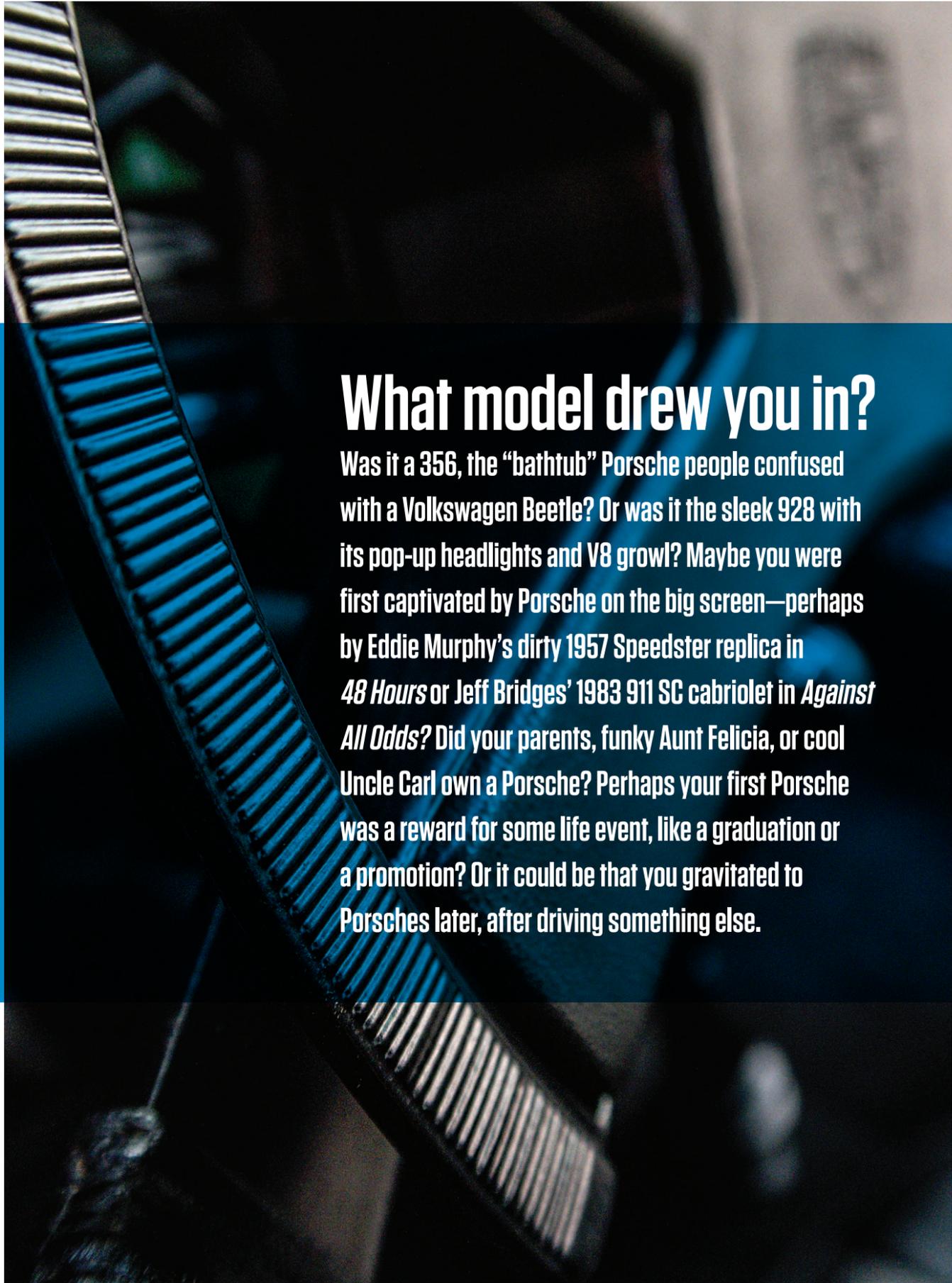


From the Ashes

AFTER LOSING THEIR 911T IN A FIRE,
THIS YOUNG COUPLE DIDN'T LOOK BACK.

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





What model drew you in?

