

Ferry Ride: The Bridges of Columbia County

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I wanted to take my bride of 40 years on an adventure. Something not too fast, not too slow, but just right. With our 40th wedding anniversary fast approaching on April first, (yes, I know, that's April Fool's Day, but that is a story

for another time). I thought the first midweek drive of 2025 would be a fun way to start off the yearlong celebration of our marriage.

In all honesty, my wife DW was a bit nervous; she was understandably concerned about the weather. Who could blame her? Most of middle America, the east coast, and deep south were, at that very moment, being pummeled by an arctic air blast so severe, it left 10 inches of snow in New Orleans. You can understand her trepidation. Weather permitting were the key words of this drive. But no inclement weather ever materialized. Instead, we were treated to blue skies, calm winds, and mild temperatures. Such weather as would befit a cool

Lunch at Bridgewater Bistro



autumn day, not a day in mid-January, in the Pacific Northwest.

We counted our weather blessings and met up at a little wayside near the Wapato Bridge. To be honest, this was not a purely Porsche run - because of jangled weather nerves, many members had brought their other cars. But I didn't hold that against them. Along with 911s, Boxsters, and Macans, there were Subarus, Bimmers and even a red Mini!

After signing the perfunctory releases, Past President Heinz Holzapfel gathered us all for the mandatory safety briefing. He called it the Columbia Cruise, but it was much more than that. Heinz told us that this would be a low altitude drive, which meant we were not going to get above 500 feet of elevation. He cautioned, however, that "Although it's a sunny day, there might be patches of frost in the shade, and around the corners." We then split into two groups, and were off. DW and I were in the second group.

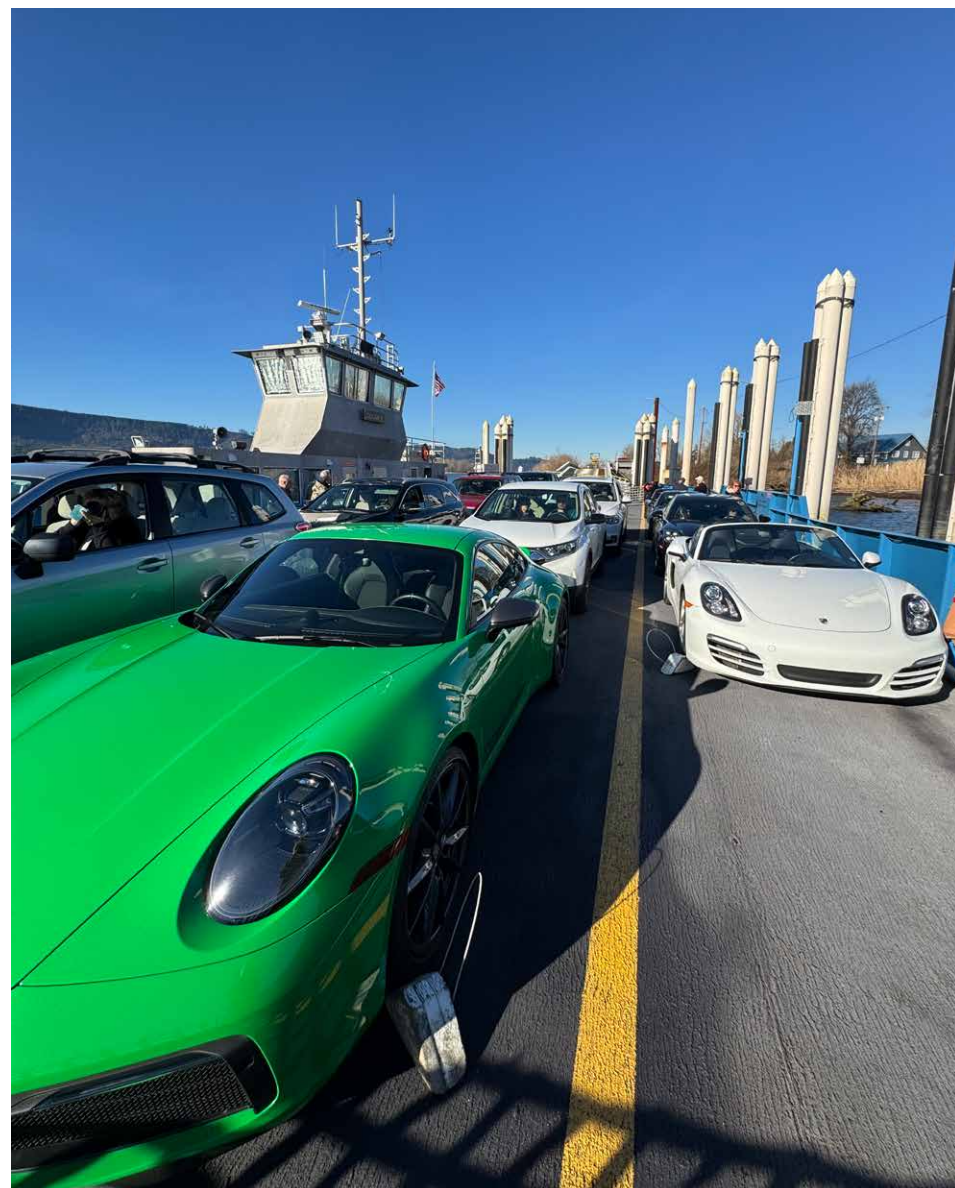
We started out on a road that wound its way through multiple nurseries. Tiny plants were poking their way out of the dirt - in their gallon sized pots. Seeing row after row of cedar, pine, and fir trees endlessly marching off into the void would have been grand enough. But off in the distance, Mount St. Helens loomed. It's like no other mountain you've ever seen, unless you're been to Krakatoa, east of Java. Because of the volcanic eruption on May 18, 1980, half the mountain is missing. An explosion my wife actually saw first-hand.

