



FOR ONE PCA MEMBER, THIS 1994 968
WAS THE ONLY CAR THAT WOULD DO.

STORY BY **DAVID MATHEWS** PHOTOS BY **MICHAEL ALAN ROSS**

BLUE BEAUTY

Everyone loves good news and pleasant surprises. Take Horace Mann Newell, Jr. When his phone rang one morning in April 2014, the voice at the other end asked, “When are you going to come pick up your car?” At that moment, Horace’s life got infinitely better. He was about to become the owner of a car that had “spoken” to him months earlier. ♦ We met Horace in the parking structure at Jay Peak Resort during the 2016 Parade. He was doing what hundreds of other Porsche people were doing—rubbing their cars. I was doing what I do—walking around with a pen and notepad, asking questions. “Hey, how are you doing? You’ve got a beautiful 968, there. Entered in the concours?” ♦ “No, giving it a break this year,” he said with a smile and an outstretched right hand. “Just going to help some of the new guys if they want it. My name’s Horace. What’s yours?” Gotta love Porsche people!

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT consider the path Horace took toward ownership of this 968, which he calls Blue Beauty, stressful, frustrating, and painfully protracted. But his approach was calm, relaxed, and peaceful, in keeping with his strong meditative beliefs.

Horace had gone years without a Porsche when he heard of a pristine 968 that might be for sale. He had read good things about the model—quick but civilized, sporty but practical, in a Porsche sort of way. He drove from his home in downtown Chicago to Addison, Illinois “just to take a look.” It was love at first sight.

There was something captivating about that Midnight Blue Metallic color, the way its iridescence morphed into green and turquoise as

sunlight played on it. The 968’s shape was retro-modern. It maintained the strong bloodline of earlier transaxle models, but its softer contours differentiated it from the 924 and 944 that had preceded it. And those pop-up headlights—quirky cool. This 968 was equipped with Porsche’s new Tiptronic transmission, a real plus considering the traffic congestion in Chicago. Heavily, right? Not quite.

The problem was that the car wasn’t actually for sale. Ron Spooner, an 80-year-old former submarine engineer, who’d owned the car since 1999, was only “thinking” about selling it. He had enjoyed owning it for 15 years and 31,000 miles, but aging joints and an aching back made it increasingly difficult for Ron to

climb into and out of the low-slung coupe. Consequently, his 968 spent most of its time in a climate-controlled garage. The car needed to be exercised and enjoyed, but Ron was still infatuated with the car and wasn’t yet ready to part with it.

No problem, thought Horace. Instead of chasing after another car, he settled in for a wait. The fact was that no other car would do. Horace sensed a kinship with that 968 he found impossible to shake. Horace

kept in touch with Ron, and eventually they became good friends. Easygoing and with a knack for telling stories, Ron loved to share his experiences about life on a submarine. Winter visits regularly included Horace backing Ron’s car out of the garage and onto the driveway, then the two swapping Porsche stories.

HORACE HAD DEVELOPED a love for Porsches in college, when he acquired a rusty 1961 356B 1600S coupe.

A hard worker, Horace was able to maintain his taste for fine German machinery by working two jobs—in the steel mills at night and as a life-guard at a local swimming pool during the day. Between jobs, he fit in school, study, and resurrecting the old tub. “Lots of Bondo and a cheap Earl Scheib respray—Maytag White,” he quips. A college boy’s dream car.

In 1972, Horace sold the coupe and purchased a 1968 912, a car in which he was nearly killed. “I was

going through an intersection when a car blew through a stoplight and broadsided me,” he recalls. “Luckily, it struck the passenger side of the car, or I would have been crushed.” That accident brought about a spiritual awakening. “I believed that 912 somehow protected me—saved me. I sensed a kind of connection.”

A believer in Porsche karma, Horace next purchased a 1987 944, a car he kept until 1997.

Whether it was fate or just good





timing, when Ron said he was ready to sell, Horace wasted no time consummating the deal. Not so much a business transaction as a sharing between friends, Horace took Ron to breakfast after completing the paperwork. Less than a block from Ron's house, an admirer pulled up next to them and shouted through the window, "What a cool car. Love the color!"

A month or so later, Horace attended a Chicago Region concours in Joliet, Illinois. Although he hadn't planned to compete, friends urged him to enter his car in Street Class. Figuring that the best he could hope for was to pick up some pointers for future events, Horace entered Blue Beauty. A second in class in his first-ever concours made Horace a believer. "I was hooked—still am."

Although Horace loves to drive his car, his real passion is competing in concours. "I'm a Q-tip pusher," he confesses. Combining concours preparation with his interest in reiki, an ancient Japanese technique for stress reduction and pain relief, is natural for Horace. The tenet driving reiki is that by "laying on hands," energy is channeled between and through individuals and inanimate objects—like cars.

