



Trip of a Lifetime

16 DAYS AND
NEARLY 6,000 MILES
IN A TWO-SEAT BOXSTER.

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I MET NANCY AND RUDY SAMSEL on day two of the 2017 Parade in Spokane, at the Concours 101 seminar. Nancy is a Brooklyn girl with an accent as thick as *My Cousin Vinny's* Mona Lisa Vito. Rudy is gregarious, with a big smile, a round face, and a tattered fedora that looks as if someone sat on it. They were eager to talk, and I knew I wanted to get to know them better when they told a story about getting married one morning and doing a PCA rally that afternoon (more on that later). They are salt-of-the-earth folks who seemed to revel in simple pleasures—each other and, like true fans of the brand, their Zenith Blue 1998 Boxster.

When Grant Larson first put pen to paper designing the Boxster, he surely had the Samsels in mind. The price of a Carrera had risen stratospherically in the 1990s, rivaling the cost of a modest Midwestern home. A sports car with nimble handling, good looks, ample storage for weekend trips, a top that went down, and a price that would not crack the retirement account was just what thousands of sports car fans clamored for. Introduced in 1993 and offered for sale in 1997, the Boxster blended the tradition of Porsche's 914—mid-engine, a view of blue sky, and trunks fore and aft—with modern technology and shared 911 components. The new Boxster was Porsche's really big little deal.





NANCY AND RUDY acquainted themselves with the PCA community before they actually purchased their car. They joined PCA Test Drive, a program in which “not-quite-yet” Porsche owners receive a six-month subscription to *Panorama* and access to the PCA website. The benefit to this temporary membership is its glimpse into all of the activities a member can enjoy and, of course, the hundreds of member-owned Porsches available for sale. “The brother of a childhood friend was active in PCA,” said Rudy. “That’s how I knew about the club and that it was a pretty big deal.” Rudy planned to do much of the work on the car himself, and considered PCA a great resource.

Were they always crazy about cars? Well, Rudy, yes. Nancy, no.

“My ex was a mechanic,” she said. “He talked about his work all the time. I know more about carburetors than I ever wanted to know. But you know, with Rudy...well, this is the second best thing in our relationship. You’re not going to print that, are you?”

Did they look at other cars before they settled on a Boxster? “We looked at a Miata, but it didn’t have the storage room,” replied Rudy. That was an understatement. “It barely had room for my hairdryer,” added Nancy. So a convertible was important and storage space was critical. What else was on the list? “It must have been well-maintained, and it could not be silver. Any color but silver.” That explains the personal plate on their car—NIGHTAG... *nicht* (German for “not”) and Ag (the

periodic table symbol for silver).

After browsing through classified ads and online sites, they found what appeared to be the right car—a triple blue, manual shift Boxster on Craigslist. It was a two-owner car. Although the second owner had a garage full of old American iron, he was not a Porsche enthusiast.

“He drove the Boxster 40 miles in three years—40 miles,” said Rudy. An undertaker in East Philadelphia, the seller had planned to use the Boxster for his weekend commute to the Jersey Shore but didn’t like the stick shift in city traffic. “He was a very nice Italian guy—can’t remember his name now,” added Nancy. “Joe something-or-other. He just didn’t like driving the car. When we showed up, he just handed us the keys. ‘Go ahead. Take it for a drive,’ he said.”

JOE SOMETHING-OR-OTHER may not have liked the Boxster, but Nancy and Rudy did. They liked everything about it, especially the color. The maintenance booklet reflected the first owner’s meticulous attention to detail. “I’ll never forget when I saw the manuals for the car,” related Rudy. “I began to page through them, and it was all there. Everything was done on time and at the Porsche dealer, even replacing the wiper blades and tires.”

Nancy told Joe that Rudy really wanted the car, so he said he would hold it for them. Not good enough for Nancy—she wanted the car then and there. What she thought might be a problem, wasn’t. “All I had was my checkbook—a personal check.” Joe didn’t flinch. A personal check was good enough for him. In fact, he

even added something extra.

