



Behind the Coffee

Porsche Panorama

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Story and Photos by Sean Cridland



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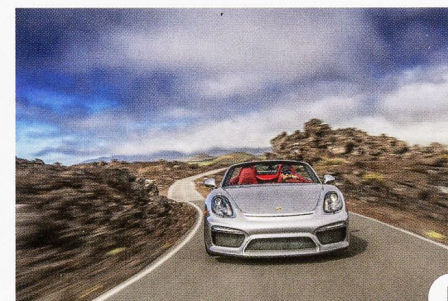
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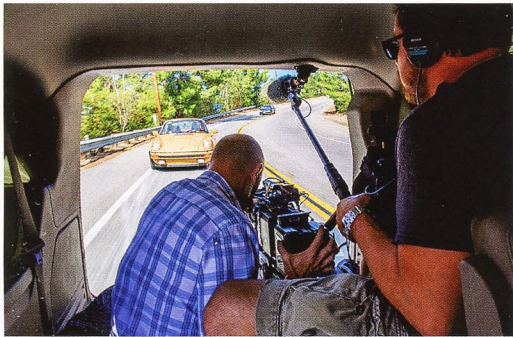
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Behind the Coffee

ON LOCATION WITH JERRY SEINFELD'S HIT WEB SERIES, *COMEDIANS IN CARS GETTING COFFEE*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SEAN CRIDLAND

TWO YOUNG COMEDIANS, one from Chicago by way of Arizona and one from New York, make their way to Los Angeles in the late 1970s. Both struggle to launch their careers, doing nightly stand-up routines, writing for other comics and shows, and getting bit parts. Eventually, they reach the Holy Grail of aspiring comedians, an appearance on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson.

The two men go on to great success in the late 1980s and 1990s with self-titled sitcoms. Like nearly everyone who “makes it” in their chosen profession, they reach a point in their lives when they can own any car they desire. The two stars—Jerry Seinfeld and Garry Shandling—both drove a Porsche 911 Turbo, known to enthusiasts as the 930.

Decades later, they're riding around Hollywood in a Cashmere Beige 930 with a Cork interior, revisiting the neighborhood where their careers took off. They lament not seeing each other enough, talk about old times, visit the sites of their success, share a meal, and talk about their friends, lives, interests, and hobbies. They're here to film an episode of Jerry Seinfeld's web series, *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*. And *Panorama* is behind the scenes to bring you the story.





COMEDIANS IN CARS GETTING COFFEE is a carefully blended brew. Not just cars, not just comedy, it's about sharing—sharing a ride, sharing a meal, sharing a conversation. The show is bicoastal, filming in New York and Los Angeles. Because it's on the web, you can tune in any time you want on your computer, tablet, or smart phone. Each episode is between 15 and 20 minutes long—short enough to watch while you're catching a shuttle from the airport to your rental car or when waiting to pick up your kids from school.

Most of Seinfeld's guests visit as themselves. Some—like Miranda Sings—come in character. Unlike some “reality” shows that feature overly privileged housewives or whiny, petulant self-important fashionistas, *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* has a more casual air.

It's a talk show that skips the artificial sound stage with a desk, a couch, and a fake plant. There are no bright lights or makeup. Instead, Seinfeld meets the comedian of the week at his or her hotel, office, or home and drives to a restaurant or coffee shop. Some guests are close friends. Some are comedic legends. Others are up-and-comers.

A few well-placed GoPro cameras record the in-car conversation. You listen in as Seinfeld and his guest move from car to sidewalk to restaurant or coffee shop. The conversation is much like one that you and one of your good friends might have—if you both made a living by being funny.

While the show isn't really about cars, they do play a central role. Seinfeld picks up each guest in a car he

thinks suits that guest's personality. An episode with Jason Alexander reprising his role as George Costanza features an AMC Pacer. Kevin Hart, diminutive in size but loud in character, merits a vintage Porsche RSK Spyder. For Steven Colbert, it's a 1960s Morgan Plus 4. Howard Stern rides in a 1970 Pontiac GTO, *The Judge*. Appropriately for a fellow car guy and Porsche lover, Jay Leno merits the brass ring—Seinfeld's prized 1949 356/2 Gmünd coupe.

You get the idea.

