

An Infelicitous Situation

There's a certain hum to your automobile that you don't notice. Thus you like it. Like the regular beating of your heart. When it goes away, you say something like, "Damn! What is that rattle?" or "I knew I should have taken this rattrap in last month."

Anyway, instead of being late to Portland last weekend, we never made it. We rattled off at the exit indicating Scio, almost rolling to the stop sign. Smoke was seeping out around the hood and a distinct, sickening odor permeated the vehicle. Andy asked, "What do you think it is, Dad?" Stephanie, who has successfully completed one semester of auto-mechanics at South, volunteered in her life-is-full-of-little-lessons fashion, "Sounds like a rod, Dad. I'd say a great opportunity to get rid of this clunker and get something a little more updated. Maybe break into the '80's?"

"Like a Porsche 944," Andy adds.
It seems like we've had this discussion before.
"No gang. A Porsche is too small and impractical for this family."

"Aw, come on Dad! It'd be awesome zooming around in one."

I pull the hoodlatch, and slowly get out, hoping not to wake the baby. Andy and Stephanie clamber out, waking the baby who begins to cry. They are eager to see what the trouble is, make suggestions, put in a challenging word about Alan Bowers' father's new 911 Carrera.

"I'll think about it; but let's tackle this problem first."

I take a few deep breaths and look around. It could be worse I tell myself. Leslie is happily nursing on Claire. The older kids are excited. The sun is shining. I leave a note under the windshield wiper explaining the infelicitous situation after rejecting Stephanie's suggestion to write, "Make my day. Steal this car."

A kindly filbert farmer proffers us a ride to Albany where we catch the Greyhound to Eugene. 2 1/2 hours later the Toyota and I are doing the freeway slop, a chain length behind my friend Harold's pick-up. I hate every nervewracking second.

The worst of it is over. We are humbly reduced to a one-car family: Claire's VW Bug—the people's car—reliable, and as I am soon to learn, created under the auspices of Porsche.

You see, a man of my pride can withstand only so much chiding without taking action. You know how it is—you start with the basics—food, shelter, clothing—and work your way up. When you

reach your economic and emotional limits, you stop. Sometimes stretch a little. But basically hang out there. For some people the line is drawn between margarine and butter, chicken and beef, jug wine and varietals. For others, it's a house on College Hill versus Hendricks Park, a vacation in Europe versus the Orient, a BMW versus a Porsche. Choices and fine lines keep the game lively.

What happens is you get stuck in one group and you realize you can't get out. Then tricky ole Fate comes along and offers you an opportunity. Like your engine self-destructs on I-5.

What would you do?
I take the bait.

Saturday we five pile into the VW and drive out to Centennial Imports—"not your average car dealer"—to visit some Porsches. We are all bug-eyed and demure as we enter the showroom. A five-year-old Porsche Targa is being displayed. A very handsome, \$25,000 used car. A salesman gives us a rundown of various features on the five available Porsche models. Without options the models range in price between \$24-50,000. We react differently, Claire grasps the baby tighter and tighter; Stephanie and Andy release a continual flow of exclamations: Really! Awesome! Wow! Unbelievable! Gee! My voice gets progressively softer. For better or worse we all realize we are out of our class.

But the crushing blow for us windowshoppers is when we learn that a super-duper special Porsche 959 is being manufactured that will cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$140,000. I thank the salesman and whisper that we have to leave. No one talks on the way home.

We are famished by the time we arrive. Claire puts Leslie down to nap. Out comes the tuna fish, chips, milk, pickles, onions, mayonnaise, bread, lettuce, tomatoes. For a few moments there are only eating sounds. Then I say:

"I'm glad we went out there. I for one learned a lot."

"Why would anybody spend \$50,000 on something to drive around in?" Andy asks.

"It doesn't seem right to spend so much money on a car, even a good one, when so many people are starving like Ethiopians."

Claire says, "Let's find out how much it will cost to rebuild the Toyota."

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You just have to break down now and again to realize what a good deal you've got.

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