The road was beautiful, as the sun warmed the asphalt, the small patches of morning frost Heinz had warned us about started to melt away. This gentle winding drive was so calming that it could have gone on forever. We traveled through tiny picturesque western towns. As we turned corners, going down various main streets, we could see the local inhabitants busying themselves with



New member Cliffton Bong with his 2021 718 Cayman S





the start of their day. Getting to work, gathering their kids off for school, and picking up the morning newspaper from the front porch. We felt truly blessed to witness these small slices of Americana.

Eventually, we came upon our first destination, the town of St. Helens. We stopped near a skatepark, standing in sharp contrast to the town's public library. I couldn't help wondering about their city council meeting many years ago, when the local officials made that fateful decision. It must have gone something like this, "Hey, let's put the skatepark right next to the library. That way, we draw the kids in for some skateboard fun, and they grab a book on the way home." Their plan worked flawlessly. My wife and I saw children skating, and then just a few moments later, they were in the library reading.

We then began our drive through the town. It was very interesting seeing the old Craftsman and Victorian homes lined up next to each other - as we turned right, then left, then right again. "Wait a minute, haven't we already been down this street?" I asked DW. That's when we started seeing the multiple detour signs. As Heinz told me later over lunch, he had scouted the drive on the preceding weekend, but at that time there were no city workers with red flags, or road construction signs. We ended up doubling back a few times, but it was all in good fun. I realized I did enjoy driving through the marina townhomes, parking lot, thrice. It gave me a chance to really soak up the ambience.

As the town of St. Helens fell away in our rear-view mirror, we passed



large lumber yards, and huge timber processing companies. High log-decks rose out of nowhere to dominate the landscape. A not-so-subtle reminder that we as a society still use wood products for almost every conceivable purpose. As we crossed an elevated bridge a large train station lay underneath, its dozens of tracks and engines ready to serve the quick removal of this precious renewable resource.

