

The Alternative Line – Not Really

by Joe Holzer for CNY-PCA Redline Report Copyright 2017 <http://www.holzerent.com>

My Vehicles

Our dear Editor Emeritus Skip Testut has frequently requested articles about our personal automotive histories. But since I'd always had other things to write I never put this to paper (or electrons, so to speak ;-). But here goes:

My family had a 1960 Ford station wagon – Not the fake wood sided “Country Squire” which Porsche has decided to emulate with their 2018 Panamera Estate Car, which is the best looking Panamera I have ever seen. I suspect Mike Darminio is also drooling. They got it when I was 10 (do the math ;-). When I was 13 my Grandfather passed, and I received his 1950 Ford. Like the wagon, it had three on the column, and power NOTHING else. It had bad brakes, and was deemed not worth fixing by my parents. But it allowed me to learn to drive and shift, and throw out an anchor to stop it just before I reached the road in our driveway, where I could JUST reach third gear. A great car to learn on. But I got to my license late – the '60 Ford was replaced by the '68 Country Sedan – olive drab metallic with similar gear, power nothing, but a FAR too small steering wheel designed to expect power steering. And a bitch to learn to drive and pass my license test in. I think they felt sorry for me.

When in '69 I went off to Clarkson (yep, I repeated 9th grade) I was bored my first go-thru and didn't want to learn French – but I had a guidance counselor who asked the pertinent question when, having been put into the “dummy” class and assigned to shop, my first task was to build a flying model which would do aerobatics and return to me, all on a clock mechanism; “What's wrong with this picture?” Then I got a 719 on the Math SATs, and Clarkson didn't CARE what my verbal score looked like, nor even if I could SPEAK English. My sophomore year there my Uncle Dan died. He had been a polio survivor who had adapted well to his braces, and learned to drive a BMW Isetta, and bought two. They were perfect for his needs, because the front opened to allow him to sit on the floorboards, pull himself into the seat, and close the front to be behind the wheel of an adapted hand-control vehicle. I had hoped, and even lobbied, for them, but to no avail. My Aunt, who cared little for cars and never drove, allowed them to become feral cat boxes because she also could not part with them. Sad. I would have cherished them.

Entering my junior year I was eating lunch with my Dad when his friend overheard us talking and said he had a '63 Chevy Bel Air Wagon with a bad tranny I could have if I took it from his property. We hooked up a strap to drag it, after my Dad tried first to drive it home with inevitable parts bounding across the road enroute. Turned out to be simpler than thought, though, as only the front yoke on the drive shaft was broken – the tranny was fine. But his friend said the car was mine anyway, even after knowing it was a complete car for merely \$10 and installation. That's how I met my future wife, and finished my last two years at Clarkson, and first few years of graduate schools. When it refused to shift up, and gas was getting ridiculous in the '73 Gas Crisis, I bought a new '74 Toyota Corolla SR5, the ONLY year they made it really special, with fender flares, wider tires, and a higher ratio rear end so it actually was faster accelerating than its lesser 4 speed brethren in each gear. A true “poor man's Porsche”, and I loved it. Sadly, I wound up having to weld a bed frame to the bottom to keep it from folding up from rust when you opened the doors, and eventually DROVE it to the junkyard when the electrics became unreliable because of the poor grounding of rust. I miss that car, funky fenders and all.

We also had a '66 Chevelle Wagon we towed a pop-up camper all over including up to Nova Scotia, and with which we both got our Master's Degrees nights and weekends by camping in the closed Provincial Park at Charleston Lake in southern Ontario, CN. It was replaced with another new car – a '78 Datsun 810 Wagon I also loved because it had a 5 speed manual. But it also had a hidden manufacturing defect which eventually ruined one cylinder, long after it was out of warranty. It was the only car I ever had a radio stolen from, while I worked in Ogdensburg, and commuted back to my home in Liverpool on weekends for almost the five years I worked there while my then wife worked in Syracuse – funny how life makes things work out. I'd got the job after my MBA because I wanted some managerial responsibilities, but the WEEK before we were to move up, She got offered a role managing the new community service group for the VNA. That set me to see periods of separation as not that bad on a marriage, and my career eventually progressed in that direction for real, when in June 1986 I hung out my Independent Consultant shingle.

