

The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer for Publication in CNY-PCA Redline Report Copyright 2007 <http://www.holzerent.com>

Where We've Been

First, I must inform you in the interest of full disclosure that I was lambasted for my use of the word “moron” in my last article. I shall try to minimize my judgemental observations henceforth, however earned they might be.

In that same issue of *Redline* we had a number of writers who waxed philo about their Rambler experiences. That happened to coincide with the 20th year of *Excellence*, known as *Porsche* before the mor... (sorry) lawyers at PCNA had a hissy-fit about the use of their trademarks yada, yada, yada. Instead, the name was changed to an appropriate representation, which derives from the exceptional history of Porsche by Karl Ludvigsen, *Excellence was Expected*, which I feel is better than any Tom Peters motivational tome.

So I felt it was time for a retrospective; thus you dear readers might understand how I became such a mor... (sorry) nut about cars. My parents were at least a little unusual. They owned big Ford station wagons (like Mike D), but eschewed the shelf-paper down the sides, as well as an automatic tranny or power anything, preferring three on the column and big biceps for all. The '64 was a great car, and I'll have a sweet spot for the Galaxie 500 Convertible in turquoise over white naugahyde 'till my dying day. The '68, though, was a terror – small steering wheel and terrible window crank positions which I think were designed to punish those too cheap to pay for the upmarket toys. Anyway, MY first car was a hand-me-down from my Grandfather, a '50 Ford sedan, which I was just able to get to second gear before having to toss an anchor to JUST miss rolling from the driveway into the road, the brakes were so bad. I had hoped for my late uncle's (3) Izettas, which he loved because, as a victim of polio with braces, he could easily climb in and out the front-opening door with its pull-away steering wheel while still having motorized mobility long before “handicapped” zones were in fashion. Unfortunately, my aunt “couldn't part with them”, so instead they became cat litter boxes. Pity. Early, kinky, pragmatic BMW's.

Since I'm 56 now you can do the math, but I was in my formative years when Butzi Porsche penned the gorgeous stainless rollbar on the Targa that was the start of my “obsessive” to own one. Which of course was a LONG way from happening. The '50 was junked when the cost to make it legal exceeded the value of the car (does this sound familiar?), so I was at my parents beck and call until the summer after my freshman year at Clarkson when I needed a car so I could get to work, being not from the Porsche side of the tracks, so to speak. A friend of my dad was junking a '63 Bel Air wagon because it needed a new tranny, but offered it to me since he knew I was a “wrench”. So I followed my dad home as though towing it until a loud rapping followed by a huge clunk, then a strange scraping sound. I figured we'd have a puddle of parts and ATF, but was surprised to find it was simply the front U-joint had fractured, and there was not a thing wrong with the two-speed AT. Ten dollars and an hour beneath it and it was a whole car again! When I offered it back to its prior owner, he thanked me for my integrity, but felt he had honorably made it a gift as-is, so it was mine.

The Chevy was a hoot; it allowed me to meet and date my future wife when she, as a lifeguard at a pond I could not have reached without it, gave my brother and I a ration for illegally being there before getting wet, then toweling off and promptly proceeding to drop her bikini bottoms on the beach as a result of my throwing her in the pond! It allowed me to work for Virginia Chemicals as a scut, hanging parts and scraping paint in the booth until the day I saved the Plant Manager's and Engineer's butts by noticing their multi-million dollar transfer machine had no jam nuts on the hydraulic rams for making the refrigerant filters. Fixing that, I was told to work exclusively with their maintenance guy who, despite never finishing high school, taught me enough about machine logic and symbology to launch my career as an Engineer myself when I graduated from Clarkson. While there, the Chevy had the distinction of being the only car hit twice by the same truck driven by two different people! It also allowed an impromptu run by five of my school friends to the ECAC Hockey finals at Boston Garden where underdog Clarkson beat favored Harvard in the finals, and a visit to an all-girl school which could have been my daughter's Alma Mater, Wellesley, but I don't recall, except that one of my crew had a girlfriend there. So we descended like the testosterone junkies we were at the time, and I proceeded to tell all the grossest jokes I knew to the prettiest girl I had ever met, who was genuinely disappointed when she found out I was already engaged. Go figure. On the return (1973, remember) I saw for the first time a real Targa, whose owner was amused as we tried rocking in the seats trying to keep up as he blew by us on the Mass Pike. Drool, drool...

