



# Still Crazy...

AFTER 52 YEARS, THE JOHANSENS AND THEIR 1965 356C ARE GOING STRONG.

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**Porsche owners are a rare breed,** preferring to take the long way home, “bench racing” for hours, embellishing track experiences and freeway ramp derring-do, discussing ad nauseam the rally implications of Left at T and CAST, and speaking with reverence about the symbiotic relationship between horsepower and torque. And the concours connoisseur? Maybe the nuttiest of the bunch. Not content with a service station’s automated car wash, concours practitioners polish, pat, and perseverate about their Porsches as if an errant water spot were the equivalent of severe psoriasis or eczema. An odd bunch, Porsche owners. Some might say crazy.

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So walking onto the concours field early on the Monday morning of Parade, it was not a surprise to see folks huddled over, lying under, squeezed into, and hovering around their Porsches, wiping dust, lint, and whatever else had alighted on their cars during the preceding minute and a half. Among them were Ray and MaryJane Johansen, senior members of the Sacramento Valley Region, bending, twisting, and scooting alongside the younger generation.

The Johansens were prepping their 1965 356C cabriolet with the vigor and enthusiasm of contestants half their age. Of course, they could primp and preen their Porsche with their eyes closed. They know every inch of that car intimately. You see, they’ve owned it since

it was new—more than 52 years. And they have been card-carrying PCA members for nearly as long.

Ray and MaryJane drove their cabriolet from Sacramento, California to Spokane, Washington—nearly 1,000 miles—to attend PCA’s 62nd annual Parade. With no air-conditioning, their only protection against the triple-digit temperatures were floppy hats, sunscreen, and bottled water. Mind you, they weren’t just planning to compete in the concours competition. Ray hot-shoed it around the autocross course for the heck of it. And he entered one of his paintings in the Parade art show, taking a blue ribbon. Busy guy, that Ray. That *91-year-old* Ray! Yep, still crazy after all these years.



**INTERESTING STORY, RIGHT?** Well, fasten your seatbelt (optional in 1965) and hold on, because the Johansen saga began even before they took possession of their concours-winning cabriolet. “I ordered my first Porsche from the dealer in Sacramento,” recalled Ray. “Light Ivory with a black interior, chrome wheels, chrome luggage rack, and a wooden steering wheel. We planned to pick up the car at the factory, tour Europe on sort of a delayed honeymoon, then attend an international dentistry convention in Vienna.”

Everything went according to plan. MaryJane became a Johansen in April. Their trip to Germany was uneventful. The car was perfect, the delivery flawless. MaryJane and Ray enjoyed their new Porsche for ten days, heading first to Le Mans, then Switzerland, on to the French Riviera, and finally to Venice to purchase artwork.

Life was pretty darn good, until it wasn't. After an exhaustive day of shopping, sightseeing, and driving, Ray turned over the driving to MaryJane and promptly dozed off. Unfortunately, MaryJane dozed off, too. “I awoke as

on to his convention, leaving MaryJane to fend for herself. “The nuns packed me a lunch and took me to the station so I could take the train to Vienna,” said Ray.

MaryJane was none too happy. “I could have killed him. There I was, alone, never had been to a hospital, never had even been out of the country. But nuns, nurses, and other patients would stop by to see the crazy American woman,” she remembered. “I received great care during my stay. They brought me flowers. My meals included black bread, cheese, and tea made from the pollen of white roses...vitamin B, you know.”

Other patients and hospital attendants were not MaryJane's only visitors. Members of the local constabulary also paid MaryJane a visit. You see, because the accident resulted in personal injury, the law required retribution. Adding insult to injury, MaryJane was assessed a suitable fine and admonished for inattentive driving.

With Ray back in Klagenfurt and MaryJane in improved condition, the couple was anxious to return to



**Opposite: The 356C remains just as it was when it left Stuttgart, with only two additions—seatbelts and Coco mats. Left: Details matter. Headrests provide comfort on road trips; a Blaupunkt Frankfurt radio is there for entertainment.**

we were drifting off the road,” said Ray. “I grabbed the wheel and tried to turn the car, and MaryJane hit the brakes with a start, but it was too late.”

