

PCA Escape: The Other Porsche Club of America National Event

by Sean Cridland, Zone 9 Representative, Roadrunner Region

In its short history, the PCA Escape has become an increasingly popular gathering for Porsche owners and their cars. Its focus as a nationally sanctioned PCA event is far different than the Porsche Parade. Indeed, the Escape was never conceived as a replacement for Parade, but rather as a complementary venue for those who enjoy the social interaction of a PCA weekend without the stress of competition. It is what its name implies: a get-away weekend to a unique destination where Porsche owners can meet and enjoy each other's company. Tours, interesting locales, beautiful cars, and fine dining are all on the menu—pressured concours, rallies and autocrosses are not. Tenuous at first, Escape is now firmly a part of the National calendar, and is typically scheduled to afford PCAers the opportunity to meet at a location coast-opposite to that of Parade.

Why Escape?

A little history lesson will help explain why the PCA Escape was instantiated as a national event. The first ever national gathering of PCA was held in 1956. Known as Parade because the first two such events had parades of Porsches down the streets of Gaithersburg, MD, these events were relatively small and intimate and lasted over the course of a long weekend. Subsequently, Parade moved around the

country each year to allow all interested Regions a chance to host the event and to give Parade-goers an opportunity to visit new and interesting locales. As the Porsche brand grew in stature and numbers in the United States, so PCA grew, and Parade eventually became a week-long celebration of the marque attended by upwards of a thousand people with a variety of competitive and social events.

The Porsche Parade has evolved into its present status as a world-class event. It is one week of total Porsche immersion—a convention, an annual reunion of friends and members, and the national stage for the best Porsches and their owners to compete in all or part of the traditional motorsports triathlon—concours, rally and autocross. It is a hell of a lot of fun, but it also very intense. Participants expect the competitive events to be run flawlessly and social events to be memorable and noteworthy. Because of their sheer size and high expectations from participants and sponsors alike, modern Parades now require tremendous planning and resources—so much so that the PCA National Parade Committee has taken over running them in the future.

In light of all of this, the Zone Reps reviewed the 2003 PCA Member Survey as it related to Parade and proposed to

the Executive Council the concept of an extended Porsche weekend, entirely different in character and ambience to the current Parade. The thinking was this yet-to-be-named weekend would be a national-level event that would appeal to members who either did not have the time or resources to attend that year's Parade or who wanted to experience a more low-key event in a nice location with a purposely limited schedule. It was hoped the weekend would capture the intimacy of the early Parades and provide another PCA National activity at a lower cost to members, Regions, and sponsors.

The Zone Reps assigned to evaluate the concept took into consideration many of the comments of the 2003 survey respondents. The tenets that made the 356 Registry's Holidays, the Boxstoberfests, and some of the more prominent Region and Zone long weekend events successful were studied and incorporated into the model for this new weekend. At the end of their review, the Zone Reps determined the weekend should be geared more toward social activities and would not be scheduled in the same geographic area or time of year as Parade. In addition, it would be a shorter event, from two and half to four days maximum—in essence a long weekend commencing



with a Thursday check-in and social, two days of leisurely tours and socials and a final get-together on Sunday before the drive home. Any hint of competitiveness would be in the spirit of fun, such as a people's choice car show, gimmick rally, or tech sessions of general interest. Banquets would be events unto themselves—festive, with food and entertainment unique to the area and perhaps a well-known guest speaker. Tributes, trophies, and awards would remain the bailiwick of the Parade.

Once the concept was approved, the Executive Council authorized the Zone Reps to approve Escape proposals, locations, and schedules. The history of Escapes is testament to the unique flavor and feel of this event. The first Escape was held in 2005 in California's Wine Country. The following year saw PCAers traveling to New York State's Finger Lake region, home to many of New York's finer wineries and Watkins Glen. In 2007, Escape visited Northern Virginia, with myriad tours taking attendees down the pathways of history in Washington, D.C., Maryland and the Old Dominion State. For 2008, Escape made the journey to the Land of Enchantment in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This past year, Dayton, Ohio, the Birthplace of Aviation, played host to the Escape, and in 2010 PCAers will be able to experience the majesty of western Canada Sun Peaks, British Columbia. Much like Parade, a large part of the event's appeal lies in the unique locale's and the local region's scenery, driving roads, culture, and hospitality.

How Escape locations are chosen

At the start of each year the Zone Reps put out feelers to each of the Regions in their Zones to ascertain interest in Escape bids. All Regions and Zones are encouraged to submit a bid for an Escape if the Parade is not in their geographic area for that particular year. At Parade, the Zone Reps review all Escape bids and select the best bid for the following year's event. Selection is determined by a variety of factors, to include locale, schedule of events, demonstrated history by the Region to host a large event, budgetary factors for the Region and the participants, and distance from that year's Parade. The event should not be a cost burden to the attendees, nor a financial risk to the host region. If your region is interested in hosting an Escape, please contact your Zone Representative for further details.

