

Behind the Crest: James Brown's Porsche Journey

For longtime West Michigan PCA member James Brown, the Porsche story began long before he ever owned one.

Like many great car stories, it started with a feeling.

James traces that feeling back to the early 1970s. Born in 1960, he was still just a kid when he first saw Porsche on television. He remembers watching road racing—likely coverage connected to Le Mans—and among all the cars on the screen, one stood out above the rest: the Porsche 917.

That was the one.

Something about the way it looked, the way it moved, and the excitement it created grabbed him immediately. He still remembers being captivated by it, even if some of the finer details have faded with time.

Not long after, another Porsche image made a lasting impression. James recalls finding a magazine spread featuring the latest Porsche models and colors of the year. To him, it was basically a centerfold. He pulled it from the magazine and pinned it to the wall in his bedroom, where it stayed as a daily reminder of what he loved about the brand. The cars were beautiful. The colors were beautiful. Porsche had planted its flag in his imagination.

Even so, James says he was never what you would call a hardcore “gearhead.” He wasn’t the kind of person tearing down engines or obsessing over every technical detail. He handled the basics over the years—starter swaps, carburetor work, patching together an exhaust when needed—but his connection to Porsche was never really about wrenching. It was about the design, the performance, the presence, and the feeling.

As life moved on, the Porsche dream faded into the background for a while. In high school and into early adulthood, it simply wasn’t front and center. He remembers his older brother buying a yellow 914, and while he didn’t make a huge deal out of it at the time, he did get the chance to drive it around. Compared to the rusted-out station wagon he had been driving, the 914 felt like a go-kart—light, nimble, fun, and alive. It was exciting, but life kept moving, and again, Porsche slipped into the background.

Then came 1984.

James had landed a solid job in computer consulting and decided it might finally be time to buy a Porsche. He walked into the Grand Rapids Porsche dealership excited and hopeful, focused on one thing: getting into a new 924. He had a down payment in hand and thought he was finally in a position to make it happen.

Then reality hit.

After talking through the numbers with the dealership, he learned what the monthly payment would be—and it was more than he could justify. The disappointment stuck with him. Looking

back, he still remembers how badly he wanted that car and how frustrating it was to realize it just wasn't going to work.

Instead, he ended up buying a Dodge Daytona Turbo, which at the time seemed like a more affordable sports car alternative. It did not go well. James laughs about it now, but the car was a disaster. It was constantly in the shop, the turbo failed more than once, and it never came close to delivering the experience he was after. While driving that Dodge around, he would still see Porsches on the road and think about what he really wanted.

That desire never completely left.

At one point, James had a friend who collected die-cast cars—dozens of them, all still in their boxes. One day the friend invited him over and told him to pick one out. Surrounded by all those miniature cars, James didn't hesitate. He knew immediately which one he wanted. The Porsche still had that pull.

Finally, about sixteen years ago, he decided it was time. No more putting it off. No more alternatives.

He started thinking seriously about what he wanted and what fit his budget. A convertible felt right. As he looked through the available models, the Boxster kept rising to the top. It was beautiful, the handling was legendary, and it felt like the right car for the moment.

Then came the moment that changed everything.

James was sitting in an Irish pub in Midtown Manhattan when he got a notification on his phone that matched his search for a Boxster. He opened it and saw the car that would become his: a 1997 Boxster in Aquamarine. He called immediately from the bar and told the seller he was in Manhattan but could come see the car the next day. He flew home that night, went to see the car the next morning, and found that it was only a couple miles away from him.

The car was stunning.

A 1997 model—the first year the Boxster came to the U.S.—with just 41,000 miles. The Aquamarine paint sealed the deal. Depending on the light, James says, it can look blue, green, or like the color of the ocean. It sparkles. It changes. It feels alive.

Wanting to be smart about it, he brought along a friend who had experience selling cars and had a paint meter to check for any signs of damage or repair. Everything checked out. James made an offer. In a twist he still laughs about, the seller countered with a number lower than what James had offered. However it happened, it worked out in James' favor.

Then came the first drive.

That was the moment everything clicked into place.

He remembers picking it up on a gorgeous day, dropping the top, and heading north from the Rockford area onto the back roads. He drove for hours. He didn't want to stop. More than

anything else, he remembers the feeling: after all those years of wanting a Porsche, after all the starts and stops and disappointments, he was finally there.

“It felt like home.”

That feeling never left.

