

An American in the German Porsche Club Cup

By Thomas Rodehaver

I attended two events in 2007. They were both in Hockenheim, just an hour from my house. I'd been there often for Formula One events, but had never been on the track. This was also the first Porsche event in Germany, so I was a little nervous. The first event felt like the first SCCA race I attended many years ago in US as a rookie.

I was most nervous about tech inspection, although I was sure my car was up-to-snuff, I wasn't sure what they were looking for and my helmet was SA95... was this still good enough? At the drivers meeting they talked about the run groups and flags, but nothing about how to conduct oneself on track. I guessed I would figure this out when I took to the track. Good thing I was in the beginner group.

After the drivers meeting we were called to tech inspection... I'm sure glad the TÜV, Germany's mandatory auto inspection, is as strict as they are because all they checked was that I had at least one tow hook on the car! No look at my helmet or any safety items on the car. Hopefully everyone else was a prepared as I.

The first session was behind an instructor who was showing everyone the correct line and we rotated positions behind this lead car. This session was followed by an open session with everyone in your run group. I was driving my 1994 968 and was outrun by a few GT3's and new 911's, but could keep up to the Boxsters and Caymans in the twisties. Unfortunately most could outrun my car on the straight.



Hockenheim in 2007

After lunch we had two timed sessions, 30 minutes and 25 minutes respectively. The first session was designed to test your ability to run two laps timed as close to each other as possible. The second tested an average over 4 laps, again as close together as possible. Perfectly consistent lap times lap after lap is crucial and very difficult in traffic and varying levels of driver experience. This was a tough adjustment from just running laps and I had a learning curve to climb.

The next event was again in Hockenheim and my results were similar to the first event; close to the bottom of the pack, but my times were closer and I was dealing with traffic better. I learned to anticipate where the fast cars were going to catch me, hold them off in the turns until I could risk a slight lift to let them pass on the straight. This would minimize the time I lost and thus keep my lap times consistent. Key items to remember for next year.

In 2008 I was looking forward to the Hockenheim event again. I knew the track somewhat from the year before and remembered some of the keys to consistent lap times; controlling where I was overtaken. Still, a lot of the results are luck; and I must have had a bunch this time. I was honored with a 5th place in the first timed session and 1st in the second! Wow did that feel good!

The following Monday I checked the web for results and was astonished to find I was in 5th place overall in my class of more than 40 cars to this point. Over the course of the whole year, there would be a total of 89 cars in my class. Immediately I checked the schedule to see how many more events I could attend and calculated what my chances were for the season. At this point I had already missed 3 events; was it too much to make up? I decided to try running as many as my schedule would allow and hope for the best.

On to Schleizer Dreieck in eastern Germany, a road course that utilized public roads for most of the track. This required police to cordon off and guard parts of the track. A very cool track that reminded me of a small Nürburgring, with uphill and very fast downhill sections on a twisty track with a few blind curves. This is where I meet a new friend, the owner of another 968. Two rare red 968's on the same track, this was definitely very cool!



Which is the US Spec?

I scored some valuable points at this event, more importantly I scored more than my compatriot, helping me catch up to him. He had already done 1 more events than I, so this was now my new target. On to Leipzig and the Porsche test and development track. This is definitely a cool track with corners like 'bus stop – Spa', 'parabolika – Monza' and others... this track helps Porsche develop a sports car for racing and test it in real world conditions on simulated real world race tracks.

But I hated the track! There were two very tight hairpins after semi-long straights... hard braking and tight cornering... I realized on this track how valuable a 5 point harness would be. I had problems just staying in my seat! And the bus stop was nauseating... it was a very tight left-right-left that looks bigger on TV (during the Spa Formula 1 event anyway). Despite these problems I was rewarded with a 1st place in session two and a second place overall for the event! More encouragement for the next event.



What a trophy!

I had to skip the next Hockenheim event due to travel conflicts. The points I lost for missing this event will hurt me in the end. The next event I could attend was Spreewaldring, close to Berlin, a small motorcycle track just wide enough for cars, barely. My 968 comrade was also at this event, so I had a direct opponent to hunt down. He was leading me by only 0.2 points, even after missing Hockenheim where he fared quite well. Unfortunately he fared better than me at this event and was leading me by just over 10 points with three events remaining.

Dahlem was next, a private air strip with runway and taxiway... a little boring with chicanes midway on both taxiway and runway, it was down the TW, around, back up the RW, around, for 4 sessions. I did procure the best photo of my car in action to date with a shot while off camber and wheel in mid-air.



Right Front in the air, being hounded by a GT3

The next event, Sweden, was out of the question; it was a one day commute including an 8 hour ferry crossing. So it was on to the last event of the year, Assen in the Netherlands. This was another great track comparable to Hockenheim. Designed as a motorcycle track and hosting the biggest European cycling events, it was FAST! This was probably the most fun I had on track all season and I hope they use the track next year. Due to noise restrictions, they had to install a chicane to slow the GT3's and keep them out of the 120Db range in front of the test station. Still unsuccessful, the organizers had to pay a hefty fine that might cause higher entry fees for next year.

After all was said and done, I ended up 5th in class, just behind the other 968. Although he took part in 2 more events than I did, he only beat me by 20.2 points. Since I took part in at least 5 events, I was invited to the trophy ceremony at the Porsche research facility in Weissach. Definitely an honor with welcome champagne, good food and great company.



One of mine in 2009?

Although the trophies were reserved for 1st through 3rd, my wife and I had a great time. And I know what I must aim for this season; 3rd or better! Let's give it our best!