Organizing and managing for success

As Escapes have taken their rightful place on the national stage and have developed their own traditions, more and more info has become available on the good management of an Escape weekend. While Parade is now managed by National PCA, the Escape is still a region managed event. National is available to provide guidance/assistance to the Region or Zone, should it be requested. If you're looking to organize an Escape weekend, start with Regionfocus Volume 8 Number 3 entitled "PCA 'Fest' Weekends: The Good, the Bad, and the

Ugly" and written by Vern and Betsi Lyle. This issue discusses the organization and challenges of multi-event weekends like Escape. Volume 17, Number 4's article on 'How to Organize a Successful Register Event', by Charlie Davis also provides solid guidelines. Each of the chairs of the previous Escapes is willing to offer advice and assistance. The Region Procedures Manual (RPM) will have more information in future volumes. Planning factors include the following:

Car/head count: minimum of 75 cars and 200 people, maximum of 200 cars and 500 people.

Location, location, location: Escape is all about location and the journey to get there. It should be a destination unto itself that people would want to visit for a weekend. The most successful escapes have featured gorgeous scenery, quaint (READ: small) cities, or fabulous areas like California's wine country. An Escape is not a weekend at the track or convocation at a large city. A pleasing venue for a car show is not a mandatory requirement, but very few participants will be thrilled with showing their car on a hotel parking lot.

Lodging. The hotel chosen should be renowned for its location (There's that word again), service, charm and support of large groups. It should not be cut-rate or in a location where it is overshadowed by an airport or urban sprawl. Figure a block of 100 rooms to start with a minimum banquet room size for 500 people. A hospitality room will be



required throughout the weekend. The National Office and Staff will review and negotiate contracts with hotels through the Zone Reps to support the sponsoring region(s); this is an important step to make sure that the Region is receiving a fair deal, and is not taking on unnecessary risk.

Activities. Some Escapes have made the classic mistake to associate Parade-like activities and motorsports venues.

Avoid this. Escapes are laid back social weekends with tours, dining, and history on the menu. Well planned banquets usually run themselves once the catering staff take over. Less presentations mean earlier end-times. And a good, entertaining speaker can leave people with a great last-impression of the day.

A sample schedule, taken from last year's 'Escape to the Land of Enchantment' follows:

Thursday

Registration.
Informal Show and Shine Car Show at Tanoan Country Club.

Friday

Tours heading south to Socorro and the world-famous Very Large Array, out to magical Acoma Pueblo, through the "East Mountains" to Santa Fe, and up through Los Alamos and the Jemez Mountains. Dinner at Albuquerque Balloon Museum.

Saturday

More tours across the rainbow of New Mexico culture, food, driving and scenery,

to include a Cayenne off-road tour.

Farewell Dinner.

At this past October's Escape to Dayton, Ohio, a show and shine car show was staged on Sunday morning that was very well attended. The show concluded in the early afternoon so participants could get on the road and head home afterwards.

Staffing:

While any event that attracts as many as 200 cars will require a significant staff, the limited event activities of an Escape means that a smaller region can undertake the task without hardship. For example: an autocross or a concours may require a small army of volunteers, but a tour can be run with a handful of well-organized people.

The local region(s) sponsoring the event would need to staff the following positions:

- Registrar/registration
- Car display/vendor area coordinator
- Banquet coordinator
- Tour director
- Hospitality liaison
- DE staff (if applicable)

Budgeting:

Assuming an attendance of 200 people, estimated costs are as follows:

Estimated costs/fees

Fixed costs: registration expenses, giveaways, site fees, vendor areas (if

applicable), modest awards (designed for fun rather than stature).

Floating costs: banquet meals.

Estimated fee breakdown

Event fee	15
Thursday welcome function	35
Friday tour/lunch	25
Friday dinner (on your own)	0
Saturday picnic/car display & lunch	25
Saturday banquet	50
Sunday brunch	25
Total per person (no lodging)	\$175

It is strongly recommended to make the event "all inclusive" to encourage more event participation, and to make registrar's job easier. This approach also makes event cash flow easier to forecast.

Promotion and presence:

PCA National is now heavily involved in promoting and participating in this event. Inclusion of preview and wrap-up articles in Panorama and on PCA.org has provided Escapes with tremendous publicity and hype. The presence of PCA National officers and Zone Reps underscores the importance and national 'stature' of the weekend. Region and Zones are encouraged to include Escape stories and photographs in their websites and newsletters—a sure-fire way to emphasize the point is a great way to participate in PCA activity, meet new people and see great cars.

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Sponsorship:

Escape organizers are encouraged to seek out local and/or regional sponsorship of their event as they would for a multi-event weekend. Escape is a great venue for local sponsors or smaller sponsors hoping to generate national attention to reach the PCA audience. For 2009 the Executive Director and the National Office have started to arrange for and coordinate for any national sponsors who may be interested in supporting the event. With the increased success of Escape, several of our National-level sponsors are seeing increased value in becoming involved in both PCA events, since they are different in character, geographic area, and demographic.

Summary

In a Club where history and tradition matter, Escape has gained an important foothold in PCA as a new tradition, and is starting to establish itself in the consciousness of the membership. Some PCA members view Escape as a viable alternative on the years when Parade is at a great distance. Some dedicated members see it as a supplemental second event of an entirely different character. And some see it as a great way to test the waters before committing to spending a whole week at a larger event such as Parade. In any scenario, it turns out that Parade and Escape complement one another as National level events of different flavor

and open up the National PCA experience to more of the membership.

While Parade is still the premier event in the PCA National calendar, Escape has taken on a status of its own, bringing PCA members from around the country to exciting new locales and smaller PCA regions for some great driving opportunities, some great local color, and another opportunity to make and keep great friendships in the PCA community. Escape has come of age.

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