

AUTOMOTIVE

## Porsche enhances trekking wheelchair in support of accessibility

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*Developed with sponsorship from Porsche, the battery-powered chair's single-wheel design enables extreme terrain access. Image credit: Porsche AG*

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

German automaker Porsche is opening the Swiss mountains to those who have historically been kept out.

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Providing essential technical upgrades to trekking wheelchairs, the brand is partnering with specialists at Swiss accessibility solutions company [Procap Schweiz](#). The collaboration offers institutional mobility knowledge to those traversing the alpine landscapes that Porsche AG calls home, bringing a heightened level of inclusivity to the local hiking scene.

"The brand Porsche stands for making dreams come true, and with this project, it wants to play a part in enabling people with disabilities to go hiking," said Inga Konen, head of press and public relations at [Porsche Switzerland AG](#), Rotkreuz.

"Experiencing Swiss nature on a hike is not possible for everyone," Ms. Konen said. "Hiking trails are rarely barrier-free and, moreover, not infrequently impassable for blind or visually impaired people.

"In order to make obstacles such as bodies of water, cattle gates, barriers and steps surmountable and thus make hiking possible for everyone, Porsche is making a long-term commitment in Switzerland, both financially and through knowledge transfer from the automotive industry."

### Inclusivity drive

Driven by a standing commitment to furthering accessibility on the roads via its "Join the Porsche Ride" initiative, improvements to an electric wheelchair prototype originally designed at Switzerland's [FHNW University of Applied Sciences and Arts](#) centers the automaker's latest project.

Porsche is offering financial support and expertise to push designs of the apparatus, specially built for group hikes, forward.



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A post shared by Porsche Newsroom (@porsche\_newsroom)

Seeking to work alongside experts to improve the model, called "Protrek," a FHNW University team arrived at the Porsche Vocational Training Center in March 2023 to start the process of development for the trekking wheelchair with Procap Schweiz.

Besides its own staff, the automaker added Swiss electromobility brand and previous partner **Alber** into the mix. Porsche released an electric wheelchair with Alber in 2003. After hearing from wheelchair users, hikers and mobility experts concerning their thoughts on the trekking aid, ongoing tweaks will be focused on their feedback.

Porsche has long aimed to educate its trainees and employees about limited mobility.

"The Protrek is a great opportunity for our trainees, with a lot of room for creativity," said Norbert Gggerle, head of the technical training program at Porsche AG, in a statement.

"It's more than just an exercise," Mr. Gggerle said. "We can help people, and that's a wonderful way to enhance our everyday work."

"The first step consists of listening very carefully in order to correctly identify the wheelchair's strengths and weaknesses."



*Trekking teams have been testing out the model in the mountains, allowing the designers to apply both first-hand experience and professional expertise to the upgrades. Image credit: Porsche AG*

Born of the effort, a world tour has subsequently ensued.

Procap Schweiz's Reien & Sport has been organizing two-day treks using the wheelchair, testing it out on the group hikers. Venturing across rocky, mountainous and forested terrains, four to six people typically maneuver the

wheelchair for the person sitting inside.

According to Porsche, overheating, weight and the possible need for a swivel base are among the current concerns. Protrek's first non-electric version was jointly created in 2005 by Procap and the University.

In 2022, an electric drive was added for the first time. Initially launched with limited funding, Porsche's assistance now makes the project's persistence possible.

So far, the wheelchair is limited to 15 units, each of which can be customized for electric or non-electric functioning.



*Together with Porsche, Alber and Procap professionals, FHNW University students adapted the wheelchair's wheelbarrow design, reporting out on progress as part of their thesis project. Image credit: Porsche AG*

Porsche also plans to assist Procap Schweiz in creating accessible hiking routes that are disability-friendly. The latter company has created 78 of these paths in the past according to Procap, it is the largest membership organization "by and for people with disabilities" in the country, providing first-hand knowledge of Switzerland's inclusivity-related needs.

The partnership will continue incorporating a high level of advocacy into various joint initiatives going forward.

"Plans include creating more obstacle-free trails, creating experiences for people with and without disabilities, uniting tandem partners for hiking together, optimizing an electric trekking wheelchair, and promoting mutual learning to raise awareness," Ms. Konen said.

"In addition, more hiking trails will be made accessible to blind and visually impaired people using voice guidance and GPS data via an app."

Nature for all

Porsche has driven home the importance of outdoor accessibility before, consistently using storytelling as a tool to do so.

**#Porsche** and the Swiss-based organisation **@Procap\_** are continuing their efforts to ensure universal access to hiking in Switzerland, with a technical upgrade planned for a special trekking wheelchair. More: <https://t.co/kyGqSQ5qCk> [pic.twitter.com/rUzpmcwDrT](https://pic.twitter.com/rUzpmcwDrT)

Porsche Newsroom (@PorscheNewsroom) **April 21, 2023**

Working with watersports brand Takuma, the brand took on a new ecosystem the sea. A campaign was launched to bring surfing to all in October of 2021 ([see story](#)).

Programming involved a film entitled "Power of Silence," featuring professional surfer Matahi Drollet and an electric surfboard.

In November 2022, the automaker teamed up with another athlete. In an interview, Porsche asked Paralympian fencing medalist Oliver Lam-Watson to fill Porsche consumers in on the ways that automatic cars deliver agility to those who face similar challenges to their mobility ([see story](#)).

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