Was it a 356, the “bathtub” Porsche people confused with a Volkswagen Beetle? Or was it the sleek 928 with its pop-up headlights and V8 growl? Maybe you were first captivated by Porsche on the big screen—perhaps by Eddie Murphy’s dirty 1957 Speedster replica in *48 Hours* or Jeff Bridges’ 1983 911 SC cabriolet in *Against All Odds*? Did your parents, funky Aunt Felicia, or cool Uncle Carl own a Porsche? Perhaps your first Porsche was a reward for some life event, like a graduation or a promotion? Or it could be that you gravitated to Porsches later, after driving something else.

FOR RALLY SPORT REGION member Steven Zarbo, his passion was hereditary, and began early. The 2005 Hershey Parade was his defining moment. “I first fell in love with the early 911 at Hershey. Ed Mayo was there washing his silver 1972 911S,” Steven recalled. “Ed certainly didn’t know me, but I recognized his car immediately. I ran back, got my dad, and dragged him over with me to the washing station to talk with Ed. I walked around and around that car—just fell in love with it. When we left that Parade, I begged Dad to get an early 911. I was 12 years old.

into restoring 914-6s back then. It was my first opportunity to get grounded with Porsche. Dad let me help where I could. I had small hands, so I could reach into tight places like under the dash. Later, he let me wash his 40th Anniversary 911, and then, as a reward, he let me drive it a little. We lived on the edge of the city, close to country roads. It was a good place for a beginner to drive. That was my introduction. That’s how I started.”

Not only were those teen years formative for Steven’s Porsche passion, but in 2010 he met a young woman named Mariah Henderson. “I didn’t know a thing



“Dad caved in and bought our first early 911, a 1971 T, one year later,” he continued. “It was blue, sort of like an Oslo Blue, with a black and white houndstooth interior. That car was to die for. We named it Elsa. Dad and I really liked the 911T model and the way the power came on at lower rpm, rather than the higher-strung 911S.” Steven and his dad worked hard to return it to “driver” condition.

Thirteen was a watershed age for Steven, and not just because of the 911T. “When I was 13 years old, I drove a manual-transmission car for the first time. It was a 1973 914 2.0-liter, a parts car we had. My dad was

about Porsches until I met Steven,” recalled Mariah. “It was right before I got my driver’s license. Steven is the one who taught me to drive a manual-transmission car. My first car was a Volkswagen Beetle with a stick. It was like we started our relationship with that blue 911. Steven and I bonded over that experience.”

The 2013 Traverse City Parade was another turning point. “Mariah and I drove the T up from Ann Arbor [Michigan] to Parade. We entered RS03S Street Class Restoration for early 911s and 912s.”

“It was basically a wash and shine class,” Mariah explained.



Above: What could be better than driving your classic 911T on an Indiana back road, in the heat of summer, with your sweetheart? **Opposite:** A devastating fire destroyed a garage full of Porsches, but not the indomitable spirit of the Zarbo family. Beauty lies in the simplicity of lines and patterns.

Then Steven continued, “We really didn’t know what we were getting ourselves into. We went into it blind. We didn’t clean the car before we left. We drove over wet paint and fresh tar on the way up, which left tiny specks on the car.”

“We didn’t notice those specks until we were on the green [concoors grounds] as we watched others busily working on their cars,” Mariah said. “It was crazy!”

They immediately got busy, and despite their rookie status, Steven and Mariah took second place in their first national competition—behind Ed Mayo. That competition served as an epiphany for the young couple. “It was like, wow, if we actually knew what we are doing and come prepared, we might have a shot at winning.”

Their next opportunity to grab the golden ring was at the 2015 Parade in French Lick, Indiana. “None of us had ever heard of the place before, but we were prepared

that time,” Mariah explained. “We had our Q-Tips and all of our cleaning supplies. We trailered it down on an open trailer. We thought we had a shot at winning.” And they did, notching first place in Preparation Class PP03S (Street). Next would come the 2016 Parade at Jay Peak, Vermont where they planned a repeat performance.