As we followed the Porsche parade, we then came upon a lovely highway next to the Columbia River. That would have been enough, but as we wound our way through forested hillsides, ending by serene waters, my wife noticed something overhead. Something large and flying. Something big. "I see a bald eagle, that's a bald eagle!" she exclaimed.

"Nonsense," I replied, "Eagles live nowhere near here, they live on mountain tops, in high elevations. Haven't you ever seen a nature documentary?"

As fate would have it, and as with much of our 40-year marriage, I was about to be proven most unequivocally wrong. As we rounded the next corner near a very idyllic patch of pines, ending

in a green meadow, we saw a road sign. Eagle Sanctuary, it stated in no uncertain terms.

"Oh, I guess eagles do live here," I stated sheepishly. DW didn't reply, she just looked at me with a most kind and loving expression. Over our 40 years together she has made it a profession to (mostly) overlook my many faux pas. I realized at that moment that she would always truly love me. We enjoyed that moment of silence together, the Porsche's engine droning on under the bluest of skies.

"Oh look, we're at the ferry place," I announced, as the highway gently dumped us into the small town of Cathlamet, Washington, home to the Cathlamet Ferry. We all drove to the water's edge and queued up to await the boat. I must confess that I was a little bit nervous, although I didn't let on to anybody. I really didn't want to see my 911 end up at the bottom of the Columbia River. Again, my fears were completely misplaced. Once given the go-ahead, we and our fellow Porsche club members gingerly drove our cars onto the ferry's steel deck, in sharp contrast to the way the locals handled the situation. Their method was different - they throttled full speed onto the ship, only braking

at the last minute – just before careening off the bow. The only thing separating them from the water was a small rope barricade. Brave folks.

Her name is Alexandria - Captain and deckhand - all rolled into one. The cool wind blew gently through her long brown hair, her luscious green eyes taking in everything that surrounded her. Alexandria's tan uniform was clearly tailor-made to her athletic physique. (You'll have to use your imagination here; she didn't want me to take her picture. Or was it, that with my beautiful wife standing just a few feet away, I probably shouldn't take her picture.)

Anyway...as she went about her business of collecting the six-dollar toll, she also blocked the front wheels of the Porsches closest to the bow. As an unnecessary precaution, I'm sure. However, I did stand nearby just in case the unthinkable happened. I was at-the-ready with my Nikon, to shoot the cars as they tumbled into the deep blue river. As we disembarked, Alexandria gently waved to all of us, saying, "Come back soon." What a combination - Captain, deckhand and public relations maven all in one.

We were soon on our way to our final destination, Astoria, and a well-deserved lunch. As we entered the city, my wife had a great observation. "You know," she said. "I finally get to see what Astoria looks like on a sunny day. Every other time we've been through here, it's either foggy, or rainy, or just plain bad weather. This town is actually quite lovely."



Like her, I could see the draw of living here. The wide expanse of the Columbia beckons. There are quaint homes nestled in the hillside. And of course, the attractions of the downtown shops and great restaurants. "I could live here," I thought. But as soon as that idea had cleared my mind, we arrived at the Bridgewater Bistro. Club members talked with each other about their cars and the day's journey, while enjoying the sumptuous repast.

The only downside to this journey happened on the way home. I wanted to quickly stop by the town of Seaside. I like to drive down the main street with all the arcades, restaurants and tourist shops, and do the loop by the ocean, which we did.

However, on the way back to the main highway, a slovenly-dressed man standing outside the Carousel Mall decided to hurl a Coke at my white 911. He was in a group of similarly attired individuals, and I guess they'd seen one too many nice cars drive down the street that day. I had my driver's side window open to enjoy the

cool sea breeze, so I presented a tempting target.

Luckily for me, the soft drink was in a paper cup, and not a metal can. With wind resistance, and his poor aim in my favor, it bounced harmlessly off my car, splashing its contents against the drivers-side rear quarter panel - but missing me completely. The rest of the journey back to Portland was uneventful, and yes, I did wash the car the next morning. DW and I are now getting ready for the next chapter in our year-long 40th anniversary celebration. ■