The 356 skidded down into a ditch and then shot up a steep hill, bounced off a concrete post, rolled over, and finally landed back on its wheels. MaryJane suffered severe injuries—seven broken ribs and a skull fracture. Ray sustained some minor cuts. Their ten-day-old car was a total loss. The artwork in the front trunk didn't fare so well, either.

MaryJane was taken to a hospital in Klagenfurt, Austria, where she remained for 21 days. Because Ray's injuries were much less serious, he decided to continue

the United States. But there was the issue of the car to contend with. Both Johansens wanted to see the cabriolet before they left, so the man who originally transported their Porsche from the accident scene to his garage took them to see it. It was pretty twisted up. “There was blood on the headliner,” said Ray. “My blood, from where I banged into it.”

But all was not doom and gloom. The factory located a cabriolet for them that was nearly identical to the one Ray had originally ordered. The differences? Steel wheels rather than chrome, no luggage rack, and a standard steering wheel. After the insurance settlement, their out-of-pocket cost was \$400.



**BACK IN SACRAMENTO,** MaryJane continued her recuperation, regaining the equilibrium she lost in the accident and healing from the banging she took. Ray busied himself with his dentistry practice. Both were eager for their Porsche to arrive. Finally, in October, they received a call that the car was ready to be picked up. And a new Porsche adventure began.

“Back then, you had to attend three events before you could officially join our PCA region. I decided to enter a concours to get started. It was my first one, and don’t you know, I took first place,” Ray said with a chuckle. “It was just two blocks from my house. The guy who normally won had to drive 50 miles. It was the only time he didn’t take first.”

One event led to another. And another. Autocross events, more concours competition, hill climbs, and even a few TSD (time-speed-distance) rallies thrown in for good measure. And, of course, PCA Parades. “We’ve been to 16 Parades,” remarked MaryJane. “Even won two sets of tires in the drawings. Come to think of it, I could use a new set of tires now for the Toyota Ray bought me.”

The 1969 Parade in Anaheim, California stands out in Ray’s mind. “It was our first. We took second place in the TSD rally and third in the autocross event. I entered the concours as well, but I don’t remember what place I got.” Whatever it was, it must have been pretty good. Ray achieved a score that secured a fourth place overall finish at that Parade. “Wish they still did that overall award thing,” he quipped.

Ray and MaryJane didn’t only use their Light Ivory cabriolet for weekend fun; they traveled extensively in it. “We drove it to Illinois where MaryJane’s family lived. Through all of those Midwestern states. Up to Oregon and down to those hills of San Francisco.” Their daughter learned to crawl in the back seat of their 356. “Didn’t have car seats back then.”

One winter cross-country trip was particularly harrowing. “I think it was in Wyoming when we ran into a bad snow and ice storm,” recalled Ray. “As I was driving, I noticed we kept getting slower and slower, like we were running out of power. Even with my foot down to the floor we were only doing 50 mph. I decided to pull off to see what was wrong. But when I tried to turn the

wheel, nothing happened. The wheel wells were packed with ice, which prevented the front wheels from turning. I began turning the steering wheel left and right so the tires rubbed and melted away some of the ice, giving me a little steerage.

“Finally, I was able to turn the wheels enough to make sharper turns,” he continued. “I went into a town and found one of those do-it-yourself car washes. I looked at the car and it had ice coming out of the fenders.... The car looked like a catfish with whiskers. I wish I had taken a picture of it. I sprayed hot water into the wheel wells to melt the rest of the ice buildup. Must have been a hundred pounds of ice in each of those fenders. The car ran better after that.”

**THE JOHANSENS FRETTE**d about coming to the Spokane Parade. After all, the car was old, they were, ah, mature, and Spokane was quite a distance from Sacramento. However, once the decision was made, Ray was focused. “I wanted Ray to trailer the Porsche up here, but he would have none of it,” said MaryJane. “He said he got the car to drive, and he was going to drive. He’s

Ray Johansen. He follows his rules, and that’s it.”

