

Open Letter to the 944 Spec Community

Posted by Atteberry - 17 Nov 2010 21:16

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE 944 SPEC COMMUNITY

By: Thomas Atteberry #805

Imbedded in some of the proposed rules changes is a view that some competitors may have purchased very expensive professional rebuilt motors that cost in the \$10,000 range and that this defeats the purpose of the class as being a low budget racing class. At the last Southern California event someone mentioned to me that I might be the example of the expensive motor. While I did replace my motor and yes I paid someone to rebuild the motor and bring it to the best spec available I did not spend \$10,000. I did spend substantially less than that amount and yes John Millege Engineering professional, in Los Osos California rebuilt the motor. I do not have the expertise, shop, time and tools to do that work myself, just ask the Southern California race group. So why the new motor? In the summer of 2009 the motor in my car overheated after I ran over a cone and the radiator fan cut the lower radiator hose. After a leak down test a 118 Horse Power Dyno check at 7's Only racing in Buttonwillow California and an inspection of the block and pistons which showed scoring I was faced with a decision run a low horsepower motor, try to re-bore the block or buy another motor. I decided to try and buy another motor because finding someone to re-bore the old block would be difficult and the result probably would still result in a lower horsepower motor. The Southern California race group helps each other out with advise, parts and in this case engines. Charlie Buzzetti called me with a potential replacement motor. In what has to be just pure luck it was a crate motor that Porsche donated to a college for a class to have a motor, which they could take apart, inspect and reassemble. It had been sitting in someone backyard shed for over 10 years and upon his or her death the heirs put it up for sale. While a brand new motor it needed to be taken apart inspected and all seals, gaskets and the water pump needed to be replaced then reassembled. The new parts were not the cost but the labor involved to disassemble, inspect and reassemble took many hours. It also was delivered to the car, which was 124 miles away. The motor is a 1982 low compression engine. Of note Charlie Buzzetti could have taken the motor for himself but instead called me and arranged for the sale and delivery to Millege. In fact Charlie inspected the motor first before offering it to me. The end result is a new motor that generates 138-horse power. This motor is built to the rules and specifications currently in place.

That is the story on the motor now what about myself. Three years ago I stepped into a racecar to the first time in my life at age 54. That car was a Fun Cup endurance racecar with 150-horse power that weights 1600 pounds. My first race was a 6-hour endurance race in June 2008 with two other drivers. The owner of the car closed his business at the end of 2008 and sold the car. I talked with him and Ryan at NASA about what class may best suitable for a pure rookie that would also fit my personality and they both suggested the 944 Spec. For 2009 I rented a car from Tim Comeau in San Diego. At the end of the 2009 season I purchased that car from Tim. 2010 represents the first year I have ever owned and raced a car by myself, trust me it shows.

From a cost and car preparation perspective the Porsche 944 fits very well given its spec class rules, which limit modifications and are designed for fairly even car characteristics. The other element is the type of drivers. In the case of Southern California and to my knowledge of the Arizona, Rocky Mountain

and Northern California the drivers are all true gentleman drivers who are more than willing to share information, time, tools and parts to get everyone on track having an enjoyable weekend.

My approach to racing falls into two categories; maximize the car to the rules in place and try to maximize driver track time to improve my skills.

The car maximization according to the rules can only be accomplished if the rules stay constant. Constantly shifting rules make accomplishing this objective difficult. So how did I go about maximizing the car? First, get an engine that can generate competitive horsepower (130-140). Next was to get the weight down via elimination of the dashboard (that is weight up high in car), all excess wiring (could be 50 pounds with fuse box), remove extra body weight. At nationals I saw cars with rubber bumper guards (maybe 20 pounds). I saw full tail pipes and mufflers; this has significant weight and robs a little horsepower. The rules say 2600 pounds with driver the closer to that number the better. In fact if one gets under then add back ballast. Anyone can do this they just need to set a schedule to accomplish goals. I do suggest a wiring expert to eliminate the extra wiring, as a few items are critical. I also suggest eliminating the dash and installing the needed gauges (it is not expensive). For any of these items just call and I will give anyone the details. The rules are fairly simple in regards to what one can do.

