

## **Competition? No, It's Just Track Fellowship!**

By Jim Cambron

Are you competitive? Not me! Competitive is when you're in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and they call for baseball tryouts and you can't wait for school to let out so you can be the first in the gym, changing into your shorts, hitting your fist into your glove, maybe even slipping into your "real" cleats. Not me! I never was very good at baseball—so I'm not competitive.

My non-competitiveness wasn't restricted to just team sports, either. I was seldom seen around my hometown drag racing down the back roads or neighborhoods. Well, not *very* often. As a *responsible* adult and good citizen, we have to compromise our automobile competitiveness with social responsibility. So thank goodness, there are socially acceptable outlets for automotive enthusiasts, such as the Porsche Club of America's High Performance Driver Education (HPDE) program.

The three prevailing rules governing PCA HPDEs are: 1) No Racing! 2) No Racing! And, you guessed it; 3) No Racing! In HPDEs we don't race against each other or against the clock—we just drive our Porsches as quickly and as safely as we can, passing every other car on the track!

So why drive in HPDEs instead of the PCA Club Racing program? There are several reasons. In both of these high-speed driving events, you get to see how your Porsche performs at speeds and under conditions that are difficult and unsafe to replicate in a public street environment. You get to compare your Porsche's performance (acceleration, braking, turning, and general handling) to other Porsches and other cars. And it's much less expensive to run a HPDE once or a twice a year than to modify your car to meet a PCA race class and campaign it for an entire racing season.

I love to drive Porsches like they were designed to be driven, but in a safe and controlled environment. I can accelerate through the gears from 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> gear, track- and car-dependent. I can shift my gearbox with precision and sometimes accomplishment, both up and down the gears. I practice my heel-and-toe downshifts without worrying about traffic or other distractions on a public road. I get to clip apexes without coming face-to-face with oncoming traffic. I can feel the breeze and hear the wind blow on the far side of a buck-fifty. I can

practice turn-in and track-out over and over again until I approach the car's traction or my courage's limits. I can feel the awesome power of threshold braking as you approach a 90-degree turn backed by a gravel pit, watching the braking signs flash by: 300, 200, now 100! I can feel the car's balance shift from the rear to the front during braking, then back to the rear under acceleration, or from side-to-side with a quick set of turns. I can feel the planted stability and aerodynamic downforce on a tuned car and compare it to the frightful floating of one that's not. If you're competitive, you can secretly time your laps; Porsche even provides the stopwatch in their Sport Chronograph, but I seldom do that. I drive for the enjoyment of feeling the car, not for the risk associated with reducing just one more second, then another tenth, or even a hundredth.

I love to drive the Porsches to see how they compare to other cars—both Porsches and those “others”; the Corvettes, Mustangs, Camaros, Nissans, Ferraris, and race cars. Now don't confuse this with competition—it's not, I'm just seeing which car is faster coming off a turn, when you pin the throttle and let it rip! Checking to see if that car in the other lane is actually as fast as the magazines say it is. In fact, this is not competition, it's history. Since I was a kid, I've been reading about the pony car wars between the Mustangs and the Camaros. Those wars included the 289 and the 283, both 302s, the 327, the 350 and 351, the 396, both 427s, and the 428 and 429. It was the RS, SS, and Z-28s against the Cobras, GT350, GT500, and the Mach 1. It really is history, the Porsches against the Corvettes; those small enduring Porsches against the big-block V8s. One of my earliest distinctive car-model memories was with my HO-scale home racetrack, with the red '63 Split-window Vette running against the silver 911; so it must have been in the mid- to late sixties, when I was about 13 years old.

So, it's as natural as sunshine to compare a Porsche to its competition. Did you ever wonder how the GT3 compared to the Corvette Z06? I can tell you. And I can tell you what it sounds like to be passed by a Ferrari or a ZR-1, and what it's like to watch the Nissan GT-R taillights grow small. But it's not racing, it's just running your Porsche to its limit or yours in cooperation with a bunch of friends and neighbors; and it's not competition. I call it track fellowship!