Ray prepared for the trip by changing the oil, greasing a few zerks, flushing the brake fluid, and adjusting the valves. He enlisted the help of another 356 owner to do the maintenance work, which, by the way, was done in Ray’s garage. “While the car was up [on jack stands] a little bit, I got under there and cleaned the bottom side. You know, in Preservation Class they look at everything—top and bottom.”

That 356C ran like a top. “At 3000 rpm we would be doing about 60 mph. At 3500 rpm we would be doing 70. And sometimes, I just coasted down the hills,” said Ray. They allotted three days for the trip. “We only drive during the day. That six-volt system and those tiny lights are not very bright at night.”

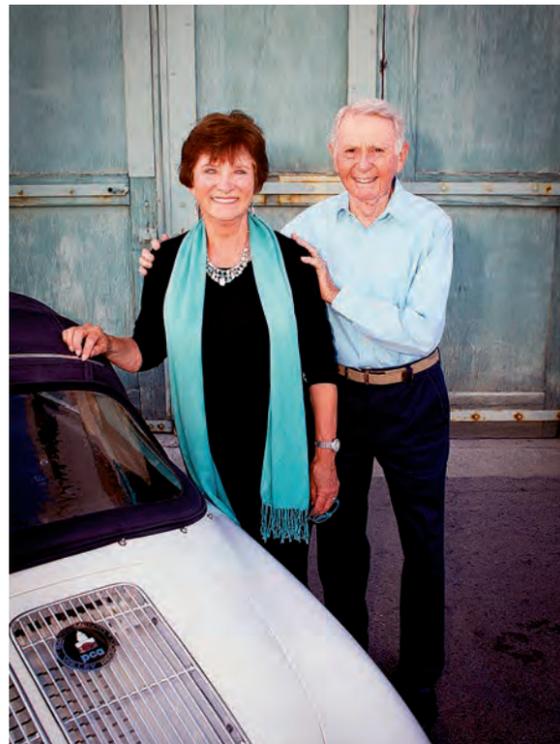
Once they arrived, the Johansens set about cleaning and preparing their car for competition. “Being a dentist,” said MaryJane, “Ray had plenty of toothbrushes.” Ray was concerned about the crazing on the passenger door, a few spots where the carpet was worn, and a door ding that had been repaired, painted, and blended. But not to worry—Preservation Class was established for

**Opposite: Ray Johansen doing what he loves—showing off with his 356C. Above: Meticulously maintained inside and out, this cabriolet belies the many miles it has accumulated.**

Right: Despite its age, the 1.6-liter engine runs like a top. Below: Ray and MaryJane Johansen enjoying an evening on the town with their Porsche—as they have for more than five decades.



cars that are driven, not hermetically sealed. Some wear and tear is expected, even rewarded. After cleaning and polishing the best they could, they decided that no more could be done. And that was that. “We went to lunch,” reported MaryJane, “and when we came back, there was a blue ribbon on our car.”



**IT WAS HOT AND MUGGY** the evening we met Ray and MaryJane for our photo shoot. The sun had not yet set, but the evening light was soft and getting better by the minute. As one might expect, the Johansens were dressed for a night out, as classy as their cabriolet. MaryJane’s scarf and turquoise necklace complemented her brilliant blue eyes. Ray wore a dress shirt and slacks, no polo shirt and shorts for this occasion. While they discussed their life together and the car they have owned since they were married more than 50 years ago, they smiled at each other, interrupted each other, corrected each other, fratched at each other.

“Sorry we didn’t keep that wooden steering wheel.”

“It was bent.”

“No, it wasn’t bent. The steering wheel, Ray. The steering wheel.”

“Oh.”

Yet, through it all, their love, and the love Ray has for his Porsche, shined through.

“Just look at him,” said MaryJane. “He’s in heaven right now. Driving, laughing, spinning the tires. Was that a cop that just drove by? Ray’ll probably get arrested.”

“He’s a kind man,” she mused. “He’d do anything for anyone. He’ll give any person a helping hand if he thinks that person may need a little help. I told him he better be careful; he’ll either get shot or sued.”

The sun set. Street lights flickered on. The neighborhood was deserted except for Ray’s cabriolet—and one wary cop.

It’s been 52 years since this 356C came to live with the Johansens. And they’re still crazy about it. ●