

Planning and Leading a Porsche Club Driving Tour

By Ed Stone

Owning and driving a Porsche has been one of my lifelong dreams. But like many, realizing that dream had to wait until my kids were grown, the college bills were paid, and I could afford having a “fun” car in addition to the “practical” family car. Enjoying my Porsches, my “fun” cars (I have owned two Caymans, and now a Macan S) was based both on admiring the quality of their build, as well as sensing the pleasure of cars designed for spirited driving dynamics. Participating in club events and their organized tours make my driving experiences even more pleasurable. They provide an opportunity to share fellowship with other Porsche owners, hear about what they have learned with their cars, and to travel together on roads that accentuate the capabilities of the cars. It is the Porsche driving experience that justifies the love and admiration we have for the brand.

Our Heart O’ Dixie region plans several driving tours each year, usually between March and November, depending on the weather. As a newish member of the HOD club, I participated in several drives, enjoying the efforts of others. As I became more experienced, I began to think of other potential destinations. When I joined the Board of Directors, I was invited to volunteer to lead a tour. I was initially hesitant, but then made the commitment. The next thoughts were, how do I do this?

Seek advice from experienced tour leaders.

I had about six months to develop my tour plan, validate it, and complete my preparations. I knew that if I did not know how to do something, even if I thought I did know, it was always best to seek advice from other sources. I talked with experienced HOD club members who had led tours that I participated in. I learned that there are many records of past tours available to consider in choosing my destination. Those packages included the tour briefing package with directions and maps used, as well as the restaurant visited at the destination. I also learned that our HOD Region and Porsche Club of America have well-thought out and practiced guidelines, procedures, and rules for conducting driving tours; reviewing

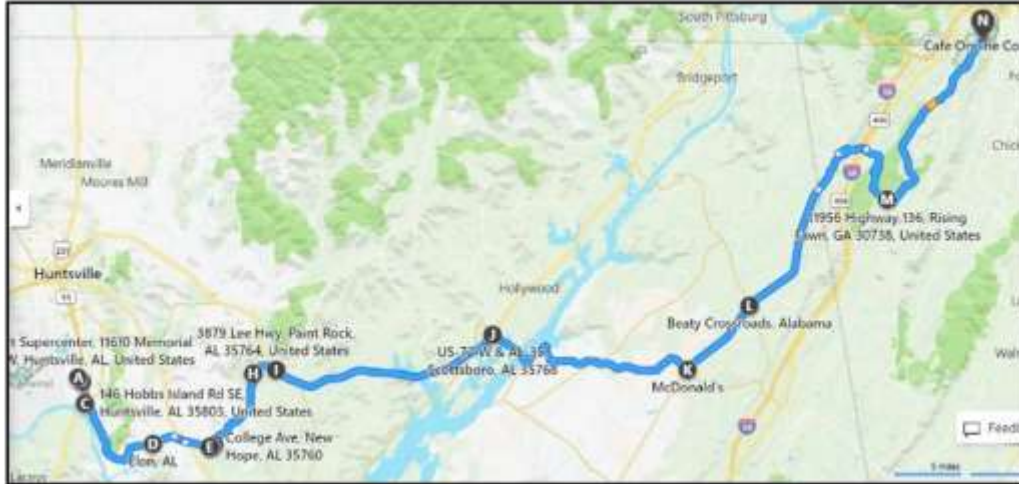
them provided the baseline for what had to be done. Club goals are to conduct safe enjoyable tours, while minimizing potential risks.

Step 1: Choose a destination and plan a preliminary route.

Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga was suggested to me; two previous tours to that destination had been rated as highly successful and very enjoyable. I was provided a copy of the tour package for that drive to consider while developing my tour plan. This was of immense help in simplifying my planning, and more importantly, reducing the self-induced stress of planning my first driving tour.

I studied the Lookout Mountain tour package and considered what I had experienced during other drives. I thought that the past tours included a significant “boring” section along Highway 72 between Huntsville and Scottsboro; I had driven that path many times during our boating weekend trips, and there was nothing particularly engaging in it. I had been on a very good drive led by Greg Bayuga which departed from south Huntsville, passed through New Hope, and on to a point of crossing Highway 72 near Woodville as it turned northward. I decided to combine the two into a new tour to Lookout Mountain; that would increase the opportunity for “spirited” driving.

