

It takes 2 Porsches to tango

Pablo Deferrari

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There was a point in my life when I wanted to chuck it all away and live a simple existence. I had lived on a 32-foot sailboat with the intent to circumnavigate the globe. I knew enough to hop freight trains to crisscross the country and see America through the back door. I thought it romantic, but my wife didn't dig the risk of being an amputee traveling this way.

Then I considered putting a roof rack on the 911 and stuffing every one of its crevices with essentials needed to tour the continental U.S. — dogs included. All of these plans went to hell. But there was one sensible solution to change our surroundings and experience a different lifestyle without the high risks — living abroad. Our ultimate choice was Argentina.

My family is from Uruguay. Due east of Argentina, it boasts beautiful beaches and countryside, unbelievable hospitality, and it ranks third in the World Environmental Scorecard. My wife and I fancied the idea of maybe setting up shop there for a little while to change things up a bit. Being a native of the U.S., I thought ahead of such a concept and acquired dual citizenship to facilitate our integration in the future.

With a great quality of life, beautiful French inspired city planning and architecture, socialized medicine, cheap organic food and wine, and California type seasons, it was perfect. Except for one problem: Porsches were rarer than finding 928 fuel hoses at the dealer.

We were more than willing to jettison the little comforts of life we were accustomed to here in the U.S., but Porsches weren't part of them. You see, we could live on the bare necessities when it came to domesticity. But when it came to a passionate choice in mobility, we had very discriminating tastes. Uruguay, although a very



cosmopolitan, had only one Porsche dealership. One. Never mind that there weren't many there to begin with. No club, no Pelican or Paragon — pfff, no Brad Penn oil. None of that. Right, time for plan B.

Argentina. We weren't beach bums, so Uruguay's neighbor was our next choice. We focused on Buenos Aires since it was a bit more accommodating to the lifestyle we've been used to in America, but it offered a more laid-back pace with all of the great attributes Uruguay possessed. The best part? They not only had tango, great cuisine and Porsches, but they also had an active Porsche club. And although the number of Porsches (mostly post-1996 models) was minuscule in comparison to say, California, there was still enough of a community to make you feel at home.

I found the Porsche Club Argentina and contacted the president, Ramiro Capeans. We struck up a great dialogue concerning our Porsche passions, and then I got to the nitty gritty.

"We've got three Porsches we'd like to bring with us, is this possible?"

"I'm afraid this is impossible, Pablo. Although you have dual citizenship with Uruguay, even if you decide to immigrate to Argentina from there, you are only allowed one car."

There was silence over the phone for a moment. I got the feeling that's what he was supposed to say to someone like me.

"Ramiro, come on, you mean there's no way we could bring in three Porsches into your country legally?"

"Government regulations allow the importation of one car only for non-nationals ... that's it."

I figured that since all three of our cars were Porsches, we were planning on becoming members of their club, and we weren't going to sell any of them, they could help us out a little. You know ... nod, nod, wink, wink. No. In fact, he was getting tired of repeating himself with the same question I was serving in a few different ways to try and get him to give me an "ah, but there is a way." No dice.

It was becoming painfully clear that unless you did some dirty, underhanded maneuver, or knew someone who could turn a blind eye in customs for a small fortune, there was no way you could bring your Porsche collection there — legally.

Well, at least we could bring over one, and if we fancied another Porsche, we could always buy one there. This is where reality set in harder than having a timing chain tensioner failure in a 968. What I discovered doing a random search for Porsches on South America's Craigslist doppelganger, Mercado Libre, yielded results that were beyond ridiculous. You'll love this:



A \$37,000 1987 Porsche 944 with 90,000 miles — nothing special, no famous owners, just a plain 944.



How about \$84,215 for a 1982 911SC? No, it's not about the paint job or the wheels. Stay with me, it gets better.



1997 Boxster with 43,500 miles — \$58,000. You read that one right. If you come to the U.S., that price buys you just about three of them.

Wanna party with the elite? 2008 Porsche 997 S with 24,500 miles — wait for it! — \$144,000. These are offerings available as of this writing, and yes, all in U.S. dollars. Go ahead and pour yourself a strong highball and tell yourself how good you have it here. Better yet, bring this article to your next "Cars 'n' Coffee" gathering, your pals won't believe it.

I know what you're thinking, stop right there. Don't even consider loading that 944 Turbo you were planning on selling into a container headed south across the equator to start a lucrative career in used Porsche exportation. Impossible ... I've already looked into it. That's why prices are what they are in Argentina and Uruguay, not only is the supply is very limited, but there is a hefty 35 percent importation tax on new cars. And when you buy high, you naturally want to sell high to recoup some of the costs.

To further compound the problem, the Argentine government made it even worse by demanding importers to export an equal amount of Argentina-made goods for every car imported. The result? Hugo Pulenta, Porsche importer, has promised to ship wine from his family's vineyards in exchange for permits to bring cars into Argentina. No wonder prices are what they are.

Well, hell, I'll be happy bringing just one down, you may think. If you think that the price of entry was expensive, I won't even tell you about servicing the thing. Even if you do it yourself and order parts from the big three, the shipping will kill you. You know what, forget the whole thing.

Look, I'll put it to you this way. If you visit Argentina, you'll fall in love. Tango, wine, beef — just about everything edible is organic — mountains, beautiful countryside when you need a nature break, passionate people. I could

go on but I won't, because if I do, I'll start to fall in love again, and that's a bad thing.

You see, I can't accept that we can take only one of our steeds. It would be like being told that six of your fingers need to be cut off, chose the four you want to keep. Impossible, I need all of them. I could easily cope, but the quality of life would diminish.

While looking to simplify life, having one or two luxuries mixed in shouldn't be difficult or contradictory if we chose to move abroad. We've done it successfully so far here in America. But I suppose that living like a hobo with Porsche passion is difficult to pull off in Argentina. It just wouldn't make any sense to enjoy a passion where the cost is nearly four times as much — no matter how great the quality of life is, without the affordability of Porsches, the pleasures of life become compromised.

In Argentina, if you are fortunate enough to be able to buy a Porsche, you are in a league of the elite. It's an exclusive club where the stakes are high and not just anyone can indulge. And in a country where the median monthly take home pay is around \$1,500, owning a Porsche is a real privilege.

Could I expect my friends back in the States to take me seriously if I told them that I just paid \$37,000 for 944 because I miss it so much and regret not being able to import it? It's doubtful; the only bit of that story to be taken so is why I'm not in a loony bin.

So, what's to be done? Unless I reach a ripe old age where Porsches start becoming a bit of a faff to the point they get in the way of more lascivious pleasures, I'll stay put in America. In fact, the next time I complain about how expensive the clutch kit was for the 993, I'll think about how much worse I'd feel having this problem in Argentina and be thankful I can enjoy such a privilege here. Tango on.

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About the Author



A dyed-in-the wool, air-cooled 911 junkie, Pablo Deferrari doesn't discriminate against other Porsches. Want further proof? He's in love with Porsche's early water-cooled models and is dedicated to the celebration of the 924, 928, 944 and 968 series. Pablo is one car away from having all four of these models in his own collection: the 924.

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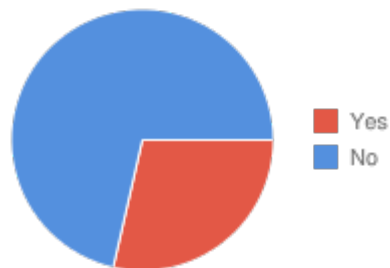
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