"When men and women build with pride machines such as Porsches, a little bit of that pride becomes innately part of the automobile," says Horace. "And when you place your hands on that machine, whether driving, racing, or rubbing, you also give life to it. That is why we name our cars."

Horace was invited to show his 968 in the "60 4 60" display at the 2015 Parade in French Lick, representing model year 1994. Blue Beauty also competed in the Parade Concours d'Elegance, Preparation Class PP08S. Despite the metaphysical mojo and elbow grease applied by Horace and his son, Horace III, he just missed a first-place finish. Ah, those devilish details.

"The judge asked me to bend down and take a look at the pedal

cluster. 'Right there, see it? That hurt you.' A single blade of grass clung to the bottom of the brake pedal." Horace carries that blade of grass in his billfold as a constant reminder of the importance of small details.

DETERMINED SIMPLY TO have fun at Jay Peak, Horace decided not to enter the concours. Less pressure and less stress—or so he thought. Sunday, five days before Horace was to hit the road, he noticed a large puddle of darkish fluid spreading around the right rear wheel of his car. Stooping down to get a closer

look, Horace tabbed the puddle with his finger and gave it a sniff—transmission fluid!

Worse than the problem was finding the fix. Horace's mechanic was out of town on vacation. Horace contacted Pat Yanahan, sage member of the Chicago Region, for advice. Pat suggested Midwest Performance Cars (MPC), a shop with a good reputation that is not terribly far from Horace's home. Horace called MPC first thing Monday morning. The shop was packed with work, but yes, they would fit the 968 in—somehow. After following the flatbed to MPC and discussing the issue with

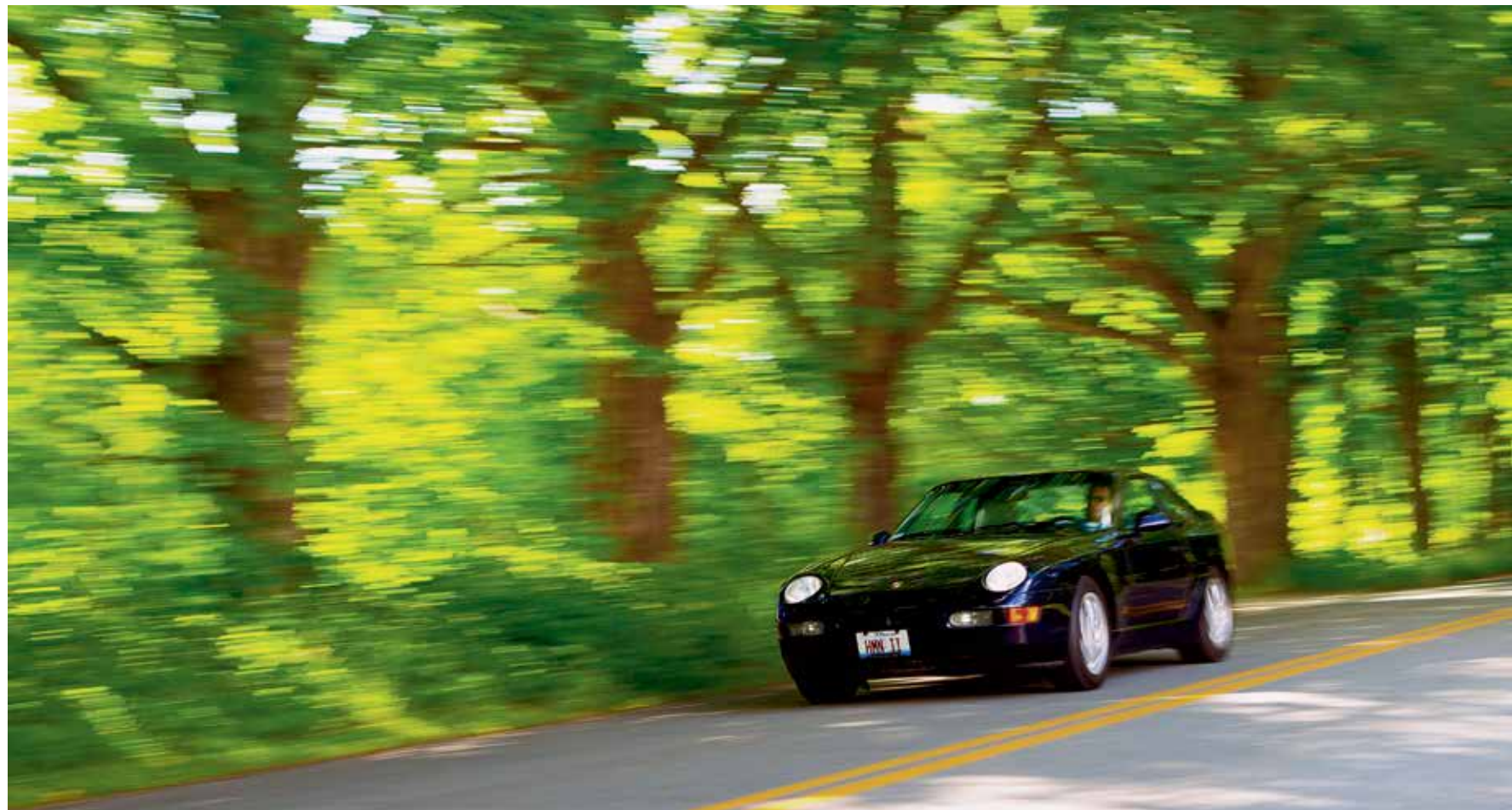
one of the technicians, the other shoe fell. "What's the matter with your eye?" the technician asked. "A sty? That looks bad. Does it hurt?"

