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## What goes on behind that parts counter?

**Pablo Deferrari**

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John Wall (left) and Mike Rowley (right) at the parts counter.

I had none left.

It was late Thursday afternoon. I'd decided to change the 968's oil on Saturday, but I had no filters left. There

were Mahle filters under the workbench — six OC229s and five OC213s for the 993, two OC46s for the 928 — but not one OC142.

"Good afternoon parts, John speaking."

"Hey John ... check a number, please?"

"What's up derrr, Pablo ... whatcha got?"

"944 107 201 08," I say. Within a few seconds, I get an answer.

"Don't have it. It's in the Northeast warehouse ... can have it here in two days."

I've been patronizing our local Porsche dealer's parts department in central New Jersey for nearly 20 years. Familiar faces, a few anecdotes and a bunch of laughs were a 15-minute drive away. I *a/ways* call them first, and they're rarely underpriced by anyone else when shipping and timing are factored in.

Saturday morning, a dozen donuts on a one-way trip; time to pay the boys a visit.

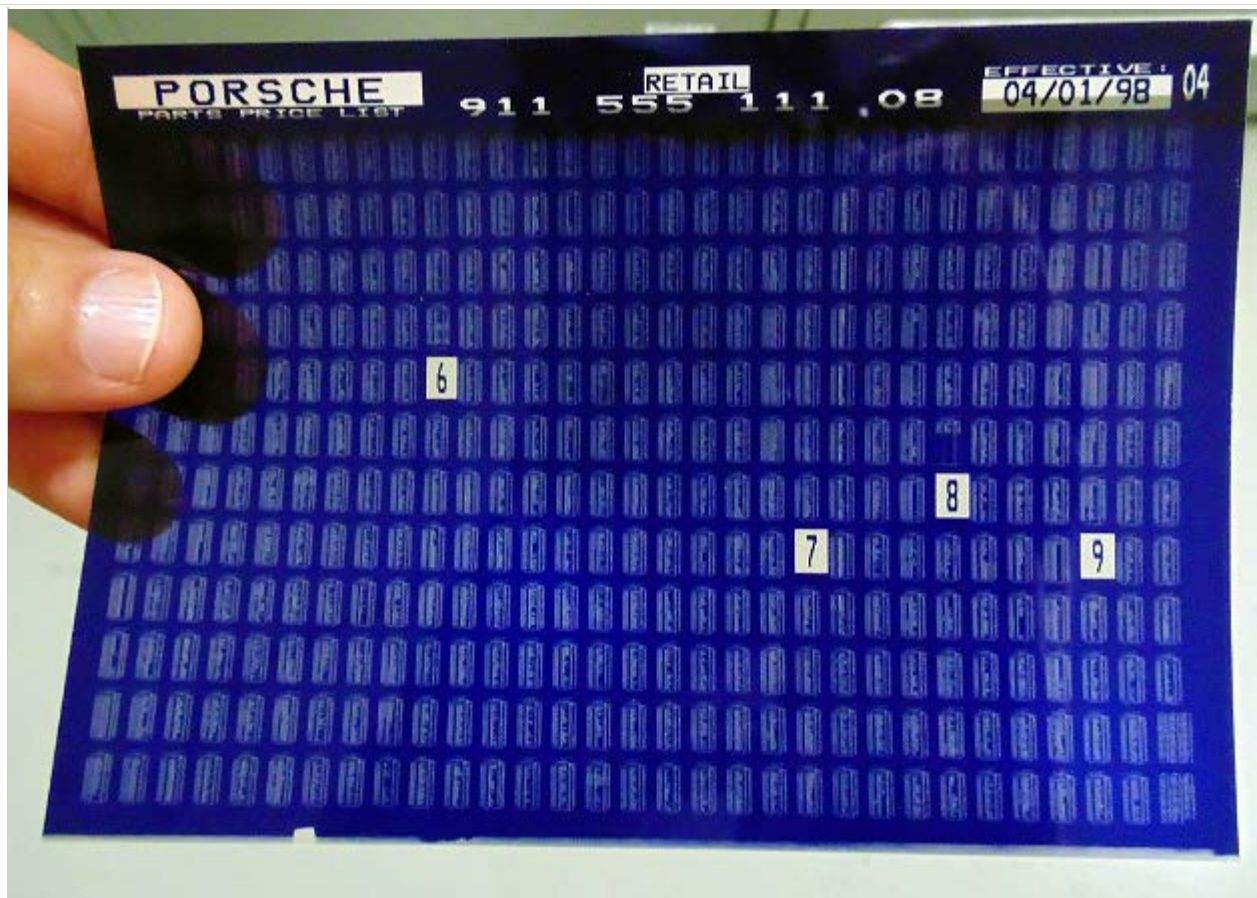
Mike Liptak, the one I've known the longest, was out that day. John Wall and Mike Rowley hosted the visit. Normally, parts, an invoice and some cash trade hands over some chat with a head turned sideways as the boy tries to shove off. But the synapses were misfiring, I hadn't the urge to leave yet.

