

# One Led to Another

THIS 944 TURBO CUP CAME TO PARADE FROM THE TAJ MA GARAJ,  
HOME OF A UNIQUE PORSCHE COLLECTION.

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



## “One led to another.”

It's a short, simple answer to a fairly broad question—why in the world did John Dixon amass such a collection of Porsche cars, parts and pieces of Porsche cars, and photos and memorabilia of Porsche cars? ♦ “When he got a car, he had to have everything he could find to go with it,” said Vickie Dixon, as she reminisced about her late husband, who passed away in 2013. It was June 2015, and we were sitting on the steps of the French Lick Railroad Depot, having both come to Indiana for PCA's annual Porsche Parade. Michael Alan Ross was busy photographing the stunning 1988 944 Turbo Cup as I got the story from Vickie. ♦ When was the “Aha!” moment? I asked her. When did her husband's obsession with Porsche begin? She said John always enjoyed telling the story about the day back in 1970 when he was driving to school in his hopped-up Chevy, a 396-cubic-inch, 375-horsepower chunk of American iron. He was feeling good—until a 911 blew past him. John caught up with the Porsche, but the Chevy's brakes faded away and its wide-track tires lost grip. He bought his first Porsche the following year. And one led to another...



**THE 944 TURBO CUP** you see here represents only one facet of John's interest in Porsches. He owned street cars, collectibles, new and old cars, classic Porsches, customized Porsches, Porsches that were driv-

en, Porsches that were hung from the ceiling, and Porsches that were sticking through the walls of his Taj Ma Garaj in Dayton, Ohio.

The Dixons' Porsche collection ranges from a V10-powered Carrera GT to Porsche-Diesel tractors. It includes a hand-built 1958 356 panel delivery truck powered by a Carrera twin-cam engine and a 356 stretch limousine built for his daughters to use on their wedding days. Rumor has it that Nicolas Cage wanted to buy it, but John refused to sell.

Like most of his collection, this 944 is special. Has Guards Red ever looked better on a 944 than it does on this Turbo Cup? From its painted magnesium wheels to the hinge pins securing its lightweight hood, each detail flows into another. The red safety harness provides a striking contrast to the very black interior. Window cranks rather than electric switches, a seriously simplified center console, and a strut tower brace that spans the engine compartment all speak to the purpose for which this Porsche was built—be light, be strong, go fast.

A staunch proponent of the “Win on Sunday, sell on Monday” philosophy, Porsche promoted the 951 (the internal code for turbocharged 944s) through its worldwide Turbo Cup. Chassis number 5069 is one of 38 Rothmans Turbo Cups built by Porsche for Canadian competition in 1988. (In addition, there were eleven 944 Turbo Cups built for Canada in 1987.) According to Porsche AG, “...the 944 Turbo Cup Porsche starts the tradition of the single-marque trophies with near-standard cars.”

Near-standard was a matter of opinion. And degree. Although the Turbo Cup was designed to look like its tamer street cousins, it was all business beneath its steel, aluminum, and fiberglass panels. The Cup featured a reinforced five-speed synchromesh close-ratio gearbox, a heavy-duty racing clutch, a limited-slip differential, Bilstein front dampers, heavy-duty rear dampers, reinforced shock towers, and a close-ratio steering rack.

Turbo Cups were strippers, with virtually all creature comforts removed. They were unencumbered by power steering, a glovebox, door pockets, a radio, or climate control. Drivers contorted their frames into a Recaro racing seat and buckled in with a five-point safety harness. The rear seats were removed, along with any sound-deadening materials. An eight-point roll cage improved safety as well as rigidity. The Turbo Cups had no sunroofs or rear window wipers, no undercoating, engine shields, fender liners, fancy leather interior trim, or cassette-tape storage.

The 16-inch road wheels, intake manifold, and large-capacity oil pan were rendered in magnesium to shed weight. Manual door mirrors borrowed from Volkswagen shaved more weight. The diet was drastic and effective. The 944 Turbo Cup was about 100 pounds lighter than the road-going 944 Turbo.

The turbocharged, 2.5-liter inline four did not escape attention. While its cylinder head still featured eight valves and a single overhead camshaft, the Bosch engine management was revised to account for modifications to the turbocharger. Output



The 2.5-liter inline four is rated at a healthy 220 hp. The spartan interior features window cranks instead of switches, a padded cage, and a Recaro seat with Sabelt harness.

was 220 hp with 270 lb-ft of torque. Light, nimble, and powerful, the Turbo Cup could scoot from 0 to 60 mph in just over five seconds and reach a top speed in excess of 170 mph when given sufficient pavement.

**WHATEVER THE IMPETUS**, John decided that he needed a Rothmans race car for his collection. Maybe he wanted a car to complement the huge Rothmans wall mural in the Midwest room of Taj Ma Garaj, or perhaps it was the other way around. In any case, John's search took him to Norden Autohaus in Edmonton, Alberta in late 2002. That dealership acquired, sold, and then reacquired never-raced chassis #5069. In a letter to John dated November 14, 2002, Randy Miyagishima, the Porsche sales manager for Norden Autohaus,

related the following:

"In 1990, as the 944 Turbo Cup series was coming to its end, I discovered that Porsche Canada (a division of Volkswagen Canada, our importer at that time) had a 944 Turbo Cup car which they held as a spare in case one of the race teams had a total loss and needed a new car. Porsche AG actually wanted this car to be sent back to Germany, but I was able to secure the car for one of my local customers.

