintenance; until a few years ago, the 3.2 was a popular candidate for modification but here, too, owners are now looking for originality in what has become a valuable car. Amongst the air-cooled cars today, a favourite for modification is the 964: 'The RS is now too expensive to risk on the track so people are looking for RS type mods to race them,' says Alex, who believes the 964 is the finest embodiment of the traditional and 'modern' 911.

“BUT HERE, TOO, OWNERS ARE NOW LOOKING FOR ORIGINALITY:”

In the US, FVD Bromebacher's market is essentially parts for the water-cooled cars and the company's strength, says its representative, is not only its by-return service, but its ability to identify and deliver the right item and advise correct fitting. 'You would be amazed how often we have seen cars in trouble with incorrectly fitted or simply wrong parts.'

He is also proud of FVD Bromebacher's expertise with classic parts. 'We have a local guy who can make factory-quality trims that have become almost unobtainable because he is working from the original factory specification.'

FVD Bromebacher remains a family company: Willy's daughter Franziska completed a law degree then decided to work for her father's business and her two younger brothers, both currently finishing their formal educations, are poised to join her. With only 40 employees at Freiburg Umkirch, most of whom speak English and French, the company is able to be light on its feet and distinctly service-oriented; yet its workshop and long experience of engineering 911s for racing are a serious measure of its ability. Overall, FVD Bromebacher comes across as an unshowy yet impressively rounded operation. **CP**

Above: Busy workshop caters for all Porsches, from the earliest air-cooled models to the latest water-pumpers

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Below left: Exhaust systems form an important part of FVD Bromebacher's business

Below right: Franziska Bromebacher (right) helps run the business founded by her father. Alex Ben Mahmoud is the sales manager

