

The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer for Publication in CNY-PCA Redline Report Copyright 2010 <http://www.holzerent.com>

Documentation

The Porsche Club of America was originally formed with the idea that owners of these unusual cars could help one another in maintaining them. Of course, at the time, there were not dealers on every second block. Even in Los Angeles. In fact, there were very few dealers at all, and absolutely nothing like the internet. What they shared was knowledge, sometimes hard won.

For most Porsche owners, the sum totality of their documentation consisted of an owners' manual and a bill of sale. Still does today. But not all of us are "most owners". Some of us like to know what and why, not just "that". Especially if you have an intermittent problem, you can understand that telling Mr Goodwrench that it keeps going "ta-poketta", which is where YOUR money goes to HIS, is simply an invitation for replacing everything in the car, at shop prices, until the problem no longer happens. Maybe. At least while the shop has it, because it will be certain to have been a new failure when you have to bring it back, according to his "experts".

Those of us who passed Economics 101 and understand the implications see that as a terrible tradeoff, and prefer to have a sound understanding at least of what the possible problems are, so that when a proposal is made to replace the shocks to solve an ignition problem, we can recognize the relative competence of the proposer, and perhaps suggest where their mental capacitor location is.

But such insight requires something which is not often publically available. Porsche, and every other automotive company, spends enormous resources to develop those attributes and legacy for which we pay the premium which a Porsche commands. One paradox in that is the fact that Porsche often makes mid-year changes. And documentation of that often lags far behind the hardware's availability. Read about merely one example in the recent *Excellence* article about the 3.1 SC "option", which has NO official acknowledgement, but clearly exists. I will bet most of you dear readers can produce other examples.

As a matter of reality, I see little likelihood of such practices being eliminated in the future despite both higher levels of technology and better abilities to track changes. All systems, after all, are still made by and administered by humans, and humans are largely lazy. Necessity was never the mother of invention – it has always been the desire to remove some burden or another from a human. Lazy.

So far be it from me to suggest that there should be some wondrous effort to assure that all owners of such cars have a full set of documents for their individual car. For most, it would simply mean the destruction of more rain forests, with no real benefits. But I am in the group that actually WANTS the details, partly because I know how to use them. And partly because I am a geek.

But I must say that I am disappointed in Porsche. I fully understand and support their right to protect their copyrights and trademarks. They represent a VERY real part of the value we pay for. But I take a "customer rights" position on such matters. So long as I do not republish, nor share in a way that diminishes Porsche's rights to reasonable compensation for their intellectual property, I expect their publications to provide me the value for which I pay, and the ability to enjoy my Porsche in such a way that my enthusiasm will be evident to any person, a potential customer for Porsche and its dealers remember, at all times.

Consider the eight grey binders my wife and daughter paid \$225 for which are supposed to be the 'Factory Service Manual' for my '95 993. Contrast that with the \$100 I paid to Bentley Books for my Carrera 3.2 book or my prior Audi 5000 books or my Audi A8 CD, or even my \$8 eBay purchased CD for my Range Rover, which is not half bad. The Bentley books are without peer. They are not perfect, but they are pretty close, providing pictures, detailed line drawings, and my most important document; Electrical Wiring Diagrams. The CDs have some decent capabilities, but some infuriating weaknesses. The most frustrating being their non-intuitive pathways to what information they do contain. As an example, one would usually presume that if you wanted to see the mechanics of, replacement of, and wiring for something like the windshield wipers, you would go to the section called "Windshield Wipers", and expect it would have all the links to each of those sub topics. Not so. There is exactly one page, and it is merely a picture of the fuse block. You must search through all of the other systems to find the physical remove – install instructions at one place, and the wiring at a place called "Common Systems". No book would ever hope to be so disjointed. Nor should these, given how easy it is to include links to those other pages. But that proves again the old adage that users are rarely the ones who design the documents. Like most software, they are designed by people who are intimately familiar with the subject, so they incorrectly presume that what is obvious to them will be obvious to the end user. Never has been; never will. Otherwise, they would be competitors.

The 993 Service Manual, which is produced by Porsche themselves, is illustrative of the process. Each binder consists of a series of pages which can be inserted (3 ring type) based on the development. So, those which are the same across multiple model years are inserted in all, and those specific to a single year are only in that year's binder. But since Porsche farmed out much of the work on things like the Cabrio Roof, the entire instruction set for it consists of a single page showing the car with the roof, and about a sentence describing each attachment point and what is done, with a circle showing the detail at that point, and a pointer from that circle to the general area on the vehicle where that is to be found. Great. Except there is nowhere to be found any description of how the mechanism works, no diagram of what or how the complicated mechanism of two motors connected with a drive key, and having a flex drive cable extending from each to a BMW supplied planetary gear winder on each side driven by a wormscrew, into which the opposite end of each of the drive cables fits. This is all hidden behind a bulkhead, with nary a single word about any of it.

You are forced to discover it when, in the middle of a rainstorm, you tried to close the roof and it twisted, because one of the cables popped out of its (only) half inch of engagement in the wormscrew, something nobody at Porsche thought might present a problem, nor bothered to recall for when they realized it would fail so started making the wormscrews as a permanently affixed part of the flex cable, which took THAT price from \$35 to \$255. If you want to know how bad a design it is, you need only look at the 996 Cab to see they stopped using that method completely and went to a hydraulic assembly, because that allows for automatic side – side balance, vs the 993's ridiculous design.

For those who wonder, MY roof now has cable extenders which are fused to the inch long square ends of the original drive cables, and have solid steel drive keys which insert into the wormscrew so that they are always under spring load into the wormscrew, which itself is held in both directions by thrust bearings, vs the original nylon which allowed them to “chuck” back and forth until they exceeded the cable engagement, e' voila the roof twists. Way to go BMW. The “ultimate failing machine”.

But there was NO way to understand any of that from the Porsche Factory Service Manual. Contrast that with the Carrera 3.2 manual from Bentley Books. It has exquisite detail of how, what, and why, with both pictures and line drawings showing what you really need to know which is not obvious, in a logical layout with references to where to find specific details like the wiring diagrams, etc. Unfortunately, Bentley has yet to produce a 993 version, though the last 993 was produced twelve years ago.

When I die, my daughter will receive my library. It will contain a lot of books with oil and grease stains on the pages. There is a (now) fat folder of printouts from the various CDs with similar detritus, since one would hope I knew better than to bring my computer to the problem. I hope she will see those marks as the real value they are, because I also made notes on those same pages as I found things which were important but somehow missed the instructions. And since her Porsche, the Silver Bullet '77 Targa with the '88 engine and Motronic setup, has so much about the car which is identical to the instructions in the Bentley Book, she will have that resource to help her avoid ripoffs from service shops because she is a blond, as she will be able to tell THEM what is wrong even if she will not likely be the wrench holder.

Documentation is like that. I never set out to learn all I know about cars, per se, I just wanted to use them. But the only way to afford to do so was to keep my money by figuring out what was wrong, fixing what I could myself (and often making it better than original), and having the knowledge to assure my bulls**t alarm was set on stun. So it was when my wife started whining about her A8L having its alarm horn sounding and the dome lights, which have a dimming feature as they time out, repeatedly cycling and killing the battery. Just imagine what that would cost at a shop to find. With my documents, though, I was able to narrow it down by process of elimination – certain things MUST happen if a specific possible trigger is occurring, so if they are not, then that cannot be the cause.

How many of you would have been able to narrow it down to removing the battery from the remote keyless panic button, which was getting pressed by the weight of the other keys around it on my wife's “weapon” of a keyring? Where is THAT documented?

