

Phoenix Rising

A 1980 911 SC TARGA
RISES FROM THE ASHES
OF A REBUILD GONE BAD.

STORY BY **DAVE MATHEWS** PHOTOS BY **NICK BERARD**

THE EMAIL, DATED December 18, 2013, read in part:

"I have some unfortunate news....We are now having to file for bankruptcy....I need you to call a transport company and arrange for them to pick up everything....At this point, the sooner the better....I don't know what happens when the bankruptcy closes....Don't worry."

The news was as stunning as a hard right to the jaw. The company Carl Jansen had chosen to rebuild the engine of his beloved 1980 911 SC Targa, the company that had been "working on" his car for nearly two years, the company that had already charged him thousands of dollars for work they claimed to have done, the company that was more than 2,000 miles away from his Chicago suburb, had just notified him that they were going out of business and he should get his car, and its sundry pieces, while the getting was good. "Don't worry..." Yeah, right. If there was ever an example of an Excedrin headache, this qualified.





THE CAR IN LIMBO was not just any car, mind you. Carl's Porsche was his pride and joy. As with many of us, Carl's fascination with Porsche started in his late teens. But with two children before he was 25 years old, family obligations took precedence. It would be 20 years before the dream of owning a 911 became reality.

How did this SC find a place in Carl's garage? "It was in 1987. One of my clients told me his partner just purchased a new 911 Turbo, but the guy was insulted by the trade-in offer made by the dealer," Carl said. "So he decided to sell the SC on his own." The client said this friend's 18,000-mile car was beautiful and suggested Carl take a look at it if he was serious about buying a Porsche.

Carl was serious, so he made a call and went to see the car. It had flaws, but nothing deal-breaking. "There was a heavy odor of cigar smoke, it carried a few parking lot scars, and the left front fender had been repaired

and then repainted. Badly," Carl recalled. "The previous owner must have been colorblind not to see the color was slightly different." But it was a Porsche 911. After a quick drive, Carl decided to buy it. "The smoke smell finally cleared out, and I bought a bra for the front end so the color difference wasn't that noticeable."

His 20-year dream became a real part of the family. Each of Carl's three sons learned the art of manual shifting, rowing through the gears of the 911 SC's 915 transmission. Mark, the eldest son, recalled riding along with his dad to PCA events and to the local golf course. Mark relished telling the story of his dad's first and only visit to Blackhawk Farms Raceway, about 125 miles northwest of Chicago.

Local car clubs regularly held driver's education events at Blackhawk, and as any enthusiastic Porsche driver is wont to do, Carl lusted for some high-speed

action. He returned home convinced that track driving was not his cup of tea after seeing another car spin off the track and roll several times.

Peter, the youngest of the three boys, remembered riding in the back seat "when I was small enough to fit." He was six years old when Carl first brought home the Targa. All three sons helped with oil changes and minor maintenance, and each was allowed to drive the car with their friends, and occasionally to high school, when Carl felt particularly charitable.

AFTER OWNING, DRIVING, and enjoying his Targa for more than a decade, Carl began to consider restoring it to its former glory. Although the car's interior was in decent shape, the door dents bugged him. The color variation on the front fender, even though camouflaged by a Colgan bra, gnawed at him. And the crease along

the entire right side of his Porsche, put there by an absent-minded valet, screamed for recourse. But there was that time and money thing.

Carl's sons came up with a remedy: the ultimate Father's Day gift. They would arrange to have the car repaired and repainted. Enter John Sode, owner of J. Sode Classical Restoration in McHenry, Illinois. A family friend, John made his bones hammering on '60s and '70s Chevys, Dodges, and Fords. His work on American muscle cars, as well as British sport cars, was legendary at the time. It made sense for the boys to take the car there to have John work his magic. And so, while Carl was out of the country, they spirited the Porsche to John's shop for restoration.