Distracted by the pressing problem of his 968, Horace hadn't noticed his swollen right eyelid. Although it didn't hurt, the lid was an angry red and continued swelling with each passing hour. Horace's next stop was to his ophthalmologist. Together, they sleuthed the cause—Horace must have brushed his eyelid after he touched the transmission fluid, causing the irritation. Although Horace's injury was not

permanent, his swollen eyelid created a vision challenge. In four days, he was planning to drive 950 miles to Jay Peak, Vermont.

A failed transmission gasket was replaced, brake fluid was flushed, and the 968 was pronounced fit for a long road trip on June 16—one day before scheduled departure. Nervewracking? Yes, but good karma prevailed. Despite having an eye that looked like he had gone ten rounds with Apollo Creed, Horace and his wife, Ruth, left for Vermont with a healthy Porsche, arriving on time and in one piece. Life—for both Horace and Blue Beauty—is good. →

Opposite: Brembo-sourced brake calipers peek through "Cup 1" wheels. The blade of grass that prevented a first in class. The 3.0-liter engine produced a sub-six-second 0-60 time. Below: The 968 measures two inches wider than the 924.



The Road to the 968

ENTHUSIASTS didn't like it at first. An engine in the front and transmission in the back? Certainly uncharacteristic for a Porsche. A water-cooled, inline four-cylinder? Sacrilege. A hatchback sports car? What were they thinking?

Introduced in 1976, the 924 caused quite a stir. This car, the successor to the mid-engined 914, with which it shared those cool '70s pop-up headlights, was slated to be the company's entry-level sports car. Built by Audi in Neckarsulm, the 924 was Porsche's first "transaxle" car. Despite a shaky start, perpetuated by the mixed reviews of a skeptical press, the 924 eventually achieved sales numbers that made Porsche accountants smile and cor-

porate executives sigh in relief. The base model's 2.0-liter engine only produced 95 hp in North America (125 hp in Europe) when it was introduced, but was re-engineered to develop 110 hp for the 1977.5 model. More powerful versions of the 924, including the Turbo, Carrera GT, and 924S followed.

The 944 that debuted in 1982 retained the distinctive pop-up headlights of the 924 and also underwent a body-building regimen, developing bulkier shoulders, flared wheel arches, and bumpers that more closely followed the contour of the fenders. The 944's 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine produced 160 hp (DIN) in Europe but only made 143 hp (SAE) in the U.S. due to emis-

sions paraphernalia. Later 944 models benefited from a four-valve-per-cylinder 2.7-liter engine that eventually grew to 3.0 liters. At the top of the mountain sat the 944 Turbo, which gave traditional 911 owners a run for their money with its power and precise handling.

The 968, first offered in 1992, was the last of the four-cylinder transaxle era. Viewed from the front, it offered an uncanny preview of the air-cooled 993 that was first introduced in 1993. The exposed headlights of the 968 popped up, frog-like—an unmistakable styling cue borrowed from Porsche's 928. Built entirely in Zuffenhausen (unlike the 924 and 944), the 968 was regarded by most Porsche enthusi-

asts as the real deal. Standard fare was a 3.0-liter engine with the then brand-new VarioCam variable valve timing. At 236 hp, it was the most powerful normally aspirated four-cylinder engine of the era. Offered both as a coupe and a cabriolet, the 968 came with either a new six-speed manual or a dual-mode Tiptronic transmission.

Although the 968 was the best of the lot, it was not a big seller. Packed with features found in its more expensive brethren and blessed with nimble, neutral handling, the 968 was produced until 1995. It marked the end of Porsche's affinity for four-cylinder engines—until today's turbocharged 718s roared into its showrooms. —DM



Classic, tri-color interior with analog gauges and retro clock. Although it looks it, this 968 is no garage queen.