James has now owned the car for sixteen years. He bought it with about 41,000 miles, and today it's nearing 132,000. It has not become less special with time. In fact, one of the most striking parts of his story is that he says he has never once taken the car for granted. Whether he's heading out for a pleasure drive or just running to the store, getting behind the wheel still feels different. Seeing the Porsche crest on the steering wheel still means something. Every drive still feels special.

His Boxster is also exactly the kind of car James wants. He prefers a manual transmission and says he always wanted the clutch, the shifter, and the direct connection to the machine. For him, that engagement matters. He wants to feel the car, not just ride in it.

When asked what Porsche means to him personally, James circles back to the same themes: the design, the engineering, the history, and the sense of German precision that seems built into the brand. He shared a story that says a lot about how deeply that identity matters to him.

After a minor incident in which a truck and trailer brushed the side of his car, the Boxster had to go in for bodywork and repainting. During the repair, the shop told him they might need to replace the hood crest. When James picked the car up, the repairs were complete, and the shop mentioned they had installed a new badge. James immediately asked for the old one back. The staff seemed surprised, but to him, it mattered. That original crest had age, patina, and history. It belonged to the car. He still has it.

That attention to meaning—not just function—is part of what defines his Porsche experience.

James joined PCA not long after buying the Boxster, and in a way, his PCA story mirrors his Porsche story: a slow beginning that eventually turned into something deeply meaningful.

When he first joined, he went to a couple of events, then drifted into the background for a while. He kept renewing his membership year after year but didn't participate much. Then, around five or six years ago, he decided it was time to actually get involved.

That changed everything.

He remembers one of the drives on the west side of the state as a turning point. He doesn't recall the exact name of the drive, but he remembers the feeling clearly. A line of Porsches stretching ahead and behind. Beautiful roads winding through trees and curves. The top down. The sound of the cars. The rhythm of the drive. It was spirited, but responsible—fun without crossing the line.

By the time the group pulled into the restaurant at the end of the route, James was hooked. He loved the drive itself, but he also loved what came after: the conversation, the camaraderie, the chance to sit down with other members and share the experience.

That's when PCA really came alive for him.

He says the biggest thing the club has given him is the people. The cars are what bring everyone together, but the community is what keeps people coming back. He talks about the genuineness of the group, the easy laughter, the shared stories, and the way people in the chapter can be serious about the cars without taking themselves too seriously.

That spirit shows up in little moments too. At a tech session, James volunteered to have his Boxster put on a hoist. What followed became one of those unforgettable club stories: someone discovered that a previous owner had apparently used a hardware-store light fixture bracket to help hold part of the underside together. Instead of becoming some embarrassing moment, it turned into a running joke and a shared laugh—exactly the kind of thing that, in James' view, says a lot about the group. People care, they know their cars, but they also know how to enjoy the moment.

In time, James also stepped into a leadership role. With his background in computer science, he was encouraged to take on the role of Webmeister. It wasn't something he had originally set out to do, but like many good volunteer stories, he found himself nudged into it by people who thought he would be good at it. He says the work can be challenging, but in the end, it feels good to contribute and give something back to a club that has given him so much.

One recent highlight that stands above the rest for James was his experience at Grattan Raceway. After trying a simpler midday lap opportunity the previous year, he signed up for Taste of the Track and finally got a real instructional experience on the course. That sealed it. He loved it. Even with limits in place, the experience of cornering the car, feeling the chassis work, and learning how to drive it the way it was designed to be driven was thrilling. By the end of the day, he wanted more.

Asked what makes West Michigan PCA special, James keeps returning to the same answer: the people. The chapter is full of experience, talent, humor, and genuine enthusiasm. There is always something to learn, whether from seasoned track drivers, longtime members, or just conversations at an event. It is a group that welcomes people in and gives them room to enjoy their cars in the way that suits them best.

If someone were buying their first Porsche, James' advice is thoughtful and grounded: don't overbuy the car for your skill level or for how you actually plan to use it. Think honestly about your abilities, your goals, and the kind of driving experience you want. A great Porsche isn't just about the biggest engine or the most extreme performance—it's about fit, enjoyment, and connection.

And for anyone considering joining PCA or wondering whether they should get involved, his answer is simple:

Yes. Join. Show up. Be active.

Go to the events. Meet the people. Share your experiences. Bring your ideas. The more you engage, the more meaningful it becomes.

For James Brown, Porsche began as a childhood fascination. It became a long-delayed dream, then a first drive he never forgot, and finally a lasting part of his life through both the car and the community around it.

And after sixteen years behind the wheel of his Aquamarine Boxster, he says it still feels special every single time.

That may be the best Porsche story of all.