The surprise nearly turned Carl apoplectic. "When I returned home from O'Hare, I peeked into the garage to check on my Porsche. It was gone! I thought someone had stolen it." His fears were allayed after some calming



conversations with his sons. John worked on the car for nearly a year. The result? An SC that looked like it had just rolled out of the factory.

But looks can be deceiving. “The Targa always had meticulous care and routine maintenance, including oil and filter changes every 3,000 miles plus whatever tune-ups, valve adjustments, and the like were required,” recalled Carl. But old cars sometimes need care beyond normal maintenance. The Illinois shop that performed some of the maintenance identified a problem that is fairly common on the SC 3.0-liter engine: broken head bolts. In fact, several broken head bolts. The shop suggested a rebuild while the engine was out and the repairs were made. With money tight and the boys in college, Carl put off the work and parked the car.

AFTER THREE YEARS of scrimping and saving for the project, Carl resumed his search for a company that would do the engine work for a reasonable price. Naturally,

he checked the classified ads in Porsche-specific magazines. One heavily advertised company, a father and son concern in Downey, California caught his eye. Just a 13-mile drive from downtown Los Angeles, the shop touted complete rebuilds, inexpensively done. “Inexpensive” and “Porsche” rarely correlate, but Carl was intrigued.

Vetting the business from 2,000 miles away was challenging. Carl heard from an acquaintance who did Volkswagen repairs that the California shop was known for its business-to-business work and only recently had begun working directly with retail customers. A friend of a friend had dealt with the company and was satisfied with their finished product. Carl decided to drop by the shop while on a West Coast business trip.

The father was there, very willing to share the work they did. Carl viewed their “how-to” videos and even checked with the Better Business Bureau. The reports were not perfect; most of the customer complaints emanated from additional charges for work deemed neces-

sary after engines were torn apart. “I knew there would be extra charges when they got the engine opened up and looked at everything, but that’s to be expected,” Carl said. Despite the BBB blemishes, the shop appeared capable. In the end, Carl believed that he had done his due diligence. He decided to have them rebuild his SC’s engine.

ON DECEMBER 29, 2011, an auto transport arrived at Carl’s home to take his gorgeous Light Metallic Blue SC, his spotless, near-concours level Targa, his first and only dream Porsche, to Downey, California.

Two months later, the shop called Carl to tell him the engine was out and it had broken head bolts, a fact he already knew. They suggested a complete engine and transmission rebuild using OEM and quality aftermarket parts, oversized valves, racing springs, and 964 camshafts. And, of course, they needed a \$4,000 deposit on what was supposed to be a \$9,200 total charge. (Carl

later discovered they actually took \$6,000 from the debit card he provided.)

“I thought I was doing the right thing. It didn’t turn out the way I planned,” he admitted. “Once they had the engine out and apart, plus half of the money, I was in their hands.”

Carl found it impossible to keep track of the rebuild progress from 2,000 miles away. “I would call periodically to see when the car would be ready. The owner would tell me how great things were going; other times, he didn’t call back. Once I was told, I ‘was in line for the clean room assembly line.’ When I called back for a progress report, I was told they had an emergency; a race car had to be readied.” Anger, anxiety, embarrassment, frustration—Carl experienced all of these emotions.

When he was in Los Angeles on business, Carl would stop at the facility to check the progress. “One time, he [the owner] came out with a box of parts he said needed to be replaced. Not knowing what the parts were, or who they actually belonged to, I was stuck. My options

There is something about Light Metallic Blue that softens Carl Jansen’s SC, but it doesn’t diminish its sportiness. The color blends with even the most industrial setting.



were to pick up the car and parts and ask—probably sue—for a refund, or wait it out. When my turn finally came to get on the assembly table, I received a call advising that the car needed \$3,500 in additional parts, including a clutch flywheel, wires, fuel injector, and two more pages of parts.” The suggested transmission rebuild increased the new total by \$5,500.

In late 2013, Carl emailed the shop advising them that he would be in Los Angeles in January 2014, and that he planned to stop by to discuss the work, their progress, the delay, and the excuses.