I had a copy of Bayuga’s tour; so, with the two printed plan details, I developed a combined tour by doing a detailed map analysis, using both the provided tour package as a baseline. I also used Google Maps to build a driving route map, entering in starting point, way points, rest stop, and the destination. Google Maps calculated driving distances and times, with a visual map and turn-by-turn directions. A planning guideline was to have a rest stop for each 90-minute or less tour segment. My map plan looked good, but it had to be validated on the roads.



An important component of a tour plan is choosing a restaurant at the destination that has the capacity to accommodate parking for the cars, and a staff capable of serving the participants. Luckily for me, the Café on the Corner had already met those criteria.

Step 2: Recon the planned tour route.

I had been advised that traffic patterns varied by whether it was a work/school day vs. a weekend day. Since our tours are always on Saturdays, for a recon to be valid, they had to be done on a Saturday. I drove three recons of my planned route. They validated much, but each exposed a few surprises.

I did my first driving recon on May 19th. I drove solo on this first effort to validate the roads and the route turn intersections. I departed on a Saturday morning, leaving the assembly point at 08:00. The “driving” fun began quickly once I turned onto Hobbs Island Road; I was familiar with this route since I had used it several times during drives to/from Lake Guntersville. I knew its crossing through the Hwy 431 traffic light would be a challenge; I chose a site in the high school parking lot where the cars could regroup. I was less familiar with central New Hope; as I drove along, I missed a critical turn and had to back-track to it; I highlighted this for the tour’s route directions plan.

Back on the correct road and moving northeasterly, I noted two more critical turns. To my surprise, I came upon a large group of bicycle riders on the same road; this could be a hazard for our Porsche group that we must be prepared for. At Hwy 72, I turned easterly and followed it into Scottsboro; it was an easy run, but a cautionary area that contained patrolling Alabama State Troopers and Scottsboro Police. I made the turn onto AL 35, crossed over the Tennessee River, and made the turn onto AL 40 which would take me to Henagar for our Rest Stop. It was a nice curvy climbing road that we could charge up to the top of Sand Mountain; more fun!

At the McDonalds Rest Stop, I checked my times and noted I was a little off plan; I attributed that to the wrong turn in New Hope. After my “rest” I continued along northeasterly on route AL 75. This segment of the tour provided a swoopy road that would take us to a critical turn onto GA 136, where we would drive down the mountain on switchbacks into Trenton. I noted two critical turns at traffic lights that would need highlighting in the tour instructions. Once through Trenton, GA, the fun roads continued, this time back up a mountainside with its switchbacks to the where I found the key turn that took me along another fun road on the top of the mountain to the town of Lookout Mountain, TN. I found a critical stop sign turn inside the town that I noted. My GPS directed me along a street where the restaurant was supposed to be, but I did not find what I expected. This was a problem that I would need a solution for. I returned to my home to review my draft tour plan and I found that my mistake was that I had used Google Earth’s identified destination address, instead of the correct restaurant address included in the original source plan – that was a rookie mistake!

I updated my tour plan with what I had learned during my first recon, however, I was not able to verify the driving times since I was a solo-driver; I could not safely make notations while underway. I planned to fix that on the next recon drive. I convinced my wife Marcia to be my driver on the second driving recon, which we performed on August 14th. She did have conditions though: we had to make it an overnight trip, including dinner and a B&B. She is not a voluntary early riser, but after I explained that we needed the representative conditions expected for the actual drive date, she agreed, and that is what we did. We arrived at the assembly point at 07:30, and loitered there for several minutes. We began our tour from the

start point at 8 AM. All went well; Marcia drove at the posted speed limits, negotiating the traffic lights and turns normally. As she drove, I compared actual times and noted the differences on the draft tour plan. During this recon, we drove through a fog that was suspended over the farming land between New Hope and Hwy 72/Woodville area. I noted two more critical turn spots along the way where the correct path was partially hidden by the fog. After passing into the sunlight, it became a beautiful day for a drive. We completed the trip per plan, arriving at the correct destination, Café on the Corner. We had a nice lunch, and I coordinated with the café's owner; she was pleased to know that we had chosen her restaurant.

