

Alternate Line

by Joe Holzer

This won't have much to do with Porsche, nor driving. If that is a problem, then read no further. But if you believe that problems can be solved, please read on. The first step toward solutions is awareness.

I recently saw *Apollo 13*, and it brought back to mind a variety of images. To frame a reference, try thinking of all the things which must be done right to win a car race. Now to design and build a car. Notice the quantum increase in complexity? Now how about putting a couple of guys on another planet (a moon) and returning them safely. Pretty complicated. And I guarantee you have overlooked literally thousands of critical tasks, each one of which can make the other efforts fail miserably. Engineers know that "sweating the details" is the essential ingredient to success in any technical endeavor. If you have seen the movie, you saw a demonstration of another ingredient not really delineated; integrity. You can well imagine the results had the battery engineer not insisted they had a power problem, the atmosphere engineer not insisted they would have a problem with CO₂, nor even the vendor engineer not insisting that the manufacturer of the LEM never tested it for what they ultimately put it through. That was professionalism. But their integrity was in committing to solving the problem in a timely manner, and then DOING it, whatever that took. You have read my diatribes about racers and Porsche engineers doing that for years. But it is time now to recognize a higher need for such commitment; and it goes well beyond the PCA and any of our petty problems.

We have in this country a widening chasm between those who have and understand technology, and reap its rewards, and those who are have-nots. We keep hearing how political parties want to outdo each other in removing "benefits" from the poor, while we also hear daily evidence of their selling favors to the highest bidders. Most of we PCA'ers are self-made. It is a common thread. But we should acknowledge something we received of real value a long time ago, which the poor are largely deprived of; something which is not related to money, per se, but is an essential ingredient before any of us could become self-made anything; a good example.

As the father of a fifteen year old girl, I have perhaps more sensitivity than most. But while it is possible, I consider her becoming a teen age mother as a highly unlikely occurrence. The reason has little to do with any moral arguments, and certainly is not because of any physical constraint on my part. Try talking to a fifteen year old child, and I assure you will be more likely to receive "shut up" than "that is an interesting perspective". But she has been the recipient of a tempered parenthood; a long enough leash to assure she has a true sense of independence, coupled with a consistently applied boundary for behavior acceptability. At the heart of this approach has, of necessity, been the need for personal integrity that manifests itself in being willing to admit that I have no lock on truth, merely more experience than she. So she has been a frequent "winner" in discussions about her actions when she has been able to formulate a rational explanation thereof.

I wonder, though, whether she is unusual in receipt of such treatment; something we adults would expect and insist upon for ourselves. I base this on my observations of parental behaviors when dealing with children, and on children's behaviors themselves. The saddest realization comes when I consider the plight of the poor. There is no simplistic explanation for their situation, nor can blame be placed in any one area. But there are striking realities which come through reliably. One of these is the continuing cycle of poverty brought about by the mere fact they have no idea how to break the cycle. Often, self-image is contributory. Their parents often abused them, so they only know how to abuse their children themselves. And it is not any leap of logic to surmise that becoming a parent at a too young age may be nothing more than an opportunity to become the equivalent of an upperclassman in a hazing situation.

Unfortunately, we have observed a long history of well-meaning attempts to redistribute wealth through tax policies and outright cash payments, yet we see perpetual increases in this “sub-class”. I suspect part of the reason is because the money carries with it no intrinsic understanding of how best to utilize it as a resource. One need only consider the fact that the poor generally pay much more for any single necessity item, if only because any retailer in their area must charge more simply because they do not enjoy the economies of scale we take for granted in the suburbs. And cost reducing technologies are slow to be adapted. Frankly, the cost savings available would more than offset the costs for bus transport, and possibly even cab fare for a large enough purchase. So you would think there would be widespread use of this advantage. Why is there not?

I believe the evidence shows a lack of a role model with adequate insight to point this out. But it is more complex than that. And I believe it has to do with the consistency and integrity I mentioned above. The TV is a powerful medium, but its messages are more confusing and contradictory than enlightening. And until the parent in a household exhibits a desire to learn, evidenced by reading or seeking educational experiences from that medium, the children will forever be limited in that exposure to mere entertainment, which often gives a very distorted picture of reality. If you doubt that, think about the last time you can remember seeing a person on TV driving a Porsche who reminded you of yourself... Neither can I. Instead we are regularly shown Porsche drivers whose mere acquaintance we would wish to avoid, to say nothing of their friendship.

So what should we do? Well, since we can afford to drive these things, we probably have some more discretionary income than the unfortunates above. Vote with your feet. When you see an ad supporting such an image, let them know you decline to buy from them because of it. When a politician tries to solve a problem by simply throwing money at it, tell them you are also unhappy. But we must all, in our own self-interest, start to become part of the solution by presenting a better example. We in the PCA are a very magnanimous, but very private, people. We do generous work and seek few accolades for ourselves for that work. But we have a very valuable gift we can give, which should make us feel great and costs us only time; we must have the integrity to stand up and show that the reason we can possess these cherished cars is because we have made the earlier sacrifices to get an education, the subsequent postponement of gratification to build something of meaning from our mere existence, and the appreciation of what real value looks like. And we must take it to the children before they have learned the bad habits which will prevent them from ever developing good ones. I believe that our efforts now can avert the kind of actions which have occurred in other countries when the populace has rebelled against the elite. And do not doubt that the image most people have of US is that we are precisely that, based on the TV model. Let’s prove they are completely wrong; that a Porsche is something to aspire to. And that it is worth the effort. Let us be a SHINING example of what integrity looks like.