

# The human element of Porsche buying

**Pablo Deferrari**

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My wife has wanted a 968 Cabriolet since the day she saw her first one. I remember half-heartedly looking for one 10 years ago, but steered her away from 968s because I'd heard tragic stories about pinion whine, then complete failure because of some unconfirmed factory mistake with the tolerances. These were excuses, I suppose, that led me to further believe that owning this car was a bad idea.

In retrospect, I didn't know a thing about these cars back then, and quite frankly I wasn't keen on learning about them; I was too enamored with 911s and had little respect for anything that wasn't air-cooled. Things have

changed, I'm enlightened, but that's a topic for another time.

Two days ago, I finally bought the car my wife has been lusting for; it was a complete surprise, she knew nothing of my plans about making good on her dream — besides, this time I was much more knowledgeable about 968s. All of my prejudices have been washed away ages ago, so I was totally into the whole experience.

But this article isn't about how I orchestrated the whole thing, there's more to it than that — something a bit more human.

It was an instant connection. Not between me and the car, but with the owner himself. This is how the car became sold to me before I even set eyes on it. Many will wag their finger and remind you that you're buying a car, there's a certain demeanor of seriousness that needs to be portrayed — what one would call a "poker face" — otherwise, you'll be played. Rubbish.

What separated me from the impulsive buyer was that I trusted my gut. If there's anything I needed to listen to, it was that.

Now, Thom Calabro wasn't a salesman, a broker or some third party that has a complete disconnect with the car. He was the owner, the custodian, if you like. Here was the man who, for about eight years, cared for this car, became intimate with it mechanically and spent countless hours behind the wheel enjoying each drive to the fullest. Above all else, he was passionate about Porsches.

Thom listed his 968 in PCA's Panorama back in the summer of 2013. Now bear in mind the rarity of these cars — only 4,665 were imported to the U.S. and Canada from '92-'95, and 2,248 were cabs, less than half the total number. They have a sort of cult following, and when you see one listed by a Porsche fanatic, you need to move — fast. That's what I thought, anyway.

Lots of these 968s, much like 944s, have unfortunately become poster children for deferred maintenance. You'll find loads of them on Craigslist, Autotrader and eBay, touting new tires, the latest in Hi-Fi, recent oil change, fresh paint, etc. But you'll be hard pressed to find the facts aficionados look for. Timing and balance shaft belts, gear oil changes, cam chain, tensioner and pad replacement, the sorts of things that can cause catastrophic failure of the engine if neglected.

At any given time, you'll find these examples for tempting prices but you'd be fooling yourself. A cheap entry price will almost certainly cost you in the first few months of ownership.

What I'm getting at is finding the right person. I was also willing to bet that a car being sold by a PCA member already had a built-in higher standard than something found on eBay or Craigslist. You see, the right person almost always guarantees a very good car — and I've never been wrong in thinking this.

Right from our first conversation, I liked Thom immediately. He was honest, took his time in answering every question I had about his 968, every service or repair he performed— the sort of questions from a buyer who knows the car nearly as well as the seller.

I knew from our pretty lengthy conversation it was well looked after. That the car was listed for just over half a year made no difference. I really didn't care because having 145,000 miles is probably the reason why this car was passed over. Buyers seem to foolishly think that finding a lower mileage example is how to go about things, but I disagree. This car has passed the magic mileage where an attentive owner replaces the important bits.

Then I went to see the car.

There were no visuals for me to go by before I went, only Thom's honest description. The car was exactly how he described it to be. Now, most would ask for a ton of pictures, including close-ups of the imperfections, oil analysis and tire depth. Come on, really? What that tells me is that you probably iron your socks.

The way I looked at it was, yes, there were things that weren't going to be right — a leak here or there — imperfections my wife could live with while I sorted them out. But the fact of the matter is I had a budget for the car with a quarter of it set aside for mending things.

Thom didn't try hiding anything or deceive me with ambiguous talk; this baby had an honest patina, a take-it-or-leave-it look. I like that. Some may like the thing polished up, looking like it rolled off the lot in some cross-town used car dealer, but it's a false representation of the goods that makes it difficult for one to see beyond.

After Thom offered me tea and introduced me to his wife, we poured over a stack of receipts about an inch and a half thick, uncompressed. He also shared the images of the cam chain and pads replacement he made and a few anecdotes about his ownership. I needed nothing else to convince me that this was the perfect car to buy.

Using the 968's market value as a springboard, I made Thom an offer that not only reflected the car's value and condition along with the things it would need, and I took into consideration all of the work he had performed. No low-balling, aggressive haggling or any of the stupidities that comes with buying secondhand, just a fair offer. I was taking this thing home no matter what. The deal was done.

My wife was beyond surprised the day we picked up the car. It happened to be Thom's birthday, and during all of the excitement, we got to meet his parents and his son — truly, a nice, warm and genuine family. He showed my wife how to operate certain things on the car, gave us a bag of spares and a memory stick with everything Thom's amassed during his ownership. As we parted, Thom further extended his generosity by telling us to call if we had any questions.

What better way to buy a Porsche is there?

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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.

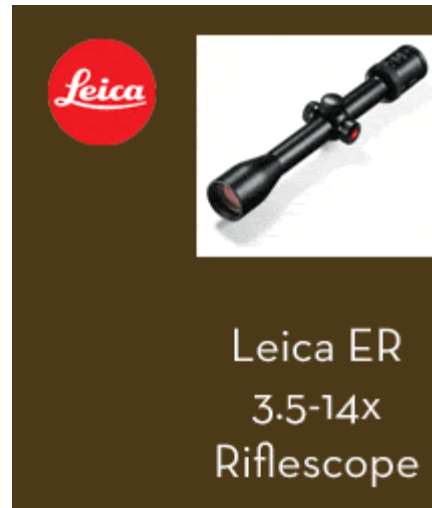
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