

# The Alternative Line

by Joe Holzer for CNY-PCA Redline Report Copyright 2016 <http://www.holzerent.com>

## Happy Anniversary

I just renewed my PCA membership and realized that I have now been a member since April 1980, having bought my first Porsche, a Silver '77 911S Targa on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March and immediately joining the club. To say that in the intervening 35 years “things have changed” would rank as understatement at the least.

To begin with, there are no longer ANY strictly-speaking “air cooled” Porsches being made. Given Porsche’s engineering talent, I have no doubt they COULD have met all emissions standards with air cooling, but it simply no longer made sense to try, given the multiple factors conspiring against that approach, from noise requirements to the horsepower wars vs consumption and global warming constraints. The ability to cool a high-output engine’s heads while having most of the area of those heads devoted to valve tops was simply untenable. And Porsche certainly had plenty of expertise in water cooled engines long before the 993 became the last of the “air-cooled breed”. In fact, they started hybrid cooling with the 935 racers, which were constrained by racing rules to look like the 911 on which they were based. For those who REALLY know Porsche history, that hybridization was actually started MUCH earlier, not least with the introduction of the trombone oil cooler as used in my '77 Porsche 911S. Oil, rather than water, was the “liquid” coolant for many years before Porsche started using that glycol stuff starting in 1999 in the 996 ;-)

As a techie, however, I must point out that ALL cars are ultimately air-cooled. They simply use an intermediary, the glycol water mixture, as a thermal stabilizer which has noise abatement and thermal inertia and conductivity advantages which matter quite a lot in the immediate proximity of the engine itself, which is the only justification for adding the weight and complexity thereof.

Another huge change over that period has been the expectations of Porsche’s customers. When I first joined PCA, the only “automatic” you could buy was in a 924, a car originally intended like the 914 to be sold as a VW, until VW backed out of the deal, again like the 914. The only 911 without a clutch pedal, no longer in production at that point however, was the very rare “Sportomatic”, which has FAR more in common with the current PDK than with any “automatic”, as it used a switch actuated by downward pressure on the shift lever to disengage the clutch via vacuum, re-engaging it only once the lever was released. Hopefully, you had the revs built up by that time, or you looked like an incompetent ;-). Thankfully, the new PDK uses the anti-stall electronics and RPM driven pump pressure to engage the dual concentric wet clutches which actuate the inner and outer input shafts in the transmission, and leave the actual shift fork engagements to the computer as well.

Along with that computerization, however, has come a concerted disconnect between the act of “driving” and that of merely being a passenger in the motorized conveyance today. The FIRST “cupholder” in a Porsche 911 did not come about until the 996. Merely coincidental with the first wasserpumper? I think not ;-). And the techie interests seem to be far more in the audio and entertainment systems than those for propulsion for most owners. And you don’t even want to get me STARTED on the fact that Porsche now far outsells its sports cars with what by any definition are TRUCKS, no matter how competent they are as driver tools, as well as crossovers and sedans. People like me, for whom the ability to actually drive on a track were the prime motivators in joining PCA, seem to be a diminishing percentile of the customer base, not that I will be a new Porsche buyer anytime soon. Only time will tell, but the trend looks to be continuing unabated. And my own personal circumstances and the deception by my “insurer”, aka rip-off artists, make my ability to get back to the track anytime soon improbable, sadly.

Those of you who follow the enthusiast press likely know by now that EVERY 911 in the 2017 model year will be a twin turbo, although there will still be a specific “Turbo” model. The SOLE exceptions for the moment appear to be the GT-3 series. And, of course, the 911 has diminished in corporate importance, insofar as unit volume is concerned, when considered against the variety of other offerings from Porsche, which now include ALSO both diesel (gag ;-)) and hybrid (half a gag, though their 918 is one hell of a racer ;-)) models. I suspect the 911 will only matter to Porsche until their enthusiasts have retired or left for greener pastures. The corporate owners, VW, seem to care only so long as the 911 can deflect the ill will their diesel debacle has sown around the world.

Of course, true “driving enthusiasts” will soon be relegated to handing over control of their cars to the computer masters, like the “Google Cars” which don’t even have human controls AT ALL. I certainly HOPE they second-thought that approach and realize that removing the human controls also removes the ability to overcome the “s\_\_t happens” circumstances of all the things the programmers have not possibly dealt with, like CNY winters and road salt, for which electronics has VERY little tolerance. And vision systems depend on clean viewports. Ever seen a CNY car and salt? And we have not even contemplated the hackers...

Over my 35 years, I have added pounds, lost hair, and turned much of it grey. My legs are no longer capable of any prolonged walking, standing nor clutch action, although I can assure you I am still able to drive one if needed ;-). And while I still love all things automotive, I am becoming curmudgeonly where it comes to tolerance for the incompetence around me on the road. It is as though the same people spelling on all the CL and FB posts are suddenly sharing my environs, and they didn't learn any lessons of the road any better than their grammar or use of the language.

But I AM heartened by one reality; when I was growing up my Grandfather used to speak with pride of his ability to harness and then control an eight horse team to pull a fire engine or other heavy load. I also have seen my share of the PBS documentaries on the turn of the nineteenth century in major metropolitan areas. If you think the streets are polluted NOW, you have not been paying attention. Yet somehow, the horse has not been eliminated entirely. And a rare knowing few actually get to enjoy the immense pleasure of one-on-one with such an animal, and the joy of the wind in their hair as they and that conveyance duplicate what USED TO BE a necessary trip, replaced now with a saunter where ONLY the pleasure of the ride matters.

I know that I will never have the ability to harness nor control even one horse. Hell, the few times I have ridden them I felt sorry for their having to haul my sorry ass on their poor backs ;-). But I do recognize the parallels with my anachronistic noisy, smelly, tail heavy air pumpers whose handling is notorious for sending the less than talented backwards into the weeds. Like my Grandpa, I too can look back with pride on having some ability to constrain a beast and make it do MY bidding. And like his horses, mine dribble a little now and then ;-). Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. That's where the oil came from – I'm just trying to return it like a good environmentalist ;-).

Yeah, right...

Oh, and one other thing has not changed a BIT in those 35 years – those who love cars and driving, and especially well engineered cars, have like me remained enamored of the way those odd handling, anachronistic widow-makers have somehow STILL been the benchmark against which ANY serious contenders have been measured, and few have come even close. And we get together periodically to share a brew and/or story about how we wasted our youth playing with cars. And still do. And proud of it ;-). Because the PEOPLE of the Porsche Club of America have always been the REAL reason to be here. The cars were simply the one thing we had in common, though "common" is a term I hope to NEVER hear associated with one ;-).

And I wish to express a heartfelt "Thank You" to all who have made my time with PCA memorable, and to offer condolences to those who never managed to interact with me. I promise to give you plenty of opportunities – only the GOOD die young, so you have no fears from that quarter, but you don't want to wait TOO long. After all – you may not get to decide when to drive fast enough to catch me for much longer ;-).