THINGS DID NOT go as anticipated, though. A disastrous fire blew up their plans on February 12, 2016. The temperature was minus five degrees Fahrenheit, and there was a frigid 15 mph wind. “Within minutes, the entire house was engulfed,” said Mariah. “Steven arrived just as his sister opened the garage and saw the smoke.”

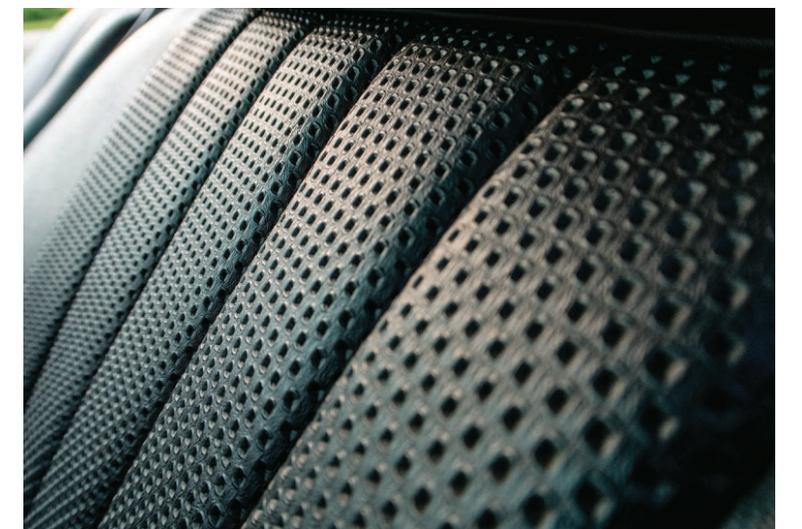
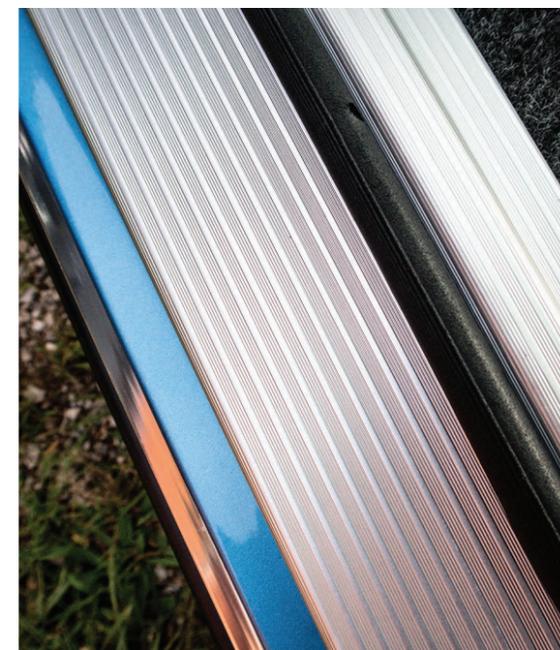
“I ran up and tried to pull Elsa out of the garage,” Steven interjected. “She sat on wheeled dollies, but just as I grabbed for the bumper, a natural gas heater exploded, blowing off one of the garage doors. It landed on one of



RICHARD ZARBO



RICHARD ZARBO





The charm of the 911T: Analog dials rather than digital. A shifter rather than a paddle. A pull rather than a button. Interactive. Tactile. Real.

the other cars, lighting that one on fire. At that point, I decided to just get out.”