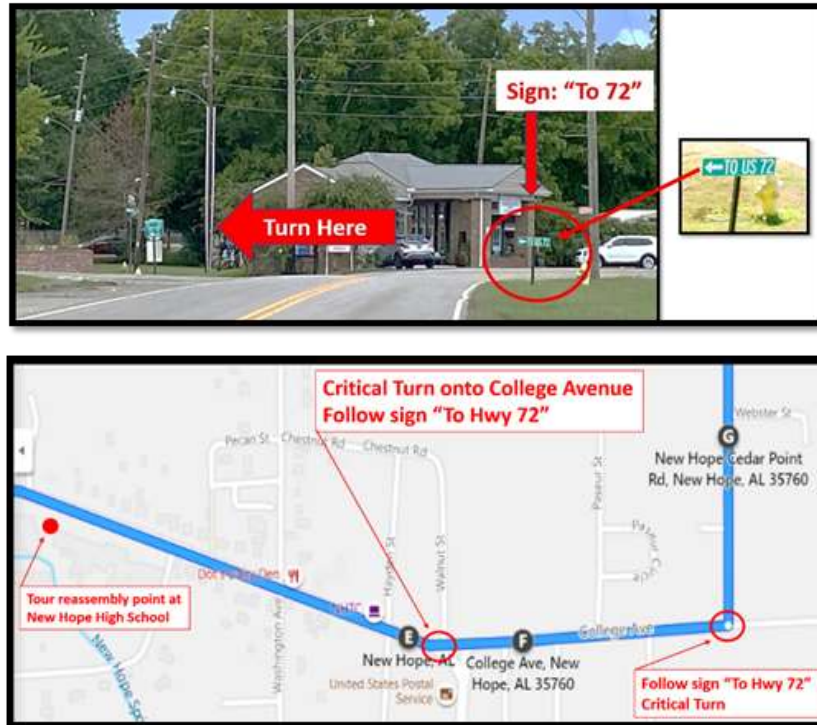
After lunch we went touring at the Raccoon Mountain Caves, thoroughly enjoying the tour. Later we searched for our Airbnb; we had some difficulty as the address was a Georgia address instead of Tennessee – who knew! But we did finally find the correct location and checked in there. After getting settled in our room, we internet-surfed for a dinner restaurant. We discovered there was no other option on Lookout Mountain; we would have to drive off the mountain into Chattanooga. We had enjoyed our Café lunch so much, we decided to return there for our dinners. Dinner was great, after which we returned to the B&B. It was a bit spartan for evening entertainment with no TV or radio; we had to stream via our phones to computer viewing.

On Sunday, with beautiful sunny weather, we departed the Airbnb, and drove to the Lookout Mountain Point Park, a Civil War Battlefield, and toured it; very interesting. It was amazing to look over the edges and realize the battle that took place with Federal soldiers fighting upwards to the top of the mountain, including dragging with them cannon pieces. After, we drove homeward via I-24 to Hwy 72 to Huntsville. The best parts of the weekend were that I was able to improve the tour plan, and Marcia had enjoyed the outing, and agreed to again be my driver for the actual tour.

Step 3: Finalize plan, publish Tour Information Package

Next in the process was to request insurance coverage by Porsche Club of America, update my tour plan into Final Draft status, and then do a final recon on the Saturday prior to the actual tour date. In updating the plan, I considered what it

was like for me as a solo driver, and following the vehicle in front of me, while trying to read the “small” print for the tour package directions - that is one of the reasons I always try to stay up front; I rarely had a navigator along for the drive. So, for my tour package, I increased the font size, included blow-ups of the map diagrams of critical turns, and added photos of those critical locations to aid the participant recognition of them. Examples:



When I thought the package was good, I shared it with Jim Cambron (Club President, and past leader of the Lookout Mountain tour) to get his opinion about it. He made a couple of suggestions, which were implemented into the final package. Jim suggested a shortcut change to the route on the other side of Trenton, GA, which would cut our time by fifteen minutes. I chose to use it to create two options, an Option A, and an Option B. If we were on or ahead of schedule, we would go with the original plan (A); if we were running late, we would go for the shortcut (B).

I did my final driving recon on Sept 11th as a solo driver again, and verified that all of the times were close and the conditions along the roads were as noted during the

previous recons. After returning to home, I made some minor edits, and added “Return to Huntsville” directions. Now, I believed the package was ready to execute.

Conduct Tour Assembly and Briefings

The original scheduled tour date had to be delayed until the following Saturday due to heavy rains. This happens occasionally, and the club President announced the decision on Friday evening.

On tour day, Marcia and I arrived at the assembly point, the south Huntsville Walmart Supercenter parking lot, off Memorial Parkway, thirty minutes before the designated assembly time. I wanted to be there before other members began arriving. As the tour leader, I was responsible for ensuring all participants signed the appropriate waivers (adult, or parental for minors), distributing tour packages, and conducting the tour and safety briefings.