“Wait a minute,” said Joe, “Before you go...” With that, he ran up the steps to his home and came back with boxes of homemade ravioli. “You’re Italian, right? So you got sauce in your freezer, right? Go home and enjoy some ravioli tonight. On me.” Pasta and a shared Italian heritage sealed the deal.

What followed the next day was typical for any new Porsche owner—a long drive, a thorough cleaning, and a little second-guessing. But only a little. Nancy and Rudy loved their Porsche. Rudy continued his maniacal cleaning and took care of small maintenance issues, such as changing the mass airflow sensor and replacing the tires. “They were over six years old,” noted Rudy.

Their Boxster had 70,000 miles

on the odometer when purchased. In two years of ownership, they added 17,000 miles, not counting the 2,500 or so miles they would be adding on their return trip to New Jersey from Spokane. Not a daily driver, the Boxster is driven purely for pleasure. And mind-clearing therapy. Nancy commutes 45 miles a day; Rudy commutes 60 miles. And yet... “There are a lot of days when we come home from work and the weather is great, so we go for a drive in Hunterdon County [New Jersey]. We’re about eight miles from the Delaware River. The Delaware borders Bucks County [Pennsylvania]. We’ve got an endless supply of phenomenal roads.”

AFTER ATTENDING EVENTS at several PCA regions in the area, Nancy and Rudy found a home with the North-

Buffed and polished to perfection, this 19-year-old, 90,000-mile Boxster belies its age. The blue Porsche Parade badge is an appropriate remembrance of a bucket-list trip.



ern New Jersey Region (NNJR), where they were welcomed with open arms. “Last year we attended their annual ‘Welcome to the Club’ Concours and Rally,” said Rudy. “It’s a way of introducing new members to different activities. I really wanted to concours the car, so I worked feverishly on it. I bought lots of different products to clean the car with.”

Nancy thought he was nuts. “I told Rudy that he should go alone since the event was probably a guy thing.” Then when they went to the concours, Nancy saw that women were down on the ground, polishing and wiping, alongside the men. “I fit right in,” she says. How did they do in that first concours? “I was very humbled, but not intimidated,” replied Rudy. “He came home crying,” added Nancy.

Recognizing passion when they saw it, NNJR officers asked the couple to be New Member Liaisons when that position became available. “I guess we were like the model Porsche club new members,” said Nancy. “So within a year of joining, we’re on the Board of Governors. NNJR is so welcoming, so ‘open arms.’ And we really enjoy their gimmick rallies.”

At the mention of gimmick rallies, one in particular brought smiles to both Nancy and Rudy. Held regularly since the 1960s, NNJR’s René Dreyfus Rally is the Queen Mother of region gimmick rallies. René Dreyfus was a French race car driver who, in the 1930s, competed throughout Europe driving Bugattis, Ferraris, and Maseratis. Along with other victories, he won the 1930

Monaco Grand Prix and competed in the 1940 Indianapolis 500. With his brother Maurice, René opened the French restaurant Le Chanteclair in New York City in the 1940s. The restaurant became a hangout and watering hole for the international road racing community. The René Dreyfus Rally is a celebration of good roads, great cars, and fun-loving people.

The Dreyfus Cup—yes, it’s an actual loving cup donated by René Dreyfus—can only be awarded to the pilot of a Porsche, even though drivers of all marques are invited to participate. Being avid rallyists, Nancy and Rudy planned to compete in the event. It promised to be fun most of the time, stress-free most of the time, and a great way to enjoy a fall afternoon the entire time.

ALSO DURING THIS PERIOD, Nancy and Rudy were planning their wedding. Neither wanted it to be a flashy event, so when a neighbor offered to officiate an informal ceremony on November 6, and friends agreed to witness the event if it could be held in the morning, the die was cast. “It was perfect—marry in the morning and rally in the afternoon. Everything low-key. So we got married, shared a little wine and cheese with our friends, shooed them off, and headed to the rally.”