Some of the show's automotive “co-stars” don't cooperate. It took two De Loreans to complete the Patton Oswalt episode. The Ferrari Daytona 365 GTB/4 in the Amy Schumer episode started smoking and had to be pulled over to the side of the road in the Bronx. Some cars, like the Pacer, just aren't fun to drive. When asked, Seinfeld admits that “the Porsches are always great. Some of the other ones have been good, too. But some...I couldn't wait to get out of them.”

DAY ONE OF A TWO-DAY SHOOT is spent on the nuts and bolts of filming. “B-roll” refers to any shot that helps to establish the action or context of the plot. It usually doesn't include dialogue or require acting by the principal players, or “talent,” as they're known in the business.

A self-produced talk show like *CiCGC* is an exception. Seinfeld is the host of the show and narrates the introduction, so he's involved in shooting several of the B-roll sequences. Even then, the production crew works for several hours on technical setup and detail shots so



Opposite: Seinfeld plays to the camera during B-roll filming. **Left:** By industry standards, the *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* crew is tiny, but it still takes a half-ton of equipment and several vehicles to make it all happen.



Even with a minimalist approach, the technology is sophisticated. It includes a MōVI remote-controlled, stabilized, side-mounted camera, special monitors to optimize GoPro placement, and extended mounts for motion shots. Seating is cramped during shifting and steering shots.

Seinfeld can get directly to work when he arrives.

Over at the staging location, not far from LAX, the building is aflutter with activity. Director and co-executive producer Tammy Johnston is checking with car handler Farshad Tehrani to ensure the 930 runs properly and is immaculate. Due to the milestone it marked in his career, the 930 is near and dear to Jerry's heart. Besides, Seinfeld is a Porsche guy. It wouldn't do to have anything but the best for this episode.

Camera lead John Taggart, audio tech Giovanni Lima, and the principal cinematography crew are unpacking, sorting, and preparing various cameras and sound equipment. Gianni Cabiglio and Dean Parnham are using a small monitor to test the placement of the GoPro cameras for B-roll shots of the car's wheels turning. Some of the shots only require simple suction cups to attach the camera. Other are more complicated, requiring suction anchors and an intricate system of rods, clamps, ball-heads, and arms to mount the camera far enough from the car to get the desired shot. A working



knowledge of Tinkertoys looks like it would be helpful.

Johnston, who has worked in news, reality TV, and talk shows, says this series is unlike anything in traditional television: "The format moves fast; anything can happen. Our show isn't like other reality shows. It's more like live TV, though we do edit for the best moments."

Johnston stresses the need to find angles and situations that will contribute a more lively, dynamic feel to the finished product. "Camera angles and GoPro placement are important for us," she says. "Without using digital special effects, we want to make the viewer feel the excitement of being on the road while Jerry drives. The conversations need to feel intimate, not canned."

Every B-roll setup is a bit different, because no two episodes use the same car. The cameras might capture front wheels as they steer, rear tires as they speed up, a view out of the side windows to establish speed, the driver's hands, or the wipers as they move across the windshield.

THE CREW ASSEMBLES at a classified location that has been researched for traffic flow, parking, scenery, and other factors that contribute to the visual interest of each shot. For the 930, that means a suitably twisty road. Once there, the crew gets everything mounted on the car for a handful of shots they'll do with Gianni Cabiglio driving in Seinfeld's stead.

In the film industry, time—and light—are of the essence. But arriving at the location can be a challenge. In

L.A., you never know if a drive up the road will take 20 minutes or two hours. It's bad enough getting someplace yourself; try keeping 15 people in four vehicles together. Once the crew loads all of its gear into two SUVs and a minivan, a police escort smooths the way. Headed to the first of two locations in the Malibu Hills, the 930 is kept safely positioned between the production vehicles to keep it out of harm's way.

By traditional television standards, Seinfeld's crew is a tight unit—there are about twelve people, including production assistants, support vehicle drivers, and those on the cameras and sound equipment. Filming is all done gonzo style—and always on the move. Almost everyone works in more than one capacity, helping out wherever they can to keep production rolling. Each episode takes only two days to shoot, and location manager Josh Ricks says that, in seven seasons, they've never gone over.