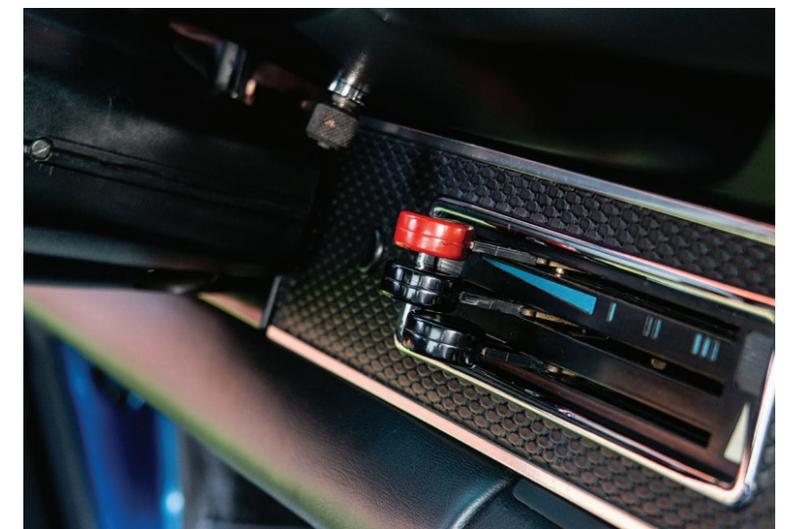
The fire was catastrophic. Flames and acrid smoke rose high above the din below. The stench of burned debris and smoldering rubber permeated the remains of what was once a family home. The Zarbo clan lost the 911T, a 914-6, a Ruby Red 356B coupe, and an Arena Red C4S. The inferno took a toll both physically and emotionally. No one was hurt in the blaze, although Steven’s sister was in her bedroom above the garage where the fire began. Luckily for her, the dog started barking and she saw the smoke when she went to let the dog out.

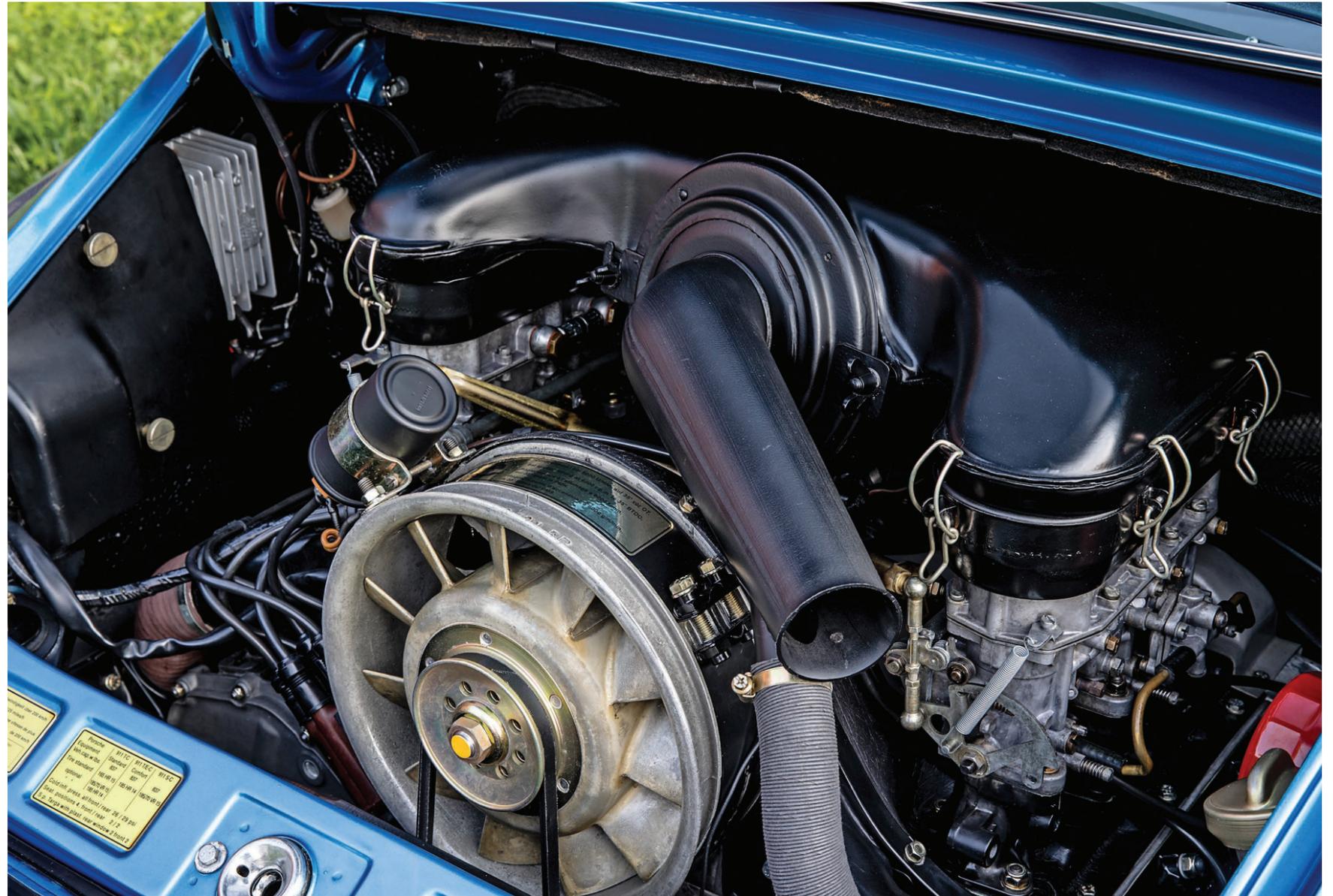
Now what? “After the fire, we realized how much we [Steven, Richard (Steven’s dad), and Mariah] all missed working on, driving, and enjoying the Porsches.” Immediately, they began to look for replacements, as any Porsche enthusiast would.

