

The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer for CNY-PCA Redline Report Copyright 2011 <http://www.holzerent.com>

Life With The Prince of Darkness – Part III – “And Now For Something Completely Different...”

This is for Skip. Like most newsletter editors who are volunteers, there is no limit to the pain you suffer, the delays caused by contributors (if you are fortunate to actually have some) who wait until the last possible moment and then are startled when their “masterpiece” is not the most important thing in the issue, and the thankless work which goes into keeping the real life blood of any organization going. And in your dear readers’ case, he doesn’t even get to enjoy the car which is supposed to be the glue which keeps the rest of us around. I mean, how long has he been looking for a Porsche, and he wound up buying a Jeep?! Even Carol could be forgiven for disowning him for that!

Well, I’m here to speak for the operatives of this club who have developed dementia, like Skip. And me. If you read any of my cat box liners, you would know that I hate SUVs. So why have I, and our similarly afflicted editor in chief, developed an almost fondness for the clodhoppers we have acquired?

Well, for starters, because it actually has a clearly consistent lineage with our other automotive history. Before you clean your cookies up, stop and think about it. Exactly what is it that you think is “mainstream” about the automobility we all choose? Engines largely behind the driver, and many behind the rear axle. Most, at least until some of you got rich, couldn’t afford that green fluid the new ones all use, but our “legacy” ones sure don’t. And even we “afficionatos” must freely admit that “Porsche Styling” is at best a part time job. Jeremy Clarkson can be forgiven completely for doubting its existence. And what about our Rambler histories?

So I am here to sing the praises of some vehicles which never made any pretense of “competing” with Porsche, at least until Porsche decided to encroach on territory which was never envisioned by any sane person as a proper venue for a Porsche. I believe it started in 1985 with a guy named Jackie Ickx. With a name spelled like that, you knew it would be off the wall. Actually, it was not Porsche’s first foray into rallying – they had been doing so for years. But the proposal to run a full on team effort against the hands-down hardest rally in the world, Paris – Dakar, with a sports car was at the time thought sheer madness by most. Anyone BUT Jackie Ickx would likely have been given short shrift. And the 959 blew all preconceptions out the window.

It must be noted here as well that the “beasts” Skip and I have become fond of are far from being pristine examples of their breed, and I believe that fact is a prerequisite. Carol’s new Cayenne is technically a far superior example vs her earlier Cayenne, and actually far nearer to a sports car than the truck her earlier one was, and the truck both Skip’s Jeep and my Strange Rover clearly are. When I corner in the Strange Rover, it has body roll like an Americas’ Cup clipper, and feels just about as tall. I expect Skippy’s Wrangler is little different. But, like 911s with their key in the wrong place (among other things), they have character which can only be appreciated with some time, as with wine you put into the bottle today vs 10 years ago. I trust you get my point, even if you are still confused. Welcome to my world and my mental state – it is contagious.

And like a broken clock, which must be acknowledged to nonetheless be correct twice per day, even those old beater trucks have a few things the newer, and pricier, cars ought to. You might think, for example, that the Strange Rover with its notorious electrics would have few things to offer as advantages vs the Bosch electrics of our favorite steeds. OK, here’s a test; how long does it take to scrape the windshield of your Porsche when left in last week’s sleet? The Strange Rover has the slickest, almost completely invisible wires embedded in the windshield glass. By the time the engine has smoothed its startup idle, the ice is easily swept away by the wipers, without needing any scraping at all. And the side view mirrors have the same feature, controlled by the rear window defrost. So do Porsche mirrors. So why not the windshield? And in whiteout driving, which we get here pretty often, the collecting pack snow causes fogging inside on all my other cars, but NEVER on the Strange Rover. Fabulous!

Those who know me recognize that “diminutive” is never going to be in the lexicon describing me. I love my Audi “S”8. But let’s be honest; getting into its back seat, or even that of its longer “L” brethren and the Panamera, is still something of a squeeze for yours truly. Not so the back seat of my Strange Rover, because it is shaped like a panel van. It has powerful headlight washers, which clean the salt crud from the lights any time they are on and the wiper washer is selected, assuring me optimal lighting in the worst CNY weather – the aftermath of Bing Crosby’s favorite tune, once combined with the road salt and silt. And, of course, it has a rear wiper and washer as well. But they used the side windows for integral radio antenna, so there is nothing to break off, unlike my “S”8. And it has a power slide and tilt moon roof, allowing for the maximum “communing” with the environment even as I destroy it with my truck.

One very nice feature is that all the body panels are aluminum, just as with my Audi 8's, so they will never rust. Unfortunately, and I'll never figure why, they left the pan in carbon steel, so it got rot through in the rear storage area and in the passenger footwell, which has certainly contributed to the failure of both the cruise and the remote keyless entry/alarm system, which I disabled and setup a simple switch in the driver area to operate the power locks. One idiosyncrasy I know most people would find unacceptable is for me a godsend – I cannot lock the car and hold the handle, or merely slam the door and leave the keys in. You MUST turn the key in the tumbler to lock the front door. One man's mead...

And while the tires are noisy, they make it like a tank in muck – it just simply goes. My wife has had me squashing peat moss into her gardens all over the yard. And with the hi-lo range on the transfer case, it can literally climb a tree. If you put it in low you MUST hold the brake if you put the tranny in drive. So it is sure footed in any weather I don't overdrive.

Will it ever win LeMans, Daytona, Sebring or the host of other places Porsche has conquered in its storied history? Never. And there is a reason I don't believe any Range Rover ever tried to win the Paris Dakar – reliability is always suspect. But like Skip's Jeep, and even Skip and his Honda; credit must be given for real credit earned. There are a few things Porsche just can't claim as their own best ideas. After all, they paid Mitsubishi for the twin balance shafts on the 944 & 968. Enjoy the Jeep, Skip. Now get off my back.

