

## **Memorable Porsche Moments**

### **By Gil Ferguson**

I always liked sports cars. As a young enlisted man in the Army, I bought a used Triumph TR 3 and enjoyed driving it around the Ohio countryside. British cars with Lucas electrical systems were not known for their reliability, and this car was no exception. I spent more money keeping it running than I could afford at that time.

After returning from Vietnam in 1970, I bought a new Corvette Stingray. I liked how it looked, but build quality was poor and it developed mechanical issues. One morning as I left my apartment for work the car was gone. Expecting to never see it again, I started looking for another car. Two weeks later, the police called to tell me they had found the car in a neighborhood still intact. I guess even the thieves didn't want it. I had already put a down payment on an Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme, which wasn't much better, so I traded the Corvette. Not happy with the quality of American cars, I started looking at European models. I bought my first German car, a BMW 320i, and enjoyed driving it. I didn't consider a Porsche as I didn't like the 914 and the 911 was out of my price range.

That would change when Porsche introduced the 924 in the early eighties. I loved the look of the car, and although it was not cheap, and underpowered with an Audi 4-cylinder engine, once I drove it I was hooked. That would start a love affair with Porsche cars. When the 944 was introduced, I sold the 924 and purchased a red 944. I liked the extra power and the fact that it had a proper 2.5-liter Porsche engine.

In 1987 I would be assigned to US Army Europe Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany. I had the 944 shipped over and picked it up at the port of Bremerhaven. I enjoyed driving it on the autobahn because you could drive fast safely, as everyone obeyed the rules of the road. The rules were to drive in the right hand lane, and when it was safe to pass, signal, pass, signal again and move into the right hand lane. Don't see much of that around here.

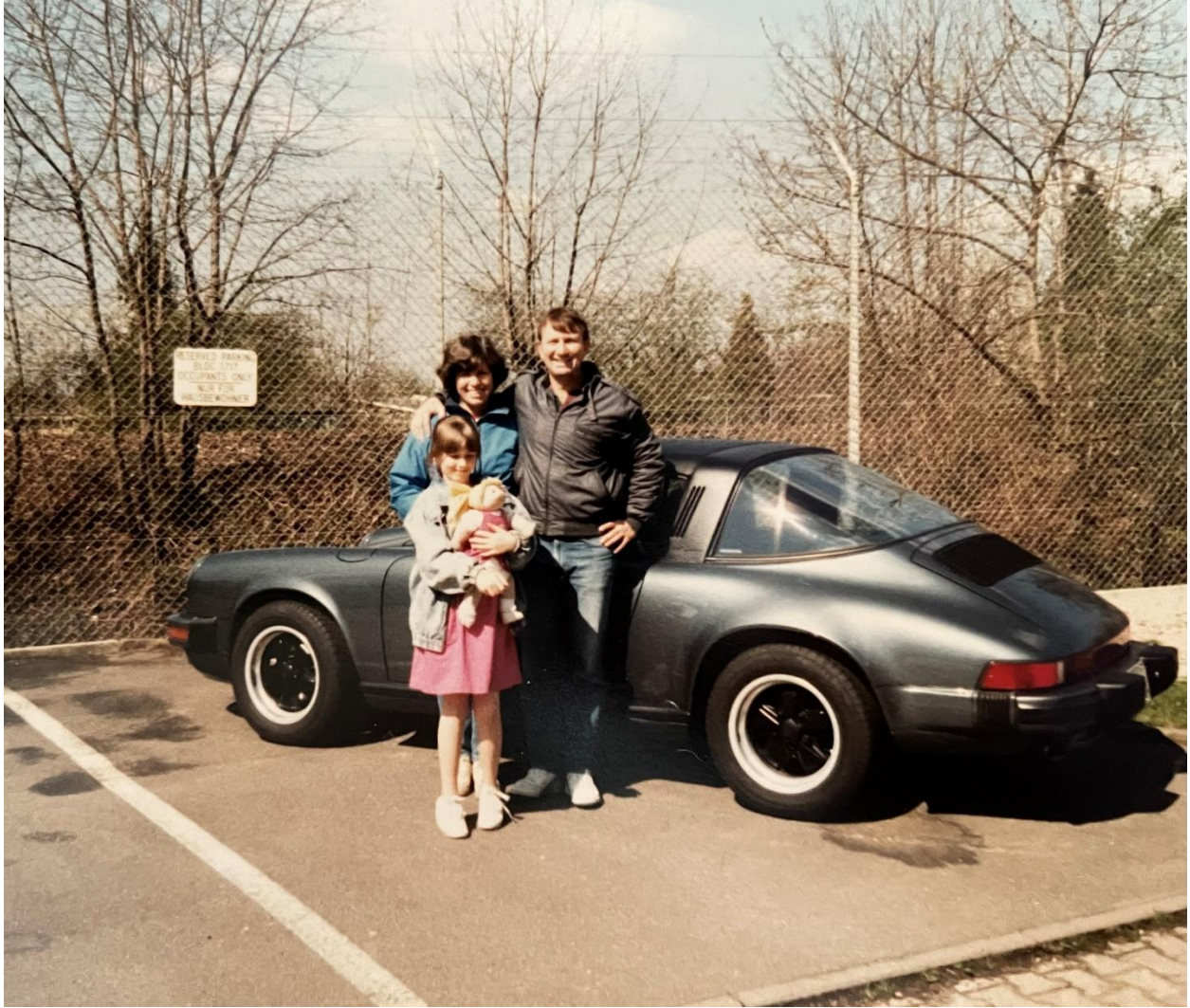
One day Rita drove the 944 and was impressed with how well the car handled at triple-digit speeds.

