

My Year in Porsche Carrera Cup

by Joe Still

I started my quest to race in the “big time” in 2020 with the older “IMSA Cup Challenge” program before it was replaced. IMSA brought in its place the international series Porsche Carrera Cup. I entered Road Atlanta as the last race of the 2020 year and the last Cup Challenge race ever. Some may recall the experience was not completely positive (I have the \$25k in Blue Cross payments to the hospital ER to prove it!) That series was repackaged and moved to USAC and is similarly professionally organized. I got licensed to run in both series this year as late last year, my Goldcrest stablemates were trying to sort out what series they wanted to run in so we could stay together.

Some background on IMSA with PCCNA and 2021. Porsche Carrera Cup North America (PCCNA) is the domestic version of a standardized series run worldwide. The other countries have been running the series for some years so they are a little more developed than North America, which is in its first year.

There were three classes:

992 Pros (with a “young driver” category who dominated the top six to eight positions all year);

992 Pro Am (non-pro drivers in the new 992 Cups);

991.2 Pro Am (the one and only year the older Cups are allowed).

IMSA makes all the team trucks line up in a remote location by Series and then they are brought in and escorted to position at a pre-determined time. And all rigs must stay closed until ALL trucks are in place and then and only then can you open up and set up.

Part of the Carrera Cup series internationally is standing starts. PCCNA (Porsche Carrera Cup North America) at the last minute said the standing starts would not be implemented until later in the year. Rumors of reasons were there were not enough spare parts for the brand new 992 Cup in North America to fix the potential carnage, which turned out not to be the case. It seems a standing start required a

large, expensive light system PCCNA did not own and was not prepared to transport and set up. Think of the F1 start lights we have all seen.

We had done some looking into standing start to get a jump on it before it was scrubbed. My pal Grady in BHM actually tried a standing start in his neighborhood and had a line of pre-teen boys running out of their houses yelling “Cup Car” from the sound they recognized from their Simulators 😊. Kids these days!

So, we were relegated to a rolling start like that used in IMSA. It remained that way throughout the season. By the way, the Cup has a launch control none of us even knew about until we started looking into standing starts. At the first of the five red lights, you engage first gear while holding the brake, at the third red light you advance to full throttle, when the fifth red light goes out you keep the throttle buried and take two seconds to release the clutch. Two seconds exactly. If you take longer, you get left behind. If you dump the clutch and light up the rear tires, you also get left behind. Two seconds is the secret sauce.

Carrera Cup Race Event One - Sebring 12-Hour

Wow, what a cool show to be part of. Totally professionally organized with paid staff. Now I like the PCA club-racing folks, but to keep it affordable it is run by volunteers, so the level of skills might be a bit diverse although they all are happy to help, just in a few cases they can be uncertain how to do that.

COVID again dominated the Sebring event as it had the last race of 2020 at Road Atlanta. We had to drive through a tent and show credentials and have temperature recorded every time we arrived at the track. It was, however, well conceived and took very little time to enter, except the day of the big race. Then it backed up a ways.

Race 1 - My rolling start was not very good. The rule is you are SUPPOSED to stay in your lane until you cross the start/finish line. I applied the rules as I understood them and I was about the only one, so I lost a few places on the run

down to Turn 1. And as it was the very first race of the year of the series and elbows were out, the result was a pretty high attrition rate. I did make it through with no damage and in fact moved forward rapidly thanks to said attrition. I finished 4th in-class and while just missing the podium, I did have to pass thru tech, which felt like an accomplishment. They post-race tech the top four cars so that in case one of the top three fails, they still have a complete podium.

Race 2 - I spun early and was lonely in the back. As I was moving up to a close competitor a few laps in, I hit what I later heard was oil and lazily spun toward the inside wall. By the way, cars always spin back to the inside; a physicist might be able to explain it but it escapes me. Anyway, it was a slow spin into the grass and stopped 5 feet from the wall. Gear down to first and back on the track I go.