In 1981 while in Ogdensburg I was in the right place to finally buy the Targa I wanted since I first saw one as my friends and I had traveled the Mass Pike trying to urge my wagon to go faster as we were enroute to Boston Gardens for the ECAC Hockey Finals where Clarkson was a surprise finalist. The guy in the 911 laughed as we shook in unison to try to get it faster. My Targa, a '77 911S was purchased used from a guy in Dayton OH who picked us up at 11 PM on Friday the 13th of March. Inauspicious, I assure you. Yet it was also the best automotive bargain of my life. My daughter still has the car, and plans to restore it, with its replacement '88 Motronic 3.2L engine after I lunched the 2.7L at WGI. She came home from the hospital her second day of life in 1982, ensconced in the car seat on the rear shelf formed by folding the rear seatbacks down, so had a panoramic view out the fixed rear glass from under that stainless

roll bar, unlike all her similar friends' experience of looking only up at sky above their parents rides' doors. That's where she learned to say "Do wowwies Dad" when her mom tried to get me to slow down. Guess who I obeyed ;-)

Housing and child care and school costs pretty much limited car choices for the next few years, though I tried to inject some "luxury" by buying used Lincoln Town Cars – first the "pimple" – a red with white vinyl top whose engine lunched at the New Paltz exit from the Thruway, and the bronzed goddess which burned itself to the ground when a fuel line ruptured in the engine bay on Morgan Rd in Liverpool, a quarter mile from the house one cold night. We should have had marshmallows ;-). The fire burned the insulation from the starter cable, so it cranked and cranked, and thereby kept pouring more gas on the fire even as I had the key in my hand. But at least it had served as the "coach car" for many in CNY to learn autocross technique – it could hold half a division ;-)

With Jess growing up, a minivan was needed, and a Ford Aerostar with AWD was chosen, again used. There is a pattern there as well – I have a philosophical issue with eating 25 % depreciation as I drive it off the lot. But I was on a bad contract in Chicago, where I had started with the Targa only to feel my legs dying and the clutch burning in that traffic, so I decided to swap it for the Aerostar with its slushbox. But I was thankfully rescued from that contract by Duracell which wondered if I could join them to implement the Ultra packaging as free-standing blisters. That allowed me in 1999 while traveling with my motorhome; my second – the first; "Tranny Trash" a Kings Highway which ALMOST made it to the state line before lurching another transmission, was replaced by my current '92 Holiday Rambler which has become my permanent home, but also lunched a tranny, as well as an engine, enroute to VIR. I still love it, though. I arranged to meet the seller of the '95 993 Cabrio Tiptronic I found on Cars.com but had to buy from a dealer for decent financing. I never understood the problem banks have with the concept of a 911 as a home improvement. But I digress ;-)

Anyway, with neither of us having seen the place, we agreed to meet at an off-ramp at Knoxville TN for my inspection, then I would take the car if it was as described back to Brookville IN where I was working at the time. When I first saw the car it made a funny sound when starting which the guy did not understand, but said it seemed to have no further impact. It was a pair of inboard super-hot radar detectors worth over a grand. He similarly said the CD changer didn't work – he had the cartridge in backwards. Works fine ;-). And the Tip has taught me to be a better driver by learning how it wants to be driven, which is VERY different from the prior Porsche mantra of all breaking before turn-in then power through to the exit. Sadly it also taught me that fabric roofs have leakage issues as I won't bore you – you have read my tale of woe with it before. It is currently patched – it looks awful, but it works. Baby steps.

After my first Audi, an '87 4000 CS quattro with a 2.3L 5 cyl; a tank in sheeps clothing, I repeated with its bigger sister '87 5000 CS Quattro with the same engine, but turbocharged, and loved them both. So, in Nov 2001, I found a "'97 A8 Modified", for which the seller had received NO replies, because nobody wants that class of car modified. It turned out he had NOT put flames down the sides nor wheelie bars, but instead tried to make it more like a Euro S8, which he had ordered an ACTUAL one from Audi the week before 9/11. So he sold me the '97 for what the dealer would give him in trade, a steal. What a sweet ride – and it would stay with the 993 at WGI, a fabulous feat for a big sedan. I loved it, but had to see it part when the tranny lunched and the repairs would cost twice what the car was worth. I had previously also had a Strange Rover which had lunched its engine, so was replaced by a '95 Chevy Tahoe LT in Nov 2013 during my move. I wound up replacing the Audi with that Tahoe's twin sister with 40K less on her clock, and still have both today – the older sib is swapping usage for 993 garage space with my friend in Phoenix, while the newer turned out to be fully functional including AC. While helping my friend push her Honda with rusted brake rotors, I managed to break its rear glass, and replacing it was a nightmarish \$75 trip to a junkyard and some scraped knuckles, but it is back to full usability again.

That's my car story and I'm sticking to it. And no Ramblers nor Alfas, thank heavens ;-). It's been fun.

Joe Holzer, the Idea Man ;-)