Nancy and Rudy had participated in five or six previous rallies, all with less than stellar results. But that day, everything clicked. They found the clues, answered the questions, and drove what seemed like the requisite number of miles. They thought they did well, but didn’t know for sure un-

til the results were announced at the banquet later that evening.

The rallymaster began his announcements while Rudy and Nancy were chatting with friends. Then Nancy heard their names. They nailed *first place!* “We had been married for only a few hours and I hadn’t told anyone, but Rudy—I could have killed him,” said Nancy. “He walked up to receive this big trophy and said winning it was the second best thing that happened that day. The group shouted, ‘What could be better than winning the Dreyfus?’ Rudy said, ‘Getting married this morning.’” So much for low-key. The Dreyfus Cup is now prominently displayed on their coffee table.

THE SAMSELS DECIDED to attend the 62nd PCA Parade, their first, back in

February. In preparation, Rudy took the Boxster to Flemington Porsche for a complete checkup. After all, the car was nearly 20 years old, and a round trip would tally more than 5,000 miles. “Everything checked out,” reported Rudy. “The dealership recommended rear brakes, so I did that. I also replaced the plugs and changed the oil. Some people think that it is difficult to work on these cars. It really isn’t that bad. The internet is a great resource. There were no problems on our trip except for a blown fuse caused by a bad USB plug.”

“We also practiced loading the car for such a long trip,” added Nancy. “Of course, Rudy had to take all of his concours stuff—his rags, his Q-tips, and his spelunker’s headlamp. I had to take my hairdryer.”

Triple blue—just what the doctor ordered. Their personalized license plate underscores the Samsels’ aversion to silver cars.



Trunk and frunk provided space suitable for concours cleaning supplies and a hairdryer. An avid photographer, Nancy captured what was, what is, and what's to come.

So they decided that Nancy would get the trunk and Rudy would get the frunk. “Anything I could load in the trunk, I could bring. If I couldn’t squeeze it in, it didn’t come along.”

Some folks may be apprehensive about making such a long trip in a two-seater. Not the Samsels. They said the ride was comfortable, storage was more than adequate, and the fuel mileage was surprising. Rudy did most of the driving. “I don’t drive the same way Rudy drives,” said Nancy. “And when he gets nervous, I get nervous.” They passed the time singing oldies, exchanging lines from *My Cousin Vinny*, and laughing. Plenty of laughing. And gesturing. Nancy waved her hands enthusiastically as she discussed everything from pasta to Porsches. The genuine Italian article.

What do they most enjoy about PCA? “You know, it feels good to have camaraderie,” answered Nancy. “You have a common bond. It’s something to talk about. Although we don’t do any of the track events, we keep busy most of the year. We are empty-nesters. PCA is perfect for us. It keeps us together. It’s nice. I like it.” Then she giggled. “My daughter has two little babies. She’ll say,

‘Mom, can you...’ and sometimes I’ll say, ‘No honey, I’m kinda busy.’”

Rudy jumped in. “Nancy thought PCA would be a guy thing. We found that it is more a couples thing. And as more young people are buying Panameras and Macans, there are kids sitting on those back seats.”

They consider their first Parade a rousing success. Competing in class PP13T, they finished less than a point from first place. Water spots, invisible in the basement concours preparation area, became painfully obvious under the bright Spo-

kane sunshine. In addition to the concours event, Nancy and Rudy enjoyed some of the tours and the socializing. They definitely plan to attend future Parades.

An avid blogger and photographer, Nancy did a marvelous job of documenting their trip with her blog: 98boxstertravels.wordpress.com. After two weeks and 5,974 miles, she concluded: “Driving cross-country was a trip of a lifetime. It was on both of our bucket lists, and we can’t wait to do it again. Over, and over, and over again.” ☯



PHOTO BY NANCY SAMSEL