I had a lot of moments later in Bishops Bend (high speed sweepers) with the car pushing toward the tire wall and I started losing time. Turns out later that I had knocked half the front splitter in the spin and lost a lot of front grip in the high-speed stuff.

The humorous part of this is I made the highlights both in our telecast AND during the run up to the BIG SHOW 12-Hour the next day in the previous highlights. That is where most people saw me as they were watching the 12-Hour event. They say there is no such thing as bad publicity, but I am not sure of the truth of that in this case, having your friends hear “Joe Still spins off the track!” I will leave you to decide.

Anyway, since after the spin I was too far back to do much, I let the front runners come through easily. I foolishly let a guy in class get past me. Lesson learned here. The three classes have different headlight colors so I just failed to notice he was in my run group.

Carrera Cup Event Two – COTA

COTA (Circuit of the Americas) was a replacement race for one of the cancelled Canadian races due to COVID travel protocols.

I had another decent outing at COTA. As typical, I was a little slow getting up to pace and then a little off in the high-speed stuff. Practices were OK but qualifying got canceled due to torrential rains. Since we couldn't qualify, they gridded us up by national championship points which placed me fourth in class based on Sebring results.

Race 1 -We were expecting a wet race based on the weather forecast but as we got up Friday morning the sky was clear. The track, however, was far from dry. But in the absence of falling rain, all but one car went out on dry slicks under the assumption that early in the 45-minute race we would have a dry line. Wet tires just would not hold up, so we thought. Yes, the wet tire guy won the overall. We rolled off from the false grid on onto the track and the rear tires lit up like a Christmas tree! I have had better traction on ice and snow it seemed like...not really that bad but I was surprised/shocked.

I did what I could putting heat in the slicks on the out-lap and then for a rare change had a good jump on the start. I was actually leading in class into the first turn but was passed by my pal Matt, and by T2 I had let him come thru outside. It did leave me in a solid second in class for the moment! A few laps later I am having fun with the slippery track, and chasing hard, I looped the car in T11. Nice easy spin to the inside wall and stopped just short of contact. Unfortunately, the steering wheel was upside down and as I was pulling the paddles to get back to 1st, I was actually upshifting. These cars do not like to downshift sitting still so I lost a lot of time in rocking the car in gear so it would take the downshifts to get back to first gear so I could jump back on the track. Damage done, back to fourth place.



Race 2 -The track was completely dry and as such I was pretty lonely after the first few laps. After cruising in fourth the whole time I had been lapped by a few of the front runners. On the last lap the leader came by a second time just as we pulled onto the front straight. At the same time on the other side of the track, Grady in third place in class got into it with one of the other Goldcrest cars and hit the wall, crippling his car. I drove by his wreck on the last lap and it looked like I have my third place in class! Well, Grady who crashed out from third, rides back with the

wrecker and gets escorted directly to the podium as third place? We are all confused. How did I pass him while he was parked on the last lap and not win that position? Best I can figure out, that last lapping leader pass before start/finish ended the race for me with one less lap than others still in front of him starting the last lap.

Carrera Cup Event Three - Watkins Glen

We did a test day at The Glen before the three days of PCCNA. After two decent slow-but-improving sessions, my gearbox went south. It would not take an upshift into 4th. It kept bouncing back to 3rd. Now these are computer-controlled gearboxes with paddle shifters that are all electro-hydraulic, so it is not like anyone can say I muffed a shift. This gearbox had about 10 hours on it from a complete rebuild by Porsche Motorsports in California. You have to use PMA for motor and transmission rebuilds/refurbs to have the requisite seals to pass tech inspections. No AAMCO rebuilds, please.

Goldcrest tried some stuff overnight that did not fix the problem. So by the end of day two, they leased a gearbox from Porsche Motorsports for...well, I will not tell you what the hourly rate was, but there was a comma involved. I felt they should waive both the repair and the lease cost as it was their work that was suspect. (Later news, they did charge for the lease but no charge so far for the rebuild).