Taggart alternately hand-holds one camera and remotely controls the side-mounted, gimballed unit that is anchored to the car with large suction cups and tethers. Driver and tech adviser Ted Nelson monitors forward and rearward traffic, keeps track of where the 930 is relative to the van, and gives a wide enough berth to both the 930 and traffic so as not to lose any crew members or peel the side-mounted camera off the van. When Nelson isn't driving, he is checking cable connections or anything else that may need adjusting.

Johnston, as director, sits immediately behind the driver—keeping track of all cameras, sound, and action

At the beginning of each episode, Seinfeld gives a brief overview of the featured car, during which he talks about its various elements while pushing buttons, flipping levers, and explaining gauges.



Unless you have a trained eye, you'd never guess the amount of work that goes into each episode. It takes special skill to operate the drones, cameras, sound equipment, and support vehicles. Right: Think this is crowded? They had to find room for the *Panorama* photographer, too!



on a tablet. In case you're counting, that's five people and loads of highly sophisticated camera and sound equipment with cables running everywhere in a tightly cramped space. Oh, and today, there is a somewhat large photographer from *Panorama* on board, trying to capture all the action without getting in the way. It's a tight squeeze.

SUDDENLY, A WHITE 914-6 GT arrives, driven by the star of the show. A relaxed Seinfeld emerges, his comfort with the crew immediately apparent. Most of them have worked with him on several episodes; some have been with him since the series started. He checks in with Johnston for any last-minute changes, adjustments, or additions.

After a quick bite to eat, the afternoon's work commences. The camera van sets off again, as does the 930, this time with Seinfeld behind the wheel. The two vehicles drive at regular highway speed, doing their best not to impede midday traffic. Seinfeld drops back, allowing the camera to get the "full-frontal" shot of him driving, then races forward, passing the van. Then he drops back again. Occasionally, the camera operators will ask the director to have Seinfeld maintain speed alongside the van. He does so with ease, mugging for the camera.

The next location is a quiet ranch, where the soft light and lush green background accentuate the coffee-like hue of the 930's Cashmere Beige finish. This is where the "walk-up" portion of the show will be filmed. Seinfeld introduces the car, walks around it, gets in, and talks about some of the internal, external, and mechanical features. He turns the key, pops the gas cap, opens and closes the hood, and points out the intercooler and other features unique to the 930. Once those shots are in the can, Seinfeld is done for the day.

The crew stays behind. Detail shots of the car—its knobs, handles, levers, and pedals—are followed by several passes with a DJI Inspire 1 Pro drone fitted with a 4K video camera. Until you've seen a drone in the deft



hands of a professional, you don't realize how much skill is required to operate it.

Late October provides some of California's best light—bright and vibrant—but it also has shorter windows of opportunity. By about 6:30 p.m., it's too dark for even the best cameras. The crew drives back to base after a twelve-hour-plus day, and there's barely time to eat, sleep, and catch up on email before thinking about the second day of filming.

DAY TWO IS GUEST DAY, and it's Garry Shandling's show. If the first day was long and somewhat relaxed, this one is shorter and more intense. The team is at base camp bright and early. The Porsche is ready to go, and the gear is loaded up by 9:00 a.m. A quick team meeting headed by Johnston ensures that everyone is on the same page. It's imperative to the flow of the show and the comfort of the guest that everything goes smoothly.

When Jerry and Garry drive, the SUVs and minivan will be nearby, filming everything—the car in traffic, people on the sidewalk, and whatever oddities are going on in the neighborhood. When Jerry and Garry walk, the team will walk. When Jerry and Garry sit, the team will swarm in to film. Today, it's all about Jerry and Garry.

Right on schedule, the team heads from base camp to the Beverly Hills London Hotel, just off Sunset Strip.



They pull in, and camera and sound people hit the pavement with a precision and coordination that would make Seal Team Six jealous. The tan 930 is parked front and center. Other hotel guests are diverted as Seinfeld makes the invitational call that begins each episode: "Garry, this is Jerry Seinfeld. What are you doing? Want to go get a cup of coffee?"

Eventually, Shandling appears, and the two old friends greet each other. Shandling is thrilled to see the

Top: Seinfeld preparing to meet Shandling outside the London Hotel. Above: Two of the world's funniest comedians in a car that's familiar to both of them.

