



FROM THE BASEMENT... APEX PERFORMANCE

STORY BY CLARK HAMERLY; PHOTOS BY CLARK HAMERLY AND SKIP CARTER

I joined PCA in 1991 and, at that time owned a 1981 911 SC. I attended the Allegheny Region's annual All-Members dinner and unexpectedly won a free driver education weekend at Nelson's Ledges. I had never considered going to the track, but I had to give it a try. I absolutely loved it and knew that this was something I wanted to get as much of as I could get. I was 46 years old (not exactly a kid), and did as many DEs as possible over the next 2-3 years at Nelson's Ledges, Mid-Ohio and Summit Point. I couldn't get enough.

In 1994, I acquired a purpose-built racecar that had won the SCCA Runoffs in 1981 and was on

a 1981 Porsche factory race poster. The car is a 924DP (or 933) raced by Tom Brennan. I still own this car. When I say purpose built, I mean purpose built. Everything was trick and constantly needed attention. I only drove it three times before it got pushed to the side of the garage in favor of some 944s that were much easier to track.

In November 1996, I got divorced from a woman who failed to see my fascination with cars (much less going to the track).

In February 1998, Linda and I got married. I told her up front that Porsches and going to the track were a big part of my life. She said she understood and wanted to join me

(win-win!). She had a Camaro and did a couple of PCA DEs. We were having fun and she liked it.

In 1999, I purchased a 1995 968 that was a light front end total. I decided to turn it into a racecar. I needed seats, so I bought into Corbeau as a dealer thinking I would just sell off the Corbeau seat inventory to other drivers. This was the beginning of Apex Performance out of my basement in Pittsburgh, PA. I realized I had the knack for selling stuff and I enjoyed it.

I wasn't very good with computers, but Linda (being 24 years younger) was cutting edge. She would ask me what I was doing on the computer until midnight. My response was,

“for the first time in my adult life, I am making money without working for someone else.” From 1999 to 2001 we sold Corbeau seats and mufflers to kids running Hondas. I did not understand what they were doing, but I did understand road racing. So, in 2001 we started to lean towards racing safety: helmets, harnesses, etc. I served as President of the Allegheny Region 2002 and 2003, and we had a PCA Club Race in 2003 at what was then called BeaveRun (now named Pitt Race). I decided it was time to get my PCA Club Racing license. At the same time Linda quit her full-time job to run the business out of our basement. We were the trackside supplier at BeaveRun in 2003- 2004. This paved the way for us to get a HANS dealership. This was our version of winning the World Series, and it felt like we had arrived. We also became the full series sponsor for the 944 Cup series.

In 2009 I left my full-time job. We sold our house and moved to Murrells Inlet, SC, a place where we already owned a condo. Because we couldn't run the business out of our condo, we leased a 1,500 square-foot unit in an industrial park. I remember signing a three-year lease thinking to myself, “buddy, I hope you know what you are doing!” In 2010 we were looking for new sponsorship opportunities. We looked towards PCA Club Racing and, in 2010, we became a National Sponsor, which has worked well for us. We understand the PCA mindset. We are Porsche people ourselves and, while we no longer drive at the track, we still have four Porsches.

At the same time we became a Performance Friction (PFC) distributor. This was an easy sell for me. I had raced on PFC's and knew they worked well, so I could tell people how the compounds would perform. I memorized all the part numbers for Porsches and BMWs. Linda would listen to me talking to customers, telling them the part numbers from memory, and she would ask “How can you remem-



ber all those part numbers but you can't remember where you left your keys?” Good question...

Since 2010, we became Motorsports Partners of Essex Parts (North American Importers of AP Racing and Ferodo) and Girodisc. We also upgraded our trailer to the current 53' Featherlite. We go to the track about 15 weekends a year. You'll always find myself, Linda and Miles (our track dog).

We set the inside of the trailer up as a store. Drivers can walk through, pick things up and look. Most of our weekends are DEs, but we support

three Club Races a year: Sebring, Daytona and Road Atlanta. In 2011, we purchased a lot in the industrial park where our office was leased. Then in 2013, we built our own 4,100 square-foot building which will be totally paid in full at the end of this year.

Looking back, we have come a long way from our basement in Pittsburgh and it is largely due to our affiliation with PCA. I am now 72 and keep getting asked, “when are you going to retire?” I tell everyone the same thing, “I will retire when it is no longer fun. I love it.” ❏