That winter I would take a trip to the port of Rotterdam in Holland to look at logistics support areas for the Army's annual Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER) exercise.

While driving a rental car in Holland, I looked in my rear view mirror to see a Porsche closing fast. A 911 Targa with the roof off and two Dutch police officers inside pulled up next to me and the officer in the passenger seat put his arm up through the opening, and pointed to the right, meaning for me to get into the right hand lane. I complied and they sped past. I told myself I had to get one of those, and I did.

When I got back to Heidelberg I went to the local Porsche dealer to order a 911. Since I couldn't decide on the model I wanted, the salesman suggested a trip to the Porsche factory in Stuttgart. I was impressed with the production process and the fact that there was not a lot of automation, so much of the work was done by hand, with the cars being moved from station to station on dollies. I decided to sell the 944 and order a U.S.-spec 911 Carrera Targa in Venice Blue metallic with Marine Blue interior.

The car arrived right after Thanksgiving as a 1988 model, and our youngest daughter was born one month later. We would put her in a car seat and strap it into the back seat and, along with our eight-year-old daughter, would drive all over Europe. One day while heading for a conference in Garmisch, I decided to see how fast the car would go, and got it up to 150 mph, which was the top speed for that model. I started to think about what would happen if I blew a tire or someone did something stupid, so I backed off. Guess I was never meant to be a race car driver.



**Gil and family with the new 911 in Heidelberg.**

On one of our trips to Amsterdam, Holland, I was stopped by the Dutch police for exceeding the speed limit. The officer took my information back to his car and a few minutes later came back and told me this was my lucky day as he was only giving me a warning. That was a nice change from the photo radar cameras in Germany where you received a ticket in the mail, along with a nice picture of your car, as proof it was you driving.

By far our most memorable trip was to Berlin before the wall came down. Back then you had to drive a specific route through East Germany, stopping first at the US checkpoint where you were briefed on the route and told to not deviate from it, or exceed the posted speed limits. The next checkpoint was East German. You

were met by a guard and after showing him your paperwork and exchanging salutes, he pointed you to a nearby building.

Upon entering the building I saw a wall with a slot in it to put my paperwork. I could hear people but not see them. I sat down in a chair with Communist propaganda magazines in English on a table next to me. As I sat there I looked out the open doorway and saw the young guard walking several times around my car. Not sure if he was admiring the car or my wife. A few minutes later, my paperwork reappeared in the slot with the appropriate stamps on them. No one said a word. I took the paperwork to the guard who looked them over, and we were on our way. The last checkpoint before entering Berlin was U.S. so that everyone was accounted for.

While in Germany we attended some Porsche Cup races at the Hockenheim ring just down the road from Heidelberg. We also attended the German Formula 1 Grand Prix one year. I belonged to the Porsche Club while in Germany and there were always Porsche factory representatives present at our Christmas parties. One year I got to meet Alois Ruf, the famed German tuner, whose famous 911 Yellowbird graced the covers of several car magazines. I also attended the Frankfurt auto show while I was there.

In 1992, we departed Germany and I had the 911 shipped back and picked it up at the port in Newark, NJ. We would spend the next five years in Missouri and Kansas before moving to Huntsville in 1997. In 1998 the Boxster would be introduced, and so I decided to sell the 911 and get one. As the saying goes, hindsight is always 20/20.

Demand for the Boxster was high, but I found a dealer in Florida who could guarantee me an allocation for a \$5000 deposit. When the car arrived, I flew to Tampa and picked the car up from Bert Smith. Driving the car back to Huntsville I enjoyed the performance and the admiring glances people gave it. However, it would not be long before disaster would strike.

One day while driving on a country road I looked down to get a drink of soda and when I looked up there was an old VW Beetle stopped dead in the road. I tried to

avoid him but hit him on the left front and took out the radiator, losing the coolant. A flatbed truck came and loaded it up for a trip to a local chop shop, since there was no Porsche dealer in Huntsville back then. They kept the car for six weeks, mainly waiting parts, and when I got it back there were bubbles in the paint and the interior was filthy.

The airbag light was still on so I had to take it to Nashville to get it turned off. While there, I was told I had a bent rear aluminum suspension component. I surmised that it happened when they chained the car to the flat bed. I sold the car shortly after that and would not drive another Porsche until December 2009 when I saw a Cayman at the Porsche dealership in Nashville. Since it was the end of the year, they were eager to sell it and made me an offer I couldn't refuse. I drove it until the new Cayman came out in 2014 and traded that Cayman for a new Cayman S at Porsche of Huntsville.

In 2017 when the new 911, 991.2 arrived with a twin-turbo six-cylinder engine, I ordered one and still enjoy driving it to club events as well as a couple of Porsche Parades.

Recently with the help of Jim Cambron, I installed a Cobb tune, which not only added horsepower and torque, but increased the fun factor as well.

Those are some of my memorable Porsche moments. What are yours?