"This car was never raced, and it was not even used for display by Volkswagen Canada. It was shipped to our dealership new and still with the original factory exhaust system.... We later took the car back in trade and..."

The opportunity was too special to pass up. John bought the car, had

it shipped to Dayton, applied period-correct livery, and added it to his eclectic collection.

**THAT COLLECTION BEARS** mentioning. The Taj Ma Garaj is cool in a wacky sort of way. What started as a storage warehouse grew to what is now a 23,000-square-foot complex of several historic buildings in the heart of Dayton. It serves as a museum, conference center, banquet and reception hall, and Porsche nirvana.

Taj Central was the first piece of the jigsaw puzzle known as Taj Ma Garaj. Formerly housing a family printing company, it was remodeled to display and store John's cars. After that, as we know, "One led to another." Taj West Wing, with its hand-painted murals and four Porsches hung, suspended, or attached



to the interior walls, was originally home to Dayton Reliable Tool. Of particular note is that Dayton Reliable Tool was owned by a man named Ermal Fraze. Perhaps his is not a household name, but Ermal's claim to fame was the pop-top can, which he invented.

Taj Midwest, formerly an automotive repair facility, is now home to various automotive artifacts, including a VW Beetle hanging from the ceiling. The Taj Lounj houses pinball, foosball, and other vintage arcade games. Adorning Taj East

Wing is a rare Porsche helicopter engine made for the United States Navy in 1961. As Vickie put it, "We're not making this stuff up."

Before leaving the magical world of Taj Ma Garaj, mention must be made of a special Porsche—a 959—that can be seen sticking through the back door of a custom-built Porsche racing trailer parked in Taj East. It's not a replica; it's the real deal and was said to be the first street-legal 959 in the country. A sub-four-second 0-60 rocket ship. So why is it sticking out the back of that trailer?

Well, there's a story—virtually all of John's cars have stories—and this one goes that John wanted to "exercise" his 959 a bit before meeting with an automotive journalist for an interview about the car. That interview was to include the "ultimate driving experience." (Sorry, BMW.) Unfortunately, the 959 was struck by a Toyota driven by a woman who ran a stop sign on her way to work. Bang! Big bang! The 959 was totaled. Not one to dwell on his misfortune, John decided to celebrate the damage rather than repair it.

**Above: The period Rothmans livery stands out boldly against the 944 Turbo Cup's Guards Red paint. Below: Although the Taj Ma Garaj has a decidedly Porsche theme, there are a few outliers.**



PHOTOS: JAMES RAZOR



**Factory safety cage indicates that this is a special car; the door-handle logo adds no unsprung weight; painted magnesium "Phone Dial" 16-inch wheels.**

Porsche factory representatives offered to do the work, but the cost would have exceeded the value of the car. So there it sits, an expensive ornament, the beautiful rump of a crumpled 959.

**JOHN DIXON WAS** a private collector with a very public personality. He was a philanthropist and a community leader. He and Vickie enjoyed sharing his Porsche passion. So it was a natural fit when Vickie agreed to host a PCA National Concours Judges School in April of 2015. The first of its type for Zone 4, this school attracted PCA folks from around the country to learn the art of concours preparation and judg-

ing. Much like a trip to the dentist, concours activity can be painful before it is satisfying.

Hank Weil, a veteran concours judge, presenter, and participant, and the person responsible for securing cars of interest for the 60th Porsche Parade, recognized the significance of the Dixons' 944 Turbo Cup. He asked Vickie if she would consider bringing the 944 to Parade, as well as her paint-to-sample Pearl White 1997 911 Turbo coupe.

After counsel and encouragement from friends and family, Vickie replied, "Of course. We'll bring them both." Coordinating the trip to Parade with Danny King, owner of P3Autokrafte, a service center and

performance tuner for various German marques, Vickie and company caravanned to French Lick by car and auto transport. Vickie's Turbo coupe placed fourth in class PP05S with 138.2 points. Although immaculately prepared, the 944 Turbo Cup did not compete in the official concours, opting instead to shine in the Historic Display.

Vickie's reaction to her first-ever Porsche Parade? The maniacal allegiance shown to the brand was striking. "This Parade showed me why John loved his Porsches," she remarked. Will Vickie make the trip to Vermont for the 2016 Parade? That's anyone's guess, but, you know, one could lead to another...🌀



Photo: Andy Thonet

## There's a lot riding on these...

This is #001. It's one of the most iconic Porsche 911R's in existence. It's the great-great-grandfather of the latest 911R. It set endurance speed records that are dizzying even by today's standards. It's... priceless.

When you're in charge of such a remarkable piece of Porsche history, you have to get it right. When Tony Callas, of Callas Rennsport needs brake calipers, he comes to PMB Performance.

We'll strip your calipers to bare metal, re-plate them in factory zinc dichromate and reseal them with factory seals. The exact same process they went through at the factory.

We don't rebuild, we restore. See what we can do for your #1.



356

911

914

**⚙️ PMB Performance**

**855-STOP-101**

**855-786-7101**

[www.pmbperformance.com](http://www.pmbperformance.com)

Love us on Facebook!