

The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer for CNY-PCA Redline Report Copyright 2017 <http://www.holzerent.com>

Things Change, Life Goes On

The past few months have seen huge changes for me, and some of them affect you. To begin with, Skip tells me this will be his last issue as Editor of the Redline Report. I am sad to report this will also be my last edition of Alternative Line as a regular contribution to that newsletter for CNY PCA. It has been a fun time writing for editors who seemed to wish my efforts, but it is time to move on.

With any luck, you should notice elsewhere the lyrics to a song I wrote on the second day after my Granddaughter was born to my only child Jessica and her husband Tom. Jess could not possibly have made me prouder, having become a PhD and teaching professor of Ethics, and having in early August provided me a grandchild to spoil rotten. But also to teach how to enjoy life because it is so fleeting, and doing the things which celebrate life, like driving Porsches – something for which there is simply no substitute ;-)

The lyrics will mention a few sad things I think about – the fact that automation may soon make those with actual driving talent not merely redundant, but even perhaps verboten, as autonomous vehicles which talk to one another may eventually make it unsafe for the vast majority of “occupants” of those vehicles to allow any vehicle, no matter how well driven by a human, to inhabit those same roads. The issue will be explained by liability, but that is a misnomer – it will be the incompatibility of actual intelligence alongside artificial intelligence once insurance companies determine the relative risks to their profits from “criminals” like me who will be doing what good drivers have ALWAYS done – DRIVING instead of all the other attention grabbing technologies being crammed into vehicles today. It won’t happen in the next five years – the technology has far too many real world issues to address for which technology and the mind of software engineers is not sufficient to conjure solutions – like the range of weather in CNY, for example. But before my granddaughter Ainsley becomes a driver you may safely presume it will be the norm.

You have already observed other inevitables – like the utter demise of physically printed media like this newsletter. Which will actually take us closer to that not yet possible “Beam me up, Scotty” moment where ALMOST everything EXCEPT YOU can be sent electronically to anywhere else it needs to be at essentially the speed of light. You and I, as well as my Granddaughter, will still have to travel the old fashioned way, although I suspect we will find ways to make air travel a lot faster again without destroying eardrums, the environment, humans themselves, or our wallets. But if you have not yet seen any other cultures, I advise you plan to do so as soon as possible, because technology is rapidly destroying what used to be unique about them, not least of which was their language. As one who has traveled a good portion of the planet, I can assure you it is as educational as any classroom you will ever visit.

And speaking of which; there is already evidence that the factor of scale may make the concept of a college education on a physical campus obsolete, if for no other reason than the cost. Those higher education leaders who have been experimenting have seen they can produce graduates with identical learning who have never set foot near their campus for less than a tenth the current cost to get that on-campus degree. What will be missing will be the beer blasts and fraternization. But those were already dinosaurs waiting on an asteroid – you only need watch ANY teenage girl at lunch – they would rather text a friend right alongside them than actually talk with her. But that is also not without its own unintended consequences – some good, some not yet determined.

Already having some impact whose net results are unpredictable at best was a surprise, especially to me. Had anyone suggested to me that a technology would be so powerful as to reduce the frequency of teenage sex I would have told them they were crazy – mom nature spent billions of years making us desperate to put one and one together to make two (or more ;-)) but that is precisely one outcome of the lack of direct interaction noted in the paragraph above.

I am not so sanguine about one other seeming outcome of that technology – the dumbing down of writing skills, as spell and grammar checkers automatically rewrite even the most ham-fisted incompetence with the English language. In my case it has been Skip who has made up for mostly my typing inabilities. But you dear reader get the point. And as usual I digress ;-)

The idea that you might tune you own vehicle to maximize its performance will become even more remote than OBD-II has already made it – both for emissions concerns and for governmental control. Which might explain to you why ALL my vehicles are ’95 or older. But that must inevitably be affected by the law of diminishing returns – eventually even those will be destroyed by the environment. Whether they are doing the same TO the environment is open to argument, since at least the VW Diesel scandal has proved that nobody REALLY knows what the tailpipes are putting out – and NYSI ONLY talks to the computer, which can still pass even if parts of the engine are flying out the tailpipe, seemingly ;-)

You dear readers have doubtless heard of GMO technologies. They will be both a boon, because the world population is expanding even as arable land is being consumed faster and faster to put the population, and a bane because much of that population wants to share in the wealth and convenience we in “the west” have for too long seen as our birthright. Something has to give. And one outcome will be the inability to obtain adequate food yields without “aiding” the natural evolution by applying what science will discover is possible through gene manipulation whose random alternatives might have taken centuries. And one catch of that model will be the monocultural ecosystems they will produce, if they have not already become unsupportable by their cost from having corporate ownership of seed lots. One thing nature has demonstrated repeatedly is its ability to throw a curveball at the best thinking of scientists’ perceptions of what they “know”.

At the same time, wise sages like Neil DeGrasse Tyson should be heeded when he observes that “the world is made of Protons, Neutrons and Electrons, but mostly Morons”, to which I added the explanatory “Protons have a Positive Charge, Neutrons have No Charge, Electrons have a Negative Charge, but Morons are IN Charge”. That should give us all pause ;-). At the same time, though, one of the reasons we Porsche Club faithful have been willing to plunk down our long green has been the perception, not always borne out, that higher cost paid for better engineering will return greater value in the long run. One need only consider the experience with the 996 series IMS bearing and the earlier 2.7L case halves of magnesium to recognize that mistakes can ALSO be well engineered into expensive junk.

That said, however, it is ALSO well demonstrated that evolutionary development, instead of stylistic modification, has been the general history at Porsche, which is why there will be few who would argue against the idea that the '95 Porsche 993, which pre-dated the OBD-II rest of the 993 series made through model years '96-'98, is likely the penultimate example of an air-cooled 911 series vehicle. It is also well demonstrated that SOMEBODY sees enough inherent value, even in the 996, to develop a better mousetrap for the IMS bearing, just as the Dilavar studs and time-serts prolonged the 2.7L salvagability, even as better alternatives were developed by Porsche which could actually bolt right in, such as the Motronic 3.2 I used to replace MY 2.7L when I lunched it at Watkins Glen, making my '77 Targa almost bulletproof, but a handful to drive with the added weight and horsepower hung out behind the rear wheels, while keeping the same width tires and wheels as original. In fact, I hope you will see “MY Car History” elsewhere in this issue as well. No sugar-coating allowed ;-).

I am sure there are a host of other things my granddaughter will see, and do, which I cannot even perceive today, just as my parents could never have dreamed of an internet where every bit of information ever created was literally at my fingertips, if I merely had the wisdom to know to go looking for it instead of believing every fake news article posted by people with agendas, which has helped to so polarize the electorate because we are too busy to ask simple questions like “what’s wrong with this picture”. Sadly, I don’t see that improving anytime soon. Especially with what “spin doctoring” pays ;-).

I don’t wish to be either alarmist nor defeatist, but merely a realist. My granddaughter will have a world to deal with which is more complex, and she must be willing to share even more of the privileges she had bestowed upon her with the rest of the world. But if she can navigate that world, and especially become a learned and thinking individual, she can also be a leader who can help steer that world to a better place than she arrived to. So I am full of cautious hope. And I’ll bet YOU dear readers hope for much the same from YOUR progeny. I wish you all, and Ainsley, too, the very best of luck, and hope you will all grab at the mantle to raise it high. Thanks for your patience and tolerance of my wit and “wisdom” (!? ;-). for the past 90 articles. It’s been fun.

Joe Holzer, the Idea Man ;-)