THEN HE RECEIVED THE EMAIL. What to do?

Carl immediately called Bill Papaj, his friend and an attorney in the Los Angeles area. “He [Carl] told me that the shop doing his work was going under and he needed help getting his car out of their garage,” recalled Bill. “I rented a storage locker and lined up a flatbed truck to take his car body [the engine was no longer in the car] to storage. A day later, I hired another truck to haul the engine to the storage locker. I put boxes of extra parts in the trunk of my car.”

Bill recalls the pandemonium at the facility. “Police were there, guns at the ready, trying to maintain order.” The shop housed hundreds of Porsches, all crammed together, parked inside, outside, and in various stages of repair, according to Bill. Rumor had it that cars had been stripped and parts scavenged, then resold or used on other cars. Customers screamed for their cars, for their parts, for retribution...for blood.

Carl had to figure out what to do next. Local shops refused to work on his car. He had little in the way of documentation, and what he did have was suspect. The SC spent months in solitary confinement before he located a shop that would even look at it. Finally, Carl found Robert Wessels, owner of Dutch Treat Porsche in Lawndale, California. A family-owned business since 1972, Dutch Treat (the name chosen by Robert’s Dutch father) was well known in the South Bay area, 20 miles southwest of downtown Los Angeles.

Yes, Robert would take a look. No, he would not make any promises. And yes, the engine should probably come apart again to properly assess—and by the way, it ain’t gonna be cheap. Seeing light at the end of what had been a very dark tunnel, Carl arranged to move the car, the engine, and several boxes of loose parts to Dutch Treat.

Another piece of luck came Carl’s way. His friend, Pat Yanahan, kindred spirit and all-knowing Porsche guru of the Chicago Region, planned to attend the annual L.A. Lit and Toy Show in 2014, and he would take a look at Carl’s car and check out Robert’s shop.

“The car was in sorry shape,” recalled Pat. “The exterior still looked good, but the interior did not. The dash was buckled. The carpet was shot. The seats were beat up and scuffed, damaged from car parts that had been tossed on them. The sun-baked interior would have to be completely replaced. And then, of course, the mess with the engine...”

“Considering all the people who got hurt in that deal,” added Robert, “Carl was one of the lucky ones. He did get his car and its original engine back. Many folks didn’t. Sure, miscellaneous parts were missing, the CIS, alternator, fan, oil lines, and fuel lines, for example, but all in all...”

Robert and Pat’s assessment—\$14,000, maybe more, to be done right. And that didn’t include the interior work.

FACED WITH THE COLD, HARD FACT that spending thousands more than he had already invested in the Targa would put him so far underwater that he would need a hyperbaric chamber to decompress, Carl did what Porsche lunatics do—gave the go-ahead and opened his checkbook. He loved his car.

Robert faced a two-fold challenge—sourcing all necessary parts for the 35-year-old car, and simply not knowing what had been done by the first shop. “Carl had already spent thousands on the project, yet we couldn’t know that previous work was done correctly. Most cars that come to us have symptoms. They leak,

they smoke, they make bad noises. We generally know what is wrong and proceed with the repairs. But with Carl’s car, not only were we unsure what was initially wrong with it, but based on the reputation of the other shop, we couldn’t trust that anything was done right. We had to disassemble and inspect. We were glad we did.”

As Robert got into the engine, he found many oddities. The first shop honed the cylinders and then installed no-name rings in place of OEM parts. Five of the six cylinder heads were ported and polished; the sixth was not. Not all news was bad, however. Oversized valves had been installed, as were heavy-duty springs and new rocker arms. The 964 cams were actually the real deal.

Sourcing parts took hours. Rebuilding the engine took nearly a year. After Robert’s team completed the engine, reinstalled it, and road-tested the car, they noticed a “scratching” in second gear. The transmission obviously needed attention. More time, more work, more cash.

