

IN TUNE WITH THOROUGHBREDS

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Buying the car of your dreams can often be the easy part. Keeping it in top nick over the years, that's the tricky bit. To find out more, we chat with Porsche specialists Gregory Soh and an eclectic bunch of petrolheads



Threatened with bodily harm, Gregory Soh, founder of specialist automotive workshop Autostrasse will admit that he was in the Gifted Education Programme at Anglo Chinese School. He would later graduate with a BSc from London School of Economics and wind up as a service engineer at Bosch, the German engineering and electronics multinational.

It's safe to assume that Greg was a clever kid. And clever kids tend to gravitate to certain jobs. They don't start auto repair workshops. So what happened?

Well, the short story is that Greg decided to follow his passion. Or more specifically, he decided to put his talents into his passion. In the span of less than ten years, Gregory has built an automotive repair and restoration workshop with a reputation for meticulous, honest work. In doing so, he has also become the go-to-guy here for all things Porsche.

We are gathered here for lunch at House at Dempsey on a Saturday afternoon, as part of a get-together Greg has organised for some of his customers. Casual get-togethers like these are always nice, the conversation flows effortlessly, revolving around three main topics – cars,

more cars and automobiles. Someone mentions the food, once. He is ignored. Nobody is here to trade culinary tips. You have to love lunches like these.

“I know Greg to be a technical person. And meticulous,” says Shawn Peh, owner of an Audi S5 Sportback and a long-time customer of Autostrasse. “His pays attention to the details. He researches, finds the root cause of problems and gives you solutions.”



Porsche enthusiast Kannan, who owns a Porsche 997 Cabriolet 4S, and who likewise appreciates Greg’s expertise and experience with Porsches. “You won’t see him scratching his head trying to figure out a problem,” explains Kannan. “He takes one look and knows exactly what is at fault. You’re not going to get tall stories.”

A good majority of the company’s clientele is made up of Porsche owners although

Autostrasse's business is not confined to any one make. During the early years of the company, some of their best customers included car importers and distributors as well as other workshops. A lot of the business at the time, Greg explains, was business to business, mainly warranty work on high-end parallel imports -Lamborghinis, Aston Martins, and Bentleys. "The usual workshops often charged an arm and a leg, for relatively simple work" says Greg. "We could get things done quickly and affordably, so we got a lot of exposure to high end cars."

One company that Greg had a lot of business dealings with was Flat Six, a business owned by Andy Tatlow, specialising in restoration of vintage Porsches. Flat Six was located on the third floor of Sin Ming Autocare, a floor above Greg's workshop. "Andy was into restorations and farmed out a lot of work to me," he adds. "We eventually went into business together with Flat Six focusing exclusively on Porsche and Autostrasse doing everything else."

This demarcation, Greg acknowledges, was taken purely to preserve the Flat Six brand, and not insinuate that Porsches were profoundly different from other cars. "Cars are fundamentally the same so if you get the fundamentals right, you can work on all of them," he clarifies.



Fundamental similarities at the macro level aside, no one would argue about the considerable differences at the micro level, even within the Porsche family. A Porsche made in 1990 would have virtually no interchangeable parts with a Porsche made in 2017. Getting the fundamentals right, at least for Autostrasse, has meant investing in technology, equipment and training. Greg is especially proud of the fact the company is equipped with the necessary diagnostic tools to work on Porsches from the 1990s onwards. No doubt his previous stint as a service engineer in Bosch's automotive department helped.

"I used to fix the diagnostic machines, the ones used by companies such as Performance Motors and Mercedes-Benz, so I knew of the importance of proprietary diagnostic equipment very early on," he says. "Bosch are the granddaddy of diagnostic machines and we've

invested in Bosch diagnostic machines not just for Porsche but for Italian and British marques as well.”



While it's all well and good having good computer diagnostics tools and skills, what about cars that pre-date the computer era? “His span of knowledge is from the 1970s to the present day,” says Andrew Yong, another long-time customer. When Andrew bought his Porsche 964 C4 14 years ago, it was running well although showing its age. With Greg looking after the mechanicals since, including a full rebuild, Andrew reveals that the car is now “running beautifully”.

“If you pick up old cars like what we do,” adds Martin Merten, who owns an Alfa Romeo GT1600 Junior and a Porsche 911 SC. “You need to have somebody who doesn't believe in quick fixes. Someone who takes the time to find the root cause of issues. He's the only guy I

have found here willing to do this.”

Without undervaluing his technical competence, there are customers that appreciate his ability to understand what they need. And advise accordingly. “He takes the time to understand our lifestyle, our driving habits, and what we really need,” says Wun Hsiung, who owns a Porsche GT3, and which he uses on a daily basis. “He has tuned the car to suit my style and not to suit his preferences. He works with us and the cars are tuned exactly how we want them.”

Customer Feedback



Name: Shawn Peh

Car: Audi S5 Sportback

Likes: It is stable, has a quality interior and more than enough power. And it's really practical – with the seats folded down, I can carry a lot of stuff.

Dislikes: Quattro steering does not give as much feel as a Porsche or BMW. It feels vague. But it ticks all the other boxes so it's a fair trade-off.

Reliability: It has been largely reliable. There were a few factory faults – the transmission is a weak link. But I let Greg handle the fixes.



Name: Wun Hsiung

Car: Porsche 997 GT3

Likes: It's raw. There's no sound deadening material so you feel and hear the whole car. But it puts a smile on my face to and from work.

Dislikes: No back seats so I can't share the experience with the kids. On long drives, it's a bone-shaker.

Reliability: Yes. No problems at all.



Name: Kannan

Car: Porsche 997 Cabriolet 4S

Likes: The 911 is the only supercar that you can drive everyday. So every evening, no matter how bad the day has been, you pop the top down and get to drive home with a smile.

Dislikes: Wish I had it when I was younger and thinner. Also wish the backseats were a little

roomier.

Reliability: 911s regularly top the reliability ratings. This is a car that will drive well beyond its 20th year.



Name: Andrew Yong

Car: Porsche 964 C4

Likes: The noise and the good vibes

Dislikes: The airconditioning. It's pretty much non-existent.

Reliability: The car is 28-years-old and Greg rebuilt my engine a while back so its running beautifully.

In the next issue, we'll be running a one-on-one interview where Greg shares some auto maintenance tips and tricks and talks at length about the cars he loves, the cars he loathes, the ones he would buy with his own money, and the ones that would have him running for cover.

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