

Denis Jenkinson A Passion For Porsches

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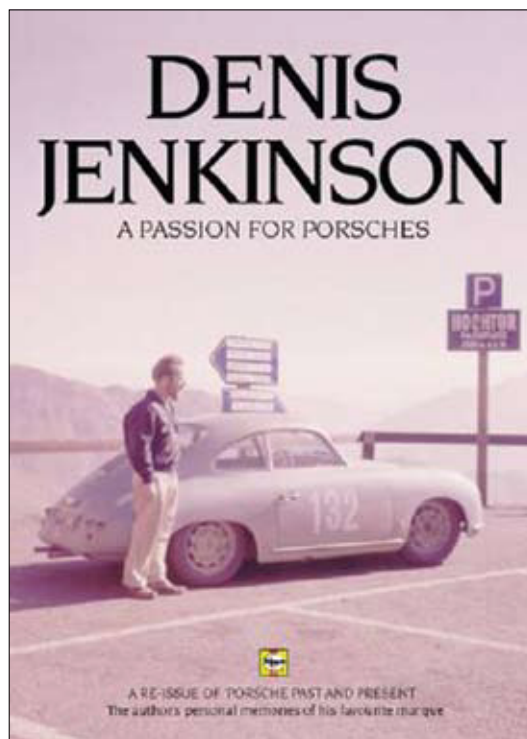
The name Jenks has popped up in the strangest places. I read the British press and there are brief references to the name every so often. David Hobbs and Peter Windsor mention him occasionally on their Formula One telecasts for Speed TV. I have heard Alain deCadenet evoke the name with regard to vintage automobiles. No one ever really identifies the chap or places him as responsible for any specific automotive event. So I have been curious as to who this Jenks fellow might be though not curious enough to Google him. I have been assuming he was some titled nobleman who bestowed his fortune on motor racing at some point in history and that said generosity effected the sport somehow.

Though I don't own every publication ever printed on the subject of Porsche, I try to at least obtain the most interesting ones. Having them in my library sadly does not mean I have read them all. 'A Passion For Porsches' has been floating around my house for some time with Denis Jenkinson's name literally the largest thing on the cover and it never occurred to me that this was the mysterious Jenks!

It turns out that Jenks was the groupie of motorsports in probably the most significant era it will ever endure. Far from royalty, Denis Jenkinson came from a working class family. He possessed a technical mind and good penmanship and by his own admission enough dumb luck to be in the right place at the right time for most of his life. Jenks, as he was known by friends, managed to meet and become close to seemingly every important person involved in racing and technical development of European cars from the forties through the eighties.

This book was originally published in 1982 under the title 'Porsches Past and Present'. It is a chronicle of Jenks involvement with Porsche from the companys formative years through the seventies. It is written entirely using personal experiences and photographs taken and collected by the author. I'm not sure anyone else outside the Porsche company was present for and had the wherewithal to document this part of Porsche history in such a personal way.

Working as Continental Correspondent



for 'Motor Sport' magazine, Jenks managed to acquire a new 1955 Porsche 356A Continental Coupe to use in his travels. He spent ten years traveling Europe in the car showing up for every Porsche related event possible. He also got invited to most of motor sports social events.

Though not much taller than the 356, Jenks met and became friendly with all the giants of motor sports including drivers, engineers writers and photographers. He rallied and hill climbed the little coupe with young guys like

Graham Hill, Jimmy Clark and Wolfgang von Trips. The Porsche factory let him drive prototypes and one off test mules. When he felt a car might be beyond his driving ability he was happy to have one of the top drivers of the period jockey him around.

Jenks' nomadic lifestyle during this period enabled him to visit many of the luminaries of the time in their homes. He was a frequent guest of the famous automotive photographer Jesse Alexander in his Frank Lloyd Wright designed Swiss villa. Jesse drove a 356 at the time and the two would "caravan" to events together. Social interaction was a big part of the race scene during the fifties and sixties and Jenks who was to my knowledge unmarried, hobnobbed with the likes of Paul Frere, Jean Behra and Huschke von Hanstein, all from the Porsche inner circle. This group enthusiasm for motorsport spilled over from the track to inundate Jenkinson's private life for over a decade.

He was an enthusiasts enthusiast and people could see it. His mechanical knowledge and driving prowess got him into circles the average journalist was left out of. As a result, his slant on the history of Porsche is more personal than most and absolutely entertaining. Jenks drove and wrote about very major development the Porsche company made to both street and competition cars during their most important decades. He experienced a period of history that I think was one of the most formative times and he presents it for us in an entertaining and well illustrated manner. Since the narrative stops in 1982 the authors speculation regarding the future of Porsche automobiles is very interesting.

If you have the slightest interest in history or sports cars or racing or driving, Jenks will entertain you. I read this book cover to cover and read every single caption to every photograph. Not something I usually do. I'm only sorry it took me this long to realize who this guy Jenks was. It gets five stars from me.