Race 1 -The loaner worked and we qualified with the loaner transmission working fine. But everyone had several sessions practice over me, so I was dragging around the tail end somewhere. Neither race was very memorable for me but neither did I get hit. The loss of 75% of practice time really cost me training.

Race 2 - I ran over the exit of the bus stop in Race 2 and unknowingly took off half the front splitter, just like at Sebring to start the year. The car was evil in the high-speed stuff like the climbing esses and I thought I had a tire going down. A quick pit-stop for safety confirmed the tires were fine. The crew thought by being off pace and getting out of the leaders' way I picked up "clag" (AKA tire debris) and it just lost all grip for a few laps. The crew however did not notice the missing splitter so all I could do was reduce pace in the high-speed turns.

Carrera Cup Event Four - Road America

I had a bit of a sore throat for several days prior to Road America, so I did the responsible thing before the race, I went and got a COVID test the day before leaving, which was negative.

I had a great one-day test the week before. We were a little slow getting started; I had Bryan Sellers run some laps to check my set up. He thought it was fine but he cut a tire on the next-to-last lap. To prove the age-old axiom, "It is always something," my front built-in hydraulic jack failed, leaving Goldcrest to have to jack the car up in increments. With a new tire, they then had to pull the hydraulic line to get the jack retracted. We missed two hours getting started.

My lap data at the test actually matched Bryan Sellers' in all regards except I was over-slowng T1 and T6. I expected great things from the Road America weekend!!

Alas, I got home Wednesday and by Sunday was in bed for 24 hours straight before finally relenting for another COVID test the following Tuesday. That test came back positive. This was when the Delta variant was starting to shake things up and since I was Pfizer vaxxed in Feb/Mar, it was a breakthrough case.

By that Friday night my SAT rate was fluctuating from 92 to as low as 72, which is not good. So, I had Susan call an ambulance for the ER. My working assumption was ambulance patients do not get dumped in the waiting room with sick people (LOL- like I was not one) and I was put on the express lane. I was started on O2 and IV meds that took four days to absorb. My last day was without oxygen so I asked to be released to make room for someone worse off. I made it out after the four days and was never intubated, just O2 by cannula. The "spa" was very quiet but boy the chef should be burned at the *steak* (pun, while regrettable, is irresistible).

It took until mid-November to get full taste and smell back and take a deep enough breath to think I am near fully recovered. This would affect the balance of the season with mental fatigue midway thru stints. Not dangerous, just loss of edge.

Now the races I missed at Road America turned out to be another demolition derby and I would easily have slid into second place due to attrition but ya gotta race to be on the podium. My big shot missed, including an almost certain second place in the second race at Road America.

Carrera Cup Event Five - Indy

I did not sign up for Indy. I had run the track before and did not particularly enjoy the lap there. Also, due to various circumstances through the summer, my wife had ankle reconstruction surgery delayed until the actual first day of practice for Carrera cup, so just as well I hadn't pinned my hopes on that event.

The Indy event was a triple-header to try to get in all the races originally planned in face of canceling the two events/four races originally set for Canada. So, I missed three races at Indy and dropped well back in the points.

Carrera Cup Event Six – VIR

This should have been a good track for me, but lack of aerobic fitness left me just a little flat. Mental fatigue was a real challenge.

Race 1 - There were only five cars in class and I finished fifth.

Race 2 - There were still only five cars but I could not stay focused, so last in class again. I did get a “good guy” shout out on TV for courtesy in letting front runners by. I can say that I was third-fastest lap in class in Quali, Race 1 and Race 2. So, my pace when I built it up showed some promise.

Over lunch one day, Brian Blocker, the head of PCCNA, promised to appeal to Germany for a “Seniors” class that would satisfy me. I told them I voted for Masters as being 68 years old or over or 45-year-old and spot me a one lap lead for every year under 67. They were 😊.

As of now we have been granted the third “master’s class” but details will not be out until January 4th.