Getting the car to its maximum potential is easy compared to getting the driver to his maximum potential. There is no shortcut to time behind the wheel. I found that Friday afternoon test day before the weekend very helpful. Running in HPDE3 helps as does super sizing to GTS class as well. Does it work yes but it is a long road. If 8 cars run in Southern California I will have a great weekend if I finish 6th and would be ecstatic if finished 5th. I offer two confidence-building suggestions. First have a front running driver swap cars with you for a test session. If they can drive your car faster then you then you know the speed has to come from you. The second is to find a way to race in a pack and get use to traffic passing and being passed. I will add a third endurance racing is a cheap form of track time. By maximizing my car and trying to maximize track time in the past year it has produced results. At the end of 2009 I would be lapped by the leader during the race and rarely passed anyone. At the start of 2010 this was still the case. However by year end I was no longer being lapped, I would pass people and as a measurable result at each track my lap times are down by about 4 seconds.

Using these two approaches to reviewing potential rules changes and not one suggestion fits into either objective. In fact the suggestions either add cost or complicate each objective. Instead of taking time to replace windows with lexan why not spend that time finding ways to reducing weight. If I want to share information with someone that should be my choice and not a mandate. Limiting horsepower just means that more time and money will be spent staying in compliance. It may also turn off others who wish to join the class given a set of more complex rules. Simple rules should help attract others to the class and hopefully more drivers to race with and refine passing and defense skills, all of which builds confidence. Limiting head thickness and compression appears silly to me and just makes rules more complex. The current rules allow for 10.5 to 1 so if someone wants to go there fine let them do it. Last time I looked the only way to get there is to use a stock head. In the end going from 138 HP to 142 HP probably does not buy you a victory. However several more years of experience and more hours concentrating on better driving will get you to the front. I doubt if I add 4 HP to my car I am going from 5-6th to 1st -2nd. Those

guys are still 3-4 seconds faster than me. My better course of action is to ask for the leaders help and advise.

This is a letter about how I have approached improving my skills and grid position. It also references the high quality of people in the class. My view is for those two factors to continue and improve it is best if the rules are left alone.

Thomas Atteberry

#805 Southern California

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Re: Open Letter to the 944 Spec Community

Posted by cbuzzetti - 17 Nov 2010 22:46

I would like to clarify a couple of things about this motor.

It is a box stock brand new 1983 engine. It was used in the Ag department at Cal Poly SLO to let students take apart and re-assemble. It is my understanding that Porsche gave this engine to them but I do not have any proof of that.

We contemplated just running it the way it was but thought it should at least be inspected.

We had Jon look at it since he was the closest and most knowledgeable available.

It is a good thing we did that because some of the bearings were installed incorrectly, some of the bolts were not properly torqued and it needed new gaskets and water pump.

The head was not touched (after all it's brand new) and an 85.5 cam was installed to help it breathe.

This motor makes 138hp with out a shaved head!!!

I wish there was a bunch of these laying around somewhere.

This motor will undoubtedly run strong for a long time.

Tom has shown great improvements in his driving over the course of this year. Having a new engine with some hp improved his confidence and it showed on the track. He is always asking questions about driving technique and we are always ready to share with a willing student.

He no longer is getting lapped and is ready to take the next step.

This engine did cost more than some, but it is bone stock except for the late cam.

Keep up the good work ethic Tom, the front of the pack is getting closer.

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Re: Open Letter to the 944 Spec Community

Posted by Sterling Doc - 18 Nov 2010 07:33

Great story!

Interesting to see how a time capsule motor does!

Your approach to focusing on track time, reliability, and driver development will serve you well. +1 on enduros, too. If you can combine that with a Traqmate, you can experiment with different lines in various corners for hours, and see what works. Great stuff!

It also would be interesting to know how much difference the late cam makes. Our local sponsor, Bennington Motorsports is looking in getting a bench dyno to answer these questions - change one thing on the same motor, redyno, and share the information. It all depends on if he can find one to fit in his budget. Nick Miller (Bennington owner) is so frugal that he sleeps in his box truck, with a window A/C unit plumbed into the door. That's how he offers full trackside support & free food for \$100/weekend!

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Re: Open Letter to the 944 Spec Community

Posted by joepaluch - 18 Nov 2010 08:07

Window AC in box truck! Wow that is living! I wish I had A/C :0

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Re: Open Letter to the 944 Spec Community

Posted by tcomeau - 18 Nov 2010 09:35

From what I understand,(Buzzetti relayed from Milledge) the late 9R cam has 8 degrees more duration on the exhaust lobes than the earlier 5R cam.

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Re: Open Letter to the 944 Spec Community

Posted by Sterling Doc - 18 Nov 2010 10:21

I have two extra 9R cams & towers. I will give one to the first person who wants one...

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