

Client Profile

Eduardo Venegas

A political exile from Cuba discovers a love of classic cars in America

by Nicole Marketta and Tom Franklin



Eduardo Venegas' 1970 Porsche 911E Targa in rare Crystal Blue, amid his automobilia collection

Eduardo Venegas considers himself a rather late bloomer in regards to his interest in cars.

He arrived in the U.S. as a political exile from his native Cuba at age 11, and he lived with relatives in the United States who had also just recently arrived nearly penniless. Very simply, cars were not a major part of his upbringing in America.

In fact, Venegas didn't get a driver's license until he was 23 years old, which is fairly late by American standards during the 1960s. After he graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, his first job with the General Electric Management Training Program required him to commute to work.

"The General Manager of the GE plant in Albuquerque, NM, picked me up at the airport after my flight from NYC and he couldn't believe a 23-year-old-college graduate in America didn't have a driver's license!" Venegas said. "So, the next morning he ordered me to practice driving all day with his assistant in the latter's 1969 VW Beetle. That afternoon, we went to the DMV and I passed the written and driving test.

"That same night I was taken to the city's used-car lots and selected the best VW Beetle I could find for under \$1,000 — a '70 coupe with one option — a radio! I didn't consider any other brand or model since a VW Beetle was all I knew how to drive.

"That was the start of my romance with cars. Six months later I bought my first Porsche, a 1968 912 Soft-Rear Targa, and have never looked back since."

Today, Eduardo Venegas still loves Porsches. He owns a 1970 911E Targa in a unique Crystal Blue special-order color.

"The first time I saw this car was in 1980 on the cover of an early Porsche enthusiast magazine called Gmund," Venegas said. "The color was so unusual...and beautiful."

A couple of years later, he actually saw the car in person at a PCA NNJ track meet at Watkins Glen. He became friends with the car's owner at the event and later bought the car from this same person.

"I maintained a friendship with the second owner for over 26 years, until I finally persuaded him to sell me the car in 2008. Even back then, I knew

this was a very special and unique car. The Porsche today has around 57k miles, original factory paint, seating, carpeting, targa top, toolkit, etc. It's one of the best unrestored examples of an early 911 long hood around. I have only shown it competitively twice — both times at the annual meets of the Porsche Club of America (Porsche Parade). The first time, it won First in Class and First in Division in the Preservation (unrestored) Group. The second time, it won the coveted Honorary Judges' Choice Trophy. The judges that year were none other than Dr. Wolfgang Porsche, Hans Peter Porsche, Ferdinand Porsche (Wolfgang's son) and Detlev Von Platen (CEO of PCNA)."

Having achieved that level of recognition for this special car, Eduardo now feels no further need to compete in concours.

"Your Porsche being selected for Judges' Choice on the concours field at a national parade by the family which gave its name to the marque is an honor that cannot be duplicated," Venegas said.

Although Venegas has owned 20 Porsches in total (seven 356s, six 911s, three Boxsters, two 944s, one 914, and one 912), his automotive interests are

varied.

Presently he has an Audi R8 Spyder and John Cooper Works Mini. He has also experienced various other brands: Mercedes, BMW (including a Z8), VW ('74 Karmann Beetle Cabriolet and '72 Karmann Ghia convertible), a '53 Fiat Topolino, and even a quirky Simca 1000 he had in Paris when he was stationed there for business in the mid-1970s.

Venegas' most enjoyable hobby today is his vast collection of automotive memorabilia. He has amassed a world-class collection of vintage rally plates, car badges, race trophies, enamel signs, Heuer time pieces, automotive steering wheels and various other memorabilia from the 1950s and 1960s.

"The enamel and cloisonné work on the European car badges in the 20th Century is positively masterful," Venegas said. "And I have tried to collect a broad cross-section of them — ADAC, Porsche Clubs, European Auto Clubs, etc... — to create a representation of that wonderful period when most enthusiasts sported a badge or two on their automobiles."

He also has a collection of rare and unusual Porsche 356 and period German memorabilia, such as key fobs, toolkits, insignias, radios and so on.

The most significant single piece in his collection is the rocket-shaped, silver-plated trophy given to Tommy Deal by the president of Mexico for Deal's historic 2nd-place finish at the first Carrera Panamericana in 1950.

"That is one item in my collection that most automotive museums in the world would love to have," he said. "We have always had limited garage space at our homes, but our memorabilia collection allows us to utilize wall space creatively to showcase more than just the current cars we own."

The memorabilia, and the acquisition process over the past 30 years, offers a natural collector and historian like Venegas an opportunity to broaden his automotive horizon in creative ways.

As he put it at the end of our interview, "The automotive memorabilia is the most rewarding side of my car hobby. Everything else comes a distant second."

Chubb is proud to know Eduardo Venegas and to include him in our family of clients. ■