Robert recommended Noel Calderon, owner of Trim Line European Interiors in Redondo Beach, to restore the interior. Noel is a third-generation craftsman who came to California from Central America. “When I started, I didn’t know much about cars, but I did know how to stitch,” quipped Noel. That is an understatement considering his work on multiple Pebble Beach Concours winners. A personal visit to Trim Line sealed the deal for Carl—priceless Alfas, Ferraris, and Porsches were works in progress. “It was a big job,” recalled Noel. “Nearly everything had to be redone. The seat cushions were in bad shape...the Targa top. We recovered the dash in leather at Carl’s request.”

Noel had the job done in four weeks. After the interior was finished, Robert picked up the car, rechecked it, Fine-tuned it. Debugged it. Made it perfect. “Normally we’ll put only 15-20 miles on a new engine to make sure it’s right,” said Robert. “But in Carl’s case, we knew he planned a long trip up the coast, so we logged more than 300 miles in his Targa before handing over the key.”

The SC model run (1978-1983) proved strategically important to Porsche. During this period, CEO Peter Schutz mandated that the 911 would remain Porsche’s flagship.





Chicago Region members Patrick Yanahan (left) and Carl Jansen. Their close friendship was critical to this Phoenix rising from the ashes.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, right? No. Not quite yet. Carl hadn't parked on Easy Street while visiting friends in San Francisco. During dinner at an upscale Italian restaurant, the manager approached their table, a disquieted look on his face.

"Uh, sir. Do you happen to have a spare key to your Porsche?"

"Yes, I do, but it's in Chicago."

"Oh. Hmm. Well then, sir, we have a slight problem.

It seems our valet accidentally broke the key in the door while trying to unlock it."

Epilogue: Carl was one of hundreds of owners, suppliers, and subcontractors involved in that bankruptcy proceeding. His settlement was 5.5% of his loss. Others lost everything.

And the the broken key? A sore subject better left for another time. ☯

Due Diligence



PHOTOS PAT YANAHAN

OLD CAR OWNERS OFTEN BECOME OLD CAR RESTORERS BY DEFAULT. Oil drips, doors rust, paint chips, seals leak, seams rip, and seatbelts fail to retract. Auto Zone does not carry Geritol for old cars. Regular maintenance slows the slog but can't stop it. So when the time comes to look for a restoration shop, what should be considered? Here are suggestions from experts who know:

1 Finding a quality shop that will give you a solid estimate up front is not going to happen.

—www.rodauthority.com.

The days of Earl Scheib's "I'll paint any car, any color for \$29.95. No Ups! No Extras" guarantee is long gone. No reputable shop worth its salt will lock up a firm cost for a restoration or engine rebuild beforehand. A general estimate? Yes, but no guaranteed price. There are always unforeseen issues. And unexpected delays. And additional expense. Clear, concise, and timely communication with the shop mitigates angst.

2 Consult other PCA members who've had work done. They won't mislead you.

—Pat Yanahan, Chicago Region PCA

Good news travels fast; bad news travels faster. Members love to share their experiences, both good and bad, with anyone who listens. Many Porsche shop owners belong to the local PCA region. Use this resource.

3 Visit the shop. Inspect the work area. Don't be awed by the cars....look at the shop itself.

—Hagerty Insurance

A clean, well-organized shop floor with up-to-date equipment is a good indication that work will be professionally done.

4 If the proposed cost of the rebuild seems too good to be true, it probably is.

—Robert Wessels, Dutch Treat

Quality costs. There are no shortcuts. A reputable shop knows its costs and must charge the customer accordingly.

5 Restoration shops are not body shops, and body shops are not restoration shops.

—Hemming Motor News

Skilled craftsmen who specialize in a specific make will do a better job of restoring your car than those who do not have the same experience. And it can go further than that. If one's goal is to restore a 924 or a 944, seek out a shop that has proven experience with that model. Each Porsche model is unique. Don't assume that a 356 specialist will be the perfect choice for a water-cooled project.