

The Way We Were

Evi Gurney writes about her years with Porsche in the 1960's in a chapter she contributed to Racing/PR Director Huschke von Hanstein's Biography "The Racing Baron" published in German and English in 1999.

Evi Butz Gurney, born and raised in Stuttgart, Germany, joined Porsche in 1960 as a personal assistant to Huschke von Hanstein upon graduating from the Foreign Language Institute (Dolmetscherschule) in Stuttgart. She worked for Sonauto, the Porsche subsidiary in Paris in 1963 and after a year as editor of a women's magazine, rejoined Porsche at the beginning of 1965 as head of the Porsche Press Department. She wrote two automobile related books and did freelance work for various publications. In 1969 she married Grand Prix driver Dan Gurney and moved to the United States. They are the owners of All American Racers, where Evi has been a PR executive for over thirty years. They have two grown sons and live in Newport Beach, California.

Following is a chapter she contributed to Huschke von Hanstein's biography. An inside look into the Porsche Public Relations and Racing Department in the Sixties:

Even now, three years after his death, I walk to my mailbox in California hoping to miraculously find a letter from Huschke there. For almost three decades we had a very lively correspondence between us. His notes, cards and letters arrived from all corners of

the world. He had great fun with hotel stationery. He sent it from the wrong destinations, just to confuse me a little bit about his whereabouts. So I got letters with 'Hotel de Paris, Monaco' from Stockholm, Sweden and 'Vier Jahreszeiten', Hamburg from South Africa. He wrote the most wickedly funny vignettes about people we both knew in the motor racing world. His comments on political or racing events made me laugh out loud. In turn, he asked for my observations on this side of the Atlantic. Through the years we had a lot of fun this way, which only stopped about a month before he died. Of course, our relationship had not started out as friends on an equal footing, but as employee and boss/mentor.

When I walked into his office on a sunny day some 38 years ago, I could not, in my wildest dreams have imagined how this encounter would change my life and shape my future. Answering an ad. for 'multilingual help' for the press department, I drove out to Zuffenhausen to Porsche Work II. I was told to see Rennleiter and Public Relations Director Baron Huschke von Hanstein. Up to this point I had never heard of Huschke, but immediately thought that a man with such a sensational name would have to be something out of the ordinary. Before I had sat down in his tiny reception area to collect my thoughts for the first job interview of my life, he came running out of his office with outstretched arms and asked me to tell him my life story, "within four minutes and in English please!" Halfway through my stammering, he asked me whether I could also brew coffee and speak French? Not bothering to look at my resume, he told me that I was hired. He felt I was a 'natural' PR girl and Porsche was looking for young people to build up the company and grow

with it. I walked out of there on air, but slightly baffled because I had no idea what Public Relations was. As it turned out, I was not alone. The term 'Public Relations', (and the concept), was known to few people in postwar Germany. One could not study the subject at a university, there were no text books. But there was Huschke and he practically invented it. Having made a name for himself as a racing driver, he started out at Porsche in the early 50's by selling the few cars they made at the time to his aristocratic friends and royal acquaintances. This gave the car a certain aura, which he recognized and skillfully exploited every waking moment of his life. Every visit of a prince, count or sports star was recorded on film, (usually by him) and was made available to the local or national press. As the company did no advertising in the 60's (only dealers did), but derived most of its publicity from achievements on the race track, Huschke's expertise in the motor racing field and his worldwide contacts in the sport were an essential ingredient in building the company's image and reputation.

He created the image that to drive such a car made one special by association. It signaled to the world that you were a very good driver (potentially as good as a professional racing driver), that you were hip and young (even if you were not) and that above all else, you had taste and style (as he did) and an appreciation for the finer things in life (like his titled friends).

