How I became a Porsche Enthusiast

Becoming a committed owner of any marque carries a story. Having owned a large number of cars of varying makes, it came time to reflect upon the path that led me to having five Porsches in the garage. Well, there is also a minivan out there, which is another story entirely. It goes without saying that a car guy and his supportive wife are responsible for this situation.

Becoming a car guy can be laid at the feet of my father. By age three, it is reported that I could amaze the crowd at the barber shop by naming the year and make of any car that passed by on the street. Car education must have been paramount at our house, as we spent a good bit of time at the dealerships, and had seen the new models months in advance of their introduction. We knew all of the dealers, and were treated to a sneak peek at new models in their secret hiding places. We lived in a rail road town, and were related to those working for the Santa Fe Railway. As the new models would roll through town on the train, we got a look at styling variations during the time when cars actually changed every year. It’s hard to believe now that we went down the road in these three ton barges equipped with large V8 engines, but our cars were all we had to connect us to the rest of the state. Owning a large comfortable car was your freedom to actually go to another city and make friends. How your car looked was your social statement upon arrival. Twist this however you wish, environmental fanatics. This was the very essence of post war America. We all played along, and the outlandishly chromed and brightly painted creations were how you spent your money during that era. My uncle actually had a car payment that amounted to half of his income in the fifties. It might have been worth that in social status.

So, time passed, and we all changed our priorities. Good looks were still essential, but what was needed was more power. The dawn of the muscle car age was upon this car guy. The early origins of more acceleration can be traced back to the 1949 Oldsmobile and the 1956 Hemi Chryslers. The big motors of the early sixties were placed into smaller platforms, and the muscle car era was born. Of course, the big power plants fit into sports cars like the Corvette, too. Now, we added flashy stripes, spoilers, and made our tires look good. Life went along really well until the reality of fuel consumption became a problem in 1973. It was obvious that our days of more power and huge cars were going to have to change.

What followed in the later ‘70’s and ‘80’s was a long lineup of cars that failed to stir the soul, move very fast, or function for more than a few years. It really didn’t matter much to a young physician in training, as there was no time or money to pursue those cars. By the time I could actually afford a new car in the early eighties, the choices were really limited. Styling was bland. Power was embarrassingly limited. There were more creature comforts and power options, but the chance that any of it worked past warranty was low.

So, the car guys in the middle of America went looking for the best cars from the ‘50’s through the early ‘70’s. Whether it was a big land yacht or a brightly colored muscle car, or a Bill Mitchell styled Corvette, any older car was better than any new offering in the ‘80’s and early nineties. Cars were restored, restified, and taken to shows. It was a good time to be a car hobbyist.

Those who prize handling should be quick to point out that a body on frame car with a big block between the front tires has to be the worst handling creation ever made. I focused upon Oldsmobile 442’s for a long time, and always chuckled when reading some of the early reviews. There was one picture of a 1968 442 going around a corner with the front tire rolling on the sidewall just before the tire pulled off the rim. The caption stated “handles great”. Corners like a bull elk on ice was much closer to the truth for those cars. Bias ply tires followed road grooves tediously, making for some thrills that were not welcome. In retrospect, I was pretty committed to the preservation of awful technology for a good part of my adult life. Thankfully, I survived the times that I went way too fast with that old technology.

Gradually, the car choices got better. Beginning with the fifth generation Corvette, and the nineties Mustangs, the cars that you could buy new became a good choice for daily driving and long trips. There were plenty of modifications possible, and the price was reasonable. I worked my way through a number of Corvettes. The daily driver was almost always a Lexus, after the Japanese took aim at the luxury market, and set the Europeans back upon their heels for over a decade. Finally, there were reliable, well made cars that did everything well. We gave up thrilling performance and endured bland styling for a long time.

The next change in the thought process happened in the middle of the last decade. Having always admired Porsches, they became a consideration once traction control and engine technology brought them to a point where the oversteer was controlled, and there was enough power to keep a torque addicted American car guy happy. The moment of change happened when a friend went shopping for his next car, and came home with a 2003 Carrera in Seal Gray with a six speed, and just the right performance options. We took the car from LA up Highway One and back, and the transformation in the thought process was remarkable. Of course, Highway One is a fine place to drive any car, but a Porsche shines especially brightly on this stretch of road. The steering precision, minimal body roll, and comfortable seats were an exceptional experience. Suddenly, my 2005 Corvette convertible was large and heavy. It plowed around corners with the rear end hanging loose. Not even a trade to a 2007 Z06 made it much better. That car was only good at the limit, and, even then, it lacked the precision that I now had experienced, and wanted in my next car. The time had come to get out of my American car past, and move into something European. One further comment should be made at this point. Having always considered the GM products to be something special, my friend and I both came to appreciate the elegant understated looks of his 996. When he first bought it, he remarked that it looks like a frog in the front, and a roach from the back. But it drives so well that this is overlooked, and the handsome overall appearance soon wins you over. My wife summed up the feel of a Porsche more succinctly. It makes you feel as if you are part of the car.