What *really* goes on here? There's much more to the simplicity of the transaction than punching in a few numbers, unpacking some crates and assigning your part to a gray metal shelf where it waits. Of course there is, I used to do this job while at university. Hey Rip Van Winkle, want to know how much has changed in nearly two decades?

Who took the Microfiche machine and 6-inch-thick parts catalogs bloated with yellowed pages and black fingerprints? And who the hell took the truck piston filled with punched-out smokes and a week's worth of ash? Oh no, no, no ... this isn't your Pop's parts department anymore.



Years ago, we turned to the microfiche machine to find parts.



A price list of parts on a microfiche film.

The two Mikes and John make a fool of my generation's turn behind the counter. Porsche has sharpened these guys to a hypodermic point that screws into any size syringe — 2,500cc of 944, 3,600cc of 993, 3000cc of 968 ... hey, got 4,500cc of 928? You're joking, right? Hand me that 1,100cc shot of '50 vintage 356.

These guys are Porsche's elite, a group they call "after sales professionals." Every quarter, they're tested by the factory — not just about their craft, but also the company's history from the 356/1 to the 918, its racing heritage, the people, how the cars are manufactured and where.

The course load intensifies with primers on manufacturing processes and materials from bolt grades, metallurgy, plastics, single/dual stage paints — they can even tell you what kinds of cattle are used for the hides clothing your seats. It's literally a work/study program; testing must somehow be squeezed into their workday.

Each of them is directly wired into Porsche's command center in Stuttgart. Porsche has built a virtual community that links each of its employees globally with department-specific forums. Mike, for example, can chat with an associate in Australia about a backordered part taking too long to be fulfilled or customer's recent complaint on pricing. Meanwhile, a moderator at the nerve center picks up on the chat and directs the concerns through upper commands to advise on a resolution.

Theirs is a profession with serious responsibilities. Engineering, mechanics and logistics are involved in this game; they must know how to read exploded views, how to search for and understand each part's function —

including its relation to other components — and how best to get in the hands of recipients. There's part number memorization, bin locations, sorting inventory into respective groups, tracking, communicating, expediting and checking for defects.

They not only advise their technicians, but also customers in ordering correct parts, and orchestrate critical cases like a VOR, or "vehicle off road," where parts must be rushed into the shop to shave days from a customer's wait time. If, for example, components coming from Germany need a month to reach their location, a VOR order cuts that wait down to a week. If any Porsche is disabled, these guys are a crucial part of its resuscitation.

The model-specific PET we can download on Porsche's website is the same one they use — only their laser beams your part's location, how many are on hand, how fast they can get it, and what it'll cost. Give them a vehicle identification number (VIN), and they have a blueprint of exactly what parts went into your Porsche, including the options, paint, upholstery, carpet, engine and gearbox codes it left the factory with.

They tell me the number of DIY customers has gone up significantly, especially the water-cooled transaxle tribe. Some call in an order, while a larger portion of them prefer to come in person. Then, there are those who simply walk in, slam a crumpled piece of paper tattooed with part numbers in blue ink on the counter, and say, "order these for me ... *please*."

Magicians, they aren't, though. NLA (no longer available) parts have become a problem for some enthusiasts, and it's something the boys behind the counter can do nothing about. It's up to Porsche to decide whether to invest in remanufacturing parts for certain vintage models that don't have much of a demand. One day they're on the shelf, the next the remains of their shadow outlined in dust will be all that's left.

If their computers spit back "NLA," sorry — you're SOL. Don't think Porsche has some secret warehouse with your 1978 928 fuel line waiting to be discovered. Those days are long gone, they tell me.

The parts department isn't privy to whether an NLA part makes a comeback. Don't lose hope, though, because one day that extinct part may suddenly show 10 in the Northeast warehouse ... it happened to me on a few occasions. Be persistent in your search.

This department has come a long way. 60 years ago, Porsche's service and parts operations left much to be desired here in America until in 1956, Ferry Porsche sent O. Erich Filius to the U.S. as his emissary to improve the situation. When Herr Filius recommended the establishment of a factory subsidiary in 1957, Porsche of America Corporation's (now PCNA) birth from that point on realized the importance of customer support and continued improving on it.

When you call or walk into any Porsche parts department today, you won't be helped by a parts clerk, you'll be helped by an ambassador of the brand who can help exercise your Porsche knowledge and possibly teach you a few things.

Don't forget the donuts.



Bought the oil filter I "needed by Saturday."

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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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