They'll sift through almost 100 hours of material. Eventually, they'll get it down to ten hours, then to two hours, then to 40 minutes, 30, and finally, 20.



From the top: Seinfeld making faces at speed. Shandling and Seinfeld casually stroll down Ventura Boulevard—with a team of 15 people. Shandling shares an insight.



Porsche, immediately getting the reference. While he's not quite the car guy Seinfeld is, the 930 brings back memories. It's the perfect car for their ride today.

Three GoPros are mounted inside the 930. One in the center records a "two shot," or a shot of both Seinfeld and Shandling. The other two cameras are angled—one toward Seinfeld and the other toward Shandling—for "one shots." In the production vehicle, the director can monitor any of the cameras, as well as listen to the two men talking inside the Porsche.

The conversation ranges from their health to what each is doing for a hobby. Seinfeld's is cars, of course. Shandling has gotten into boxing. As the convoy turns up Sunset Strip, they muse about playing The Comedy Store and some of the comedians who were there at the same time: Steve Martin, Robin Williams, George Wallace, Louie Anderson, Whoopi Goldberg, David Brenner, Sam Kinison, Richard Pryor. It's a blast down memory lane.

Eventually, they stop for coffee and breakfast at Du-par's Restaurant and Bakery, across the street from Studio City. They sit in a booth near the back to minimize their impact on the flow of regular business. It's obvious the two are veteran performers as they carry on a perfectly normal conversation even as a team of camera and sound people swarm over them. As the crew films every comment, expression, wince, and laugh from a few inches away, Seinfeld and Shandling calmly eat their breakfast and sip their coffee.

GRADUALLY, THE DISCUSSION shifts toward the challenges of writing comedy for a series. Like any accomplished tradesmen, they talk about the necessity of discipline and initiative, hard work and self-belief, and the extreme self-reflection that arises when facing an audience.

Eventually, they move on to the philosophy of time and the "virtuous state of creating" that comes from a lifetime of experience. Will these topics make it into the final show? Who knows? But it's a pleasure to eavesdrop on two comic geniuses as they alternately share deep thoughts and fondly mock one another.

When breakfast ends, the team springs back to action. Jerry and Garry walk across Ventura Boulevard to Studio City. It's a world unto itself, where they currently film series such as Tim Allen's *Last Man Standing* (in the same studio where Seinfeld shot his series), *Two Broke Girls*, and *Big Brother*. Street names honor standout performers and shows: Mary Tyler Moore Avenue, Gilligan's Island Road, and Gunsmoke Avenue.



Seinfeld and Shandling meander down New York Street, where they used to take walks together during breaks in filming to discuss ideas and career issues, or just to ease the stress and monotony of a heavy filming schedule. They reflect on where the sets were, funny things that happened, and cast and crew members from the good old days.

Eventually, Seinfeld and Shandling drive off in the 930 as crew members pile back into the production vehicles and make their way through traffic to get Shandling to his home in the Hollywood Hills. Final good-byes are said, the cameras are switched off, and Seinfeld offers Shandling a gift, a hat from Rennsport Reunion V, as a token of his appreciation.

THE MASSIVE TASK OF INSPECTING AND EDITING the footage will take place in New York a couple of days later with Seinfeld, Johnston, and other members of the production crew. Counting all the B-roll and guest day footage from the GoPros, the cinematic cameras, and the drone, they'll sift through almost 100 hours of material. Eventually, they'll get it down to ten hours, then to two hours, then to 40 minutes, 30, and finally, 20. Then music and graphics will be added, Seinfeld will narrate the intro, and the episode will be a wrap. It'll hit the web in January or February of 2016.

If you've never seen *Comedians in Cars Getting*

Coffee, you might think "it's just a talk show with cars." But watch one of the episodes, and you may find yourself wanting to watch more, maybe even all six (soon to be seven) seasons' worth. The show's unforced, honest tone gives you a glimpse of Seinfeld and each of his guests that you won't find elsewhere in the media.

While many people might revere Porsche's 930 as the most powerful, brutish sports car of its era, over these two days it was something more. It fostered a conversation worth listening to and revealed a bond not broken between two long-time friends and now-veteran performers. It's a ride worth taking. ☯

Above: Only in Hollywood could a camera crew filming two major celebrities not cause even a small stir.