Carrera Cup Event Seven - Road Atlanta

The last race of the Carrera Cup year was our home track Road Atlanta and it was a three-race event like Indy was. This was to make up for the race planned for Mosport in Canada which had severe COVID restrictions, including a two-week quarantine on the way in, which would not work.

Qualifying did not go as well as I needed and I started near the back. I have failed to grasp just how important a good Qualifying is. It seems like even two rows back at the green flag you are only 40 ft back of the four spots in front. That is NOT how it sorts out. I plan to hang it out next Quali.

Race 1 - My car tech and I just don’t seem to be able to get the starts right. We need to practice that in this offseason because it puts me out of position and complicates results. I never heard a green flag call and lost spots every time.

Race 2 - I no more than started and my right shoulder harness popped over the lip on the HANS device. I do not have a death wish so I had to slow to loosen the shoulder strap and get it back over the HANS and then cinch it back up. I lost a few hundred feet in the process, showing yet again how many things can go wrong. I chased hard and by the end made a nice pass for position to move up to top 20 overall.

Race 3 - This race turned in to as big a crash-fest as the first race of the season at Sebring. Several of the front runners in our class either crashed out or bumped into the wall and DNF’d. I was mounting my usual late-race charge and needed about two laps to pass for third in class. The next time across S/F, I got the white flag. Lord knows I put the whips to that car but came up a little short on what would have been my first and only podium for the season. Again, fourth is just a “just-in-case” tech inspection.

Race 3 at Petit Le Mans ended my year with a fourth-in-class out of 10 and a 20th overall, which given 22 of the cars were superior platforms, is not bad. Thankfully attrition, coupled with a level head and knowing a new car was coming first of January, along with needing to sell the current car, I stayed well out of trouble. Had a spin in T7 and had to sit there while three or four cars come within inches of me parked backward on the fast line. Not a great picture. I was able to clear and pull back on the grass and then rotate back to head the right way.

And someone spun my pal Grady in T6 and I was the next one by. I lined up to go inside and the guy pulled back to the inside cutting me off so that was a quick-hands moment. But again, the car was unmarked.

Wrap-Up

The year was a success in several ways. I ran with a really fast group of drivers and faster cars and managed to at least stay out of the way. I did not total a car this year. The damage was pretty nominal, especially at Road Atlanta end of year with new cars coming and everyone planning to sell the 991.2. Seems like all of my competitors but me had some big wreck damage to fix first.

I did get a little better I think, especially under braking. And I really got back most of my alertness. If you look at the sector top times from Road Atlanta, I finished near the back and unsurprisingly had similar sector times to that place. Except the final sector, which comprises the back straight to the front straight. Turn 10A includes hard braking from 170 mph down to 60. In that sector I was 10 places higher than my overall and in fact was faster than some of the 992 cars through that sector.

So, we look forward to what will be for sure the last year at the Pro level, and if I struggle with the new cars as badly as the other older guys have in theirs this year, I may not make all the events. Some very quick guys from PCA made the move to the 992 last year and frankly I can keep pace with them better in their new generation cars. The repeated claims are the all-electric steering is completely numb. I can only dream about being the exception. Also, as mentioned at VIR Carrera Cup, they have promised me some concession for age groups.

We have booked extensive winter testing to acclimate to the new cars, due the first of January. We were booked for three two-days tests and then the Sebring 12-hour race weekend. We just learned of “trouble at sea” and our new cars are now expected January 28th, so one of the test events will be scrubbed.

One note about running on an IMSA weekend: If you do not book hotel accommodations a year in advance you stand a good chance of taking whatever Airbnb you can still find at whatever distance from the track. And the hotels have “special pricing” for event weekends. As an example, the Sebring Seven Motel offers a special 12-Hour Sebring rate of \$450 per day, 5-day minimum, and no cancellation. This for a motel doing well to earn \$150 per night 😊. Now THAT is special.

Respectfully submitted,
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Carrera Cup 2021 991.2
Car Number 8