It was made clear to us who worked for him directly, that furthering Porsche's image was what we were there for. Getting the name Porsche in the paper as often as possible, preferably daily, was the

top priority. We should consider it a privilege to work for the company and complete dedication to the task at hand was taken as a given. In our little cocoon of intense, action-packed, relentless work, we barely knew that the 60's were happening, that there was a drug culture out there, that the Beatles made new music or that the Vietnam War was going on.

Huschke, and by extension our department, was responsible for managing the following areas: Porsche entries in the Formula II series 1960, the Grand Prix Formula I seasons 1961 and 1962, (including travel and hotel accommodations), the World Sports Car Championship, the European Rally Championship, the European Hill Climb Championship, supervision of and assistance to all private entry Porsche drivers, Porsche Clubs worldwide, introduction of new Porsche models including the 911, the Targa, the Carrera 904, the Bergspyder, the 908 and various other racing cars, contacts to the worldwide press, factory tours twice daily, literature on all new car models and weekly racing press releases (in three languages), Christmas parties and gifts, special occasion events including funerals, visits to all race events (Huschke) and selected events (some of us).

In retrospect it boggles the mind that all this was handled by approximately ten people who, with the exception of Eddi Barth and von Huschke's secretary Erna Angemeer, were in their twenties. Some of us became lifelong friends like Thora Hornung (later writer of many motor racing books), Ilse Naedele (later in charge of worldwide Porsche clubs) and Ole Kirk Jensen (later PR director of

Volvo). The confidence that "the Boss" as we called him, inspired in us back then served us very well later in life.

Huschke was the driver, we were his pitcrew. He was mission control, the center of the wheel. All 'spokes' had to function quickly and without fail, let alone complaint. Leaving for home at normal business closing hours he considered bourgeois, getting tired was un-aristocratically wimpy and getting ill for old people. Looking well-groomed was a must. After all, "you are working for Porsche" He looked at all times like the English Lord 'to the Manor born'. Tailor made blue and white striped shirts peeked out from expensive tweed jackets or summer linen blazers, long before such fashions were even known in Germany. Hand-made leather loafers, a generation old were slipped over bright red or pink socks, his little mischievous signal of rebellion against the corporate (dull?) establishment to which he did not really want to belong. His modus operandi in the office could be described as 'managed chaos' . His large, drawerless desk was covered at all times with papers, books, homologation sheets, photographs and souvenirs from friends and fans.

No letter was too insignificant, no note too trivial, no present too small to escape his attention and shame on us if we ever forgot to send acknowledgements or 'thank you's'. We marveled at his exquisite 'politesse' and wit in dealing with his worldwide correspondence. No moment was like another. Unpredictability was the one thing you could count on and had to be ready for. Within minutes his mood would change from furious temper outbursts and

loudly voiced criticism for minor mistakes, to lavish praise for a job well done, calling us by sweet-sounding nicknames he invented for each of us. It was a mercurial daily performance that needed getting used to and those who could not cope with it did not last long. After Wolfgang von Trips' death in Monza in September 1961, his extreme hard edge was gone. I had never seen a man so distraught before and only once later, when my husband lived through the aftermath of Jimmy Clark's accident in Hockenheim. After that horrendous Sunday in Monza, Huschke asked me to come to his home for the first time. He wanted to give some direction for the days he was going to be absent from the office.

I still see him sitting in his fur-covered rocking chair with his dog Bonga by his side, attended by his beloved Ursula and barely able to speak. He had been a mentor and father figure to Count Trips, nurturing his career from the very beginning and I think he felt he had lost a son. Up to that point he had seemed strong and awe-inspiring, now he was vulnerable and infinitely sad. I always felt that we forged a real bond at that moment, a man who had seen it all and a young woman who was going to see plenty within the decade.