As tour leader, I also designated the “sweep” car, which would be the trail car and provide progress info to me during the tour, and respond to any member whose vehicle became disabled along the way – for this tour the sweep car happened to be Jim Cambron in his yellow 911. It was important to pick a car/owner that would be easy for me to see at the front of the line of cars so that I could judge progress or delays.

We also had to identify any drivers/cars that planned to exit the tour somewhere along the way. One of the most important tasks while underway was ensuring that every participant was accounted for, and if anyone was missing, to initiate assistance for them.

We had a large turnout of fifteen cars and thirty-one participants for the morning drive, and it was a beautiful sunny and clear day. After the briefings were complete, we began lining up for the on-time departure.

Lead the Tour

Marcia and I drove onto the route at 08:00; we were on our way on-time. Marcia drove a little slower than the speed limit initially, then after everyone was underway, increased to the parkway speed limit. Traffic was light and the group moved along in good form. It was a very pleasant drive. As Marcia drove, I kept track of the times; we were within +/- 1 minute of the plan. The tour progressed per plan with no significant gaps or delays all the way to the Henagar rest stop.

We had a twenty-minute planned rest stop in either the McDonalds or Jack's restaurant. At fifteen minutes, we began sending drivers forward to the reassembly point (a business parking lot about .5 mile onward) on AL 75. There, President Jim was guiding the drivers/cars into a series of files to facilitate the group's continuation departure onward. When the road was clear, we led the tour group out onto the highway, and we were again moving along.

We continued to the critical turn across the Georgia border, where we turned onto GA-136, which we followed down the mountain into Trenton, GA. My recons had identified the potential issue of the group being broken with two traffic lights. We planned a reassembly point in a parking lot on the far side of those two lights. That plan was a great idea to get us back together as a touring group; it had been recommended by President Cambron.

With all together, we were slightly ahead of schedule, so I led us on the route up the mountain on the curvy roads (Option A). All was good until we approached the critical turn at the intersection with a flashing yellow caution light at GA-189. There were road resurfacing crews working on GA-189, and in doing so controlling traffic. This was unexpected. We idled for about twenty minutes at that intersection waiting for the escort vehicle to return to pickup another group of cars; we were now behind schedule. As the lead car, I had a friendly conversation with the sign bearer, and told him about our car group of sports cars. When his supervisor arrived, the Stop Sign guy arranged for us to be next in the queue. And then we were moving again. If we had known that road surfacing had been ongoing, we could have taken Option 2 and missed all of it and stayed on schedule – oh well!

We continued along the top of mountain, along a swooping road, through Lookout Mountain, GA and on into Lookout Mountain, TN. We arrived at our destination about twenty minutes later than scheduled. The official PCA-sponsored tour had been successfully completed with no incidents. I had completed the technical portion of my tour.

We parked, and then walked to the Café on the Corner, joining others. The restaurant staff was ready for us; they had set up most of their outside patio for us with umbrellaed tables, and settings. The weather continued to be wonderful; the service and food was top-shelf; it was a beautiful day.

After lunch, tour participants individually returned to their homes via their chosen routes. Marcia and I chose to back-track a bit so that we could stop at the hang-glider launch site and observe the brave pilots enjoying the favorable winds. It was amazing. The brave and confident pilots prepared and safety-checked their rigs, and then stepped off the mountain launching themselves, and then rode the wind above us.

After about an hour of watching the pilots, we continued our drive homeward. Although a long day, it had been a beautiful day. And, best of all, because of detailed planning and multiple recons, the tour executed mostly as planned, with no incidents. I was satisfied.

Post Tour Requirements

Ah, but finishing the “drive” does not complete all of the official PCA-sponsored driving-tour requirements. At the end of the tour, I designated a member to submit the Observer Report. And I submitted the Tour Report. Both reports are submitted via the PCA website. I printed off a copy of my report and emailed it to the Club President and Secretary.

Summary

I had a ton of fun doing this. Planning and conducting a PCA-sponsored driving tour was much easier than I originally had thought. Learning from others with

experience, following the club and PCA guidelines, and conducting multiple recons gave me both the technical knowledge and confidence to provide the club's members with an enjoyable event. I recommend that each member commit to leading such a driving tour. The most difficult step in the process is choosing the destination.