Why Concours?

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“You’re entering an event where you are paying someone to tell you how lousy your car is. THAT, my friends, is not normal behavior. Revel in your masochism and you’ll be ok.” - James Brackenrig

So the people who show their cars in concours must be a bunch of old guys who are afraid to drive them the way they were intended to be driven, so they hover and obsess around them with toothpicks and q-tips, right? Well, let’s not jump to conclusions so fast.

I’ve got a 1972 911T Targa that I bought new. It’s still mostly original, including the paint, and it looks pretty good, but no one would look at it closely and mistake it for a new car. But I know of a few cars as old or older which are also original and look like they could still be on the showroom floor. I wish my car looked as good as their cars do. How did they do that? But I’m getting ahead of myself here. Let me tell you a little bit about my own concours experiences.

Linda and I joined PCA at the end of 2001, just after her new Boxster S had been delivered. The following year we went to the Boise Parade and, to get into the spirit of the event, we entered every competition. Never having participated in a Concours before, we spent a lot of time working on the car, trying to figure out where judges might look and coming up with ways to clean and prepare areas we had never even thought about before. We had a real advantage in that the car was relatively new, and, for beginners, we did pretty well, placing 4th in a field of 16 Boxsters. After we got back, we cleaned the car up again and entered the Santa Barbara concours in Wash & Shine, again doing reasonably well, but still with room for improvement.
Not too long afterward, we bought a 1973 911S coupe. I had wanted the car to drive, but it was in such fundamentally good condition that I thought with a little effort it would make a good show car, so we got to work on it. We entered it in Wash & Shine a couple of times over the next year. We also went to Zone 8 Judging Schools and to various seminars on car care given by vendors to see what we could learn. Finally we decided to progress to Street division, which adds the engine and storage compartments as judged areas. This decision brought with it a new set of challenges. Finish of the sheet metal pan around the engine not too good? Drop the engine to the floor, take out all that stuff and have it powder coated. How do you repair the carpeting in the trunk with its multiple thin areas and small holes? What a mess the gas heater compartment was! But we managed to figure out how to get those and other tasks done and entered more events, getting compliments about how much progress we were making with the car and with our own skills. This year, without really planning to do so, we ended up participating in most of the Zone 8 events, winning class and division championships.

So is all this really an exercise in masochism? At least once each time I’m getting a car ready for a show, I end up asking myself: “self, why in the world are you doing all this work?” And then recently I realized that in the process of cleaning, touching up paint, repairing that old carpeting that Porsche used to use (it’s really not much more than compacted lint), waxing and polishing and so on, I’d acquired a really useful set of skills. Now I have some idea about how those people managed to keep their old cars not just well, but like new. When I approach a car to clean it, I look at all sorts of places which most people never even think of but which, in the aggregate, can make the difference between a car looking ok and looking really nice. I’ve worked out all sorts of little techniques and tricks for cleaning some of these areas.

Although it’s not the only possibility, participation in the various events that make up the Zone 8 Concours program is an efficient way to learn, and also to have some good times with your fellow club members. At these events you’ll have access to tremendous amounts of expertise and experience which you can take advantage of and, when the car is judged, you’ll get lots of feedback about how well what you’re doing is working, from people who have evaluated a lot of cars. You’ll be able to take even greater pride in your Porsche, knowing that it’s in the best possible condition.
So how best to get started? Read the new Manual for Zone 8 Concours Judges, posted on the Zone 8 website, and attend the Zone 8 Judge’s School, scheduled this year for Saturday, March 3. You’ll get additional insight into how a concours is conducted, along with more information about what judges look for when evaluating a car. Then start preparing your car and coming to events in the Concours schedule. With a little fun and effort, you can become an expert yourself in taking care of your car.

The Result: a Well-Prepared Car