My first Porsche was a Guards Red 2008 Carrera S with Sand Beige interior. It featured a fine six speed transmission, and I came to refer to that gearbox as the “Rolex of Transmissions”. What became apparent very quickly was the build quality and steering feel that Porsche managed to achieve with this generation of the car. It had a few flaws, though. It lacked power, and the S exhaust really sounded more like Tim Taylor’s lawn mower than a fine European racing motor. The stock sound system was so bad that I fell for an aftermarket sound system, and that caused many headaches. Clearly, I had to have a Turbo.

And, the right car came along in the same color combination not long after the search began. The pricing equation for new Porsches had always been a deterrent for those of us with a value consciousness. It takes some patience to find the right car. A nice example with 6700 miles became available through some friends. It had all the options that I wanted, as well as some extra leather wrapping on the console and seatbacks, as well as the red enamel treatment on the wheels. The car was very attractive, and always provoked positive comments from strangers. It served very well for five years. It featured a six speed, and plenty of turbo lag. Getting out of first gear without hitting the rev limiter took some skill. Eventually the clutch became more than a guy with some back issues could work with. At that point, the 991 was upon us, and the PDK was perfected. I let the Turbo go, with great regret and fond memories.

So, I leased a 2013 Carrera S for two years, with the ultimate plan of finding another Turbo once the initial frenzy had faded. This time black was the choice, and the 991 wears black very well. The car is now larger, having grown by inches since the 993 generation. It has also become more luxurious and user friendly as a daily driver or road car. The increased luxury, improved ride, and quieter cabin were very much appreciated. For the naysayers who feel that the car is now more of a luxury car than a sports car, I invite you to check out the competitive times turned in over the past two years at our West Texas Porsche Club Autocross events. I did lose to a Subaru, but when he got home, he still had a small Jap econobox, and I had a luxury car. Porsche owners understand. The 991 is a car that can easily be a daily driver, works well as a long distance tourer, and gets around a track or autocross event extremely well. Having had the opportunity to drive just about every other marque available, I can say that the 991 would be my choice for just about any driving opportunity. It’s that good.

During one of the autocross events, Dr. Andy Gray commented to my wife that I drove that Carrera S as if it were an extension of myself. This puts the feel of driving a Porsche into the right perspective for me. It all fits the driver, and responds to all input, both subtle and aggressive. It is this kind of engineering that converts someone who loves all cars into a Porschefile. There is no substitute, and Porsche is not arrogant in making this claim.

Another acquisition has been a Cayenne. Having made you aware of the needs of the heartland for comfortable, smooth, quiet transportation, it seems like a good time to point out the virtues of this Cayenne S. It rides as well as any luxury vehicle that I have owned, has more than enough power, goes through the mud and snow very capably, and handles uneven ground better than any vehicle that I have driven, including a Jeep. Of course, a Jeep with a winch, a four inch lift, and some aggressive tires will get you through the deep snow and the rugged back country better, but it’s doubtful that many Cayenne owners have those activities in mind. For my Porsche loving friends who drive something else daily, it might be time to convert your garage into a Porsche only zone.

And, now, I turn the discussion to the current centerpiece of the Porsche collection. The pride of the garage is a 2015 Turbo S. It’s Jet Black with black and garnet interior, and was picked up with 1600 miles on the odometer for a nice discount. It has some jewelry that make it a nice place to spend many hours, but all of the amazing technology comes standard. If you think about it, any engineer’s wish list of thirty years ago is in place on the car, and it all works. Direct fuel injection. Variable vane twin turbo. PDK. All Wheel Drive. Center Lock Wheels. Ceramic Brakes. Four Wheel Steering. Dynamic Chassis control. The car does everything, and still manages to ride quietly and smoothly on a road trip. My long cherished straight line acceleration is unmatched short of spending a million bucks, or having a dedicated drag car. Handling and control are simply the best that has ever been put together. Owning all of the best qualities in one single car is a tribute to the marque. It’s a treasure that is likely to hold up well through the years. Not only did Porsche get it all to work, they made it to last.

So, there is the story of one Porsche Club member’s development of the taste for the brand. We are the product of the environment where we live, and the era in which we grow up and become drivers. For a privileged few, Porsche ownership is a very satisfying experience. Living far from the coast and mountains delayed my development for a while, but I eventually arrived at the good place.