The Chevy was reliable except for its inability to crank when it got very cold, which was pretty common in February in Potsdam. So I had bought a WWI bayonet so I could reach to jump from the battery lead to the starter, bypassing the bendix, a trick which has saved me as recently as last year's 48 hours with my RV. Unfortunately, the Chevy two-speed stopped shifting up right after I bought my very first new car, a '74 Toyota Corolla SR-5, probably in protest. But driving between Hartford and New Britain CT in first gear during a gas shortage was for the birds, so I soon traded up to a '66 Chevelle wagon. It had an unremarkable life except that it took us camping in Nova Scotia with a tent, which convinced us we should buy a pop-up with an in-out convertible kitchen, a brilliant design I duplicated on my first RV, Tranny Trash, about which I've already written too much (see my website if you need a refresher).

In 1976 Lynne & I bought our first purchased home, a condo in Collinsville CT just west of Avon, where there was a great Porsche dealership, with a salesman who offered me a test drive in a Signature Edition Platinum Targa. If you have seen the Porsche commercial with the kid on a bicycle who walks into the dealer and asks for a card, I can tell you exactly where that idea came from. Needless to say, I was in no possible position to follow through on the offer, so declined. He, too, gave me his card, with the parting "...don't worry, you will". Was it that obvious?

The '74 SR-5 was unlike any thereafter; instead of being powered like the rest but upscale (heavier), it was lighter, more powerful, and a higher rear end ratio, therefore better acceleration, in addition to the 5 vs 4 speed gearbox. It had funky add-on fender flares with exposed screws to cover the wider tires. A Poor Man's Porsche. And I proved that in CT many times more than I wish to acknowledge to the local gendarmerie. That car was so much fun, and so reliable, that it was a tragedy when I drove it to the junkyard after welding bed framing to its sub-floor (ala Mike D) so it would not fold in half when I opened the doors, then it finally didn't have adequate metal to assure a reliable ground for the ignition circuit. Don't you love CNY salt? That's why the A8's are aluminum.

The Toyota was replaced with another Japanese car after we had moved in '76, and became absentee slumlords for our condo which could not compete with the bargains offered on other units still owned by the bank, when we moved to CNY. Our first car here was a new '78 Datsun 810 wagon we selected because it was one of very few still available (non BMW price) with a manual gearbox and rear drive. It, too, was a delicious car, except for its terrible parking brake design (a series of levers on the bottom of anything in the rust belt is a bad design), plus the fact that it kept fouling the number two plug, probably a manufacturing defect with the engine. But it was my transport mode when I began my living apart from my wife (Ogdensburg while she lived in Liverpool for jobs) which characterized much of my subsequent career, following it having dragged the pop-up to get our Master's degrees at Charleston Lake.

It also allowed me to be in the position to buy the Silver Bullet (again see my website for that) and start my hands-on with Porsche exactly 26 years ago on a Friday the 13th of March. I consider myself VERY lucky indeed. And the pop-up led to my adding a trailer hitch to the Targa which remains to this day, and took it to Parades and WGI (don't get me started on Phil White's Maggie doll – see the website). I note many a copy, and it brings many a laugh. My subsequent cars, like Ford's rolling barbecue whale Town Cars are all pretty well defined in articles on the website, which many of you have read. Those who haven't, please feel free. And if you've read this far without lining a cat box or something, thanks for the walk down memory lane.

Oh, one more note; my daughter Jessica will be doing her first official PCA National DE Instructor job at the Niagara event in late May at WGI before starting her PhD at Johns Hopkins in August. The torch is being passed... and so are you if you get in her way.