“California Porsche Restoration (CPR) had this 1971 911T listed on their website,” Steven said. “Dad and I were going out to the L.A. Lit and Toy Show in February 2017, so we stopped at CPR to take a look. It was in good shape, having undergone a partial restoration in Germany. We bought it and had it trucked back to Ann Arbor.”

“This 911, we named her Inga, brought us together again,” Mariah added. “It helped us heal from the scars left by the house fire. Our intent was to make this 911 a true concours car, even better than Elsa. We wanted to ratchet it up a notch, better than ‘wash and shine’ level.”

AND SO THE division of labor began. “Richard is amazing,” Mariah began. “He knows so much. He knows what’s original, what the rules are, and what the judges look for. So we do what he tells us. I’m the Minister of





From any angle, this long-hood 911 speaks dignity as well as excitement. It's pure Porsche. Opposite: With 125 horsepower but pushing only 2,200 pounds, the 911T's flat six provides plenty of oomph. The Zarbo clan: Richard, Stephen, Mariah, and Cheryl.

the Interior. That's all my responsibility. I do the fine detail cleaning. I make sure the interior is fresh and perfect. The glass is also my job. Steven took auto body and paint classes at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, with paint correction and ceramic coating a little later. He's the paint guy."

Steven picked up on the conversation. "Our friend, Matt Fox, also helps us. He just bought his first Porsche—the sound of an air-cooled flat six at 4000 rpm got to him. Dad's good friend Tim Pott, a master Porsche mechanic, frequently came to our shop to help with the engine work. He showed Matt and me how to do things so we could make adjustments and repairs on our own."

All that hard work and sweat equity paid off for Team Zarbo at their next national event. "Steven and Matt trailered the car to Boca Raton, a 25-hour trek," Mariah

recalled. "We detailed the car for three days straight. Matt worked on the engine bay, Steven on the exterior, and me on all the interior things. Richard oversaw the entire process, making sure that everything was good." Inga took first place in Preparation Class PP03T (Touring). That step up was the group's goal. Team Zarbo could not have been happier.

HAVING BEEN HIGH school sweethearts since meeting as teenagers in 2010, Steven and Mariah became engaged in May 2021. The 911 played a part in that event as well. "I thought it was odd for Steven to show up in Inga because we just don't take the concours cars out for drives," Mariah explained. "We were working so hard preparing it for Parade. But we had a nice drive that night and simply worked a little harder cleaning it later."

Their hard work was rewarded just a couple of months later at the 2021 Parade in French Lick, Indiana. Once again, they met the challenge, finishing first in class.

Competitors in the PP03T class at the 2022 Pocono Parade rested a little easier when they saw a 1971 Metallic Blue 911T missing from the concours lineup. Steven and Mariah were married in June; consequently, the concours had to take a back seat. But rest assured they plan to attend and compete in the 2023 event. A trial by fire only strengthened their resolve.

What's next for Steven and Mariah? "I'd like to pick up a 996 Turbo just to drive," said Steven. "I also love the early 911 Outlaws." Mariah concluded, "Every time we attend a Parade some certain model grabs our attention. But no matter what, a Porsche will always be a part of our family." ☉