Going to funerals, even preparing funerals, was part of the ritual of working in racing in the 60's. In a perverse way it heightened the romance of it all. Drivers were brave, grand characters way above normal humans. The photo gallery of drivers killed in racing accidents which was displayed on a wall behind his desk, grew longer and longer. Ricardo Rodriguez, Count von Trips, Tony Spychiger, Lorenzo

Bandini, Gunther Klass, Paul Hawkins, Jimmy Clark, Mike Spence, Jo Schlesser, Bino Heinz, Count Beaufort, Lodovico Scarfiotti, Lucky Casner to be followed by Jochen Rindt, Gerhard Mitter, Joakim Bonnier, Jo Siffert, Pedro Rodriguez, Rolf Stommelen and many more. Most had been frequent visitors to our offices and Huschke cared deeply about them and their safety. "Cars", he used to say "are just pieces of metal, but you my friend are irreplaceable, take care of yourself". While the causes of accidents were discussed in minute detail, the wider moral implications of the racing business were a taboo subject. Nobody dared address it, and everybody was troubled by it.

Immediately after a race was over on Sunday, no matter in which time zone it took place, he called me at home and I put our little speedy press network into motion. He gave me the results and I wrote a little story and phoned it out to certain journalists who were at their sports desks waiting for it. Apart from the fact that I had no free weekends during the racing season, the system worked beautifully and every small Porsche achievement on the track (this was before Porsche got overall victories, but labored in the class categories) was extensively reported in the papers. "It is our most important task that Ferry Porsche reads at breakfast in the local paper on Monday what his cars have done on the track on Sunday". We made great efforts to get this done without fail.

He adored traveling and never tired of enjoying local customs and people. One of his goals was to visit every important country in the world at least once. The Targa Florio in Sicily was one of his most

favorite spots. On my first visit there with the Porsche team he invited me for a practice lap around the 72km course through the Sicilian mountains and villages made famous by the 'Godfather' movies. Going through Campofelice or Cerda at breakneck speed in a rental car (a mule) he gesticulated at the sights, telling me stories where Phil Hill had gone off the road and Dan Gurney had knocked over a bridge, all the while negotiating around donkey carts, peasants and sheep that were populating the road. Suddenly he veered off into a village perched high on a mountain and accessible only by hundreds of wide steps. He drove right over them while women and children streamed out of their primitive lodgings in their black dresses and babushkas, curious about the visitor. In the village square he stopped, jumped out of the car and the town folk rushed to embrace him offering him wine or coca-cola. "IL Barone e arrivato, IL Barone de corsa e arrivato". He introduced me, kissed the women, jumped back into the car, drove down the stairs and back to the race track.

The whole episode might have taken 15 minutes but it took me ten years to recover. We did a similar thing at the Monte Carlo Rally, only this time it took ten hours of driving at night on ice and snow through the Alpes Maritimes with motorcycle World Champion Walfried Winkler sitting in the back seat of our 911. Walfried was scared out of his mind and constantly whispered in my ear to tell Huschke to slow down. He was too chicken to do it himself. I was not too chicken, because I was completely desperate at this point, but Huschke was

indifferent to my pleas. He was determined to arrive at the end of the Monte Carlo Rally ahead of Vic Elford, the eventual winner. When it was over and we drove into the courtyard of the Monaco castle to see Grace Kelly in a grey sable coat present the silver cup to Vic , I was a shadow of my former self. With a fatherly gesture he patted me on the head, telling me that now he had to catch a flight to the United States and that he was sure that I could handle the Monte aftermath in the right Porsche spirit.

And so it went, day in day out until I left for the United States to marry Dan Gurney in July 1969. Had Huschke not asked Dan to give me a ride to the city on that memorable summer evening before the Solitude Race in 1962, my life would have been radically different. I am so glad he did. I see him quite often now on 'Speedvision' on American TV. There he sits in the pits in Le Mans at 3 o'clock in the morning, stopwatch in hand, a lonely figure while all the beautiful people are back in the hotel to rest. His trademark checkered tweed cap sits just at the right angle on his head, his tie is in place, a gentleman doing his job in a business he loved and helped to make famous.







B. Cahier

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