



An enthusiast's profile

How preparation leads to performance

Name: Eric Stratton

Occupation: President and CEO, Vaxcom Services, Inc., an employee-owned professional services company that provides secure IT, threat management and protective intelligence anti-terrorism services.

Lifes in: I've lived in the D.C.-metro area for 20 years, including Columbia, Md. and the last 10 years in Fairfax, Va.; but Lincoln, Neb. will always be home to me.

Tell us about your first Porsche: A black 1992 911 C2 Targa; purchased on April 1, 2000. I called the owner in Raleigh, N.C., and it was just what I was looking for; we negotiated terms on the spot, and I flew down that same morning to close the deal.

When the owner picked me up at the airport, I knew instantly that it was the right car. I flew back the following weekend to pick it up, but the owner was out of town, so he literally left the keys under a potted plant; we also made arrangements for me to use his garden hose so that I could detail the car (slippery slope No.1).

Potomac happened to be holding a DE event at VIR that weekend, so I drove directly from Raleigh to VIR to show it off to my friends at the track. Everyone loved it, but ultimately suggested that I'd need to get another one because it was "too nice" to put on the track!

I participated in a 2-day HPDC two weeks after I bought it and was instantly hooked on driving my Porsche in the environment it was designed for — the race track (slippery slope No. 2).

Tell us about your current Porsche: 1993 911 RS America, Guards Red. Knowing that I wanted a performance-oriented track car, I searched for over a year to find the perfect RSA in terms of condition and options: LSD



Photo by Sideline Sports Photography '09

Above: Stratton at speed during a 2007 event at Virginia International Raceway.

Photo by Richard Curtis

Left: Porsche enthusiast and DE participant Stratton searched for over a year for just the RS America he wanted. Although licensed for the street, Eric uses the car exclusively for DEs.

only, no sunroof, no A/C and no radio. Of the 701 RSAs made, few were ultimately optioned this way. Not that I would recommend it, but I actually bought this car sight unseen and had it shipped from Beverly Hills to Fairfax; the first time I saw it in person was coming off the transport. A photo of my car has been featured on the home page of the PCA RS America Registry www.rsamerica.net for the past several years.

Other vehicles: My tow vehicle is a 2005 GMC 2500



Photo by Richard Curtis

Left: Eric works on his RSA between track sessions recently at Summit Point (W.Va.) Raceway. When he bought his enclosed trailer, he specifically ordered a rare driver's side awning in order to increase the socializing space during track weekends.

HD with Duramax diesel and Allison transmission. It is a fantastic rig with lots of torque, and it is comforting to know that it isn't straining to get the job done. In 2008, I added a 24 ft. enclosed trailer that has added significantly to my pleasure at the track.

Photo by Willy Straubhaar

Right: Master Sergeant John Souza, gives a thumbs up before his laps around Summit Point Raceway in Stratton's RSA. One of the highlights of last year's DE season, says Stratton, was the opportunity to participate in the club's Vets on Track program.

What do you like best about your current Porsche?

I absolutely love my car and it is a total blast to drive. The set-up has been developed and refined over the past eight years to where it consistently provides high performance on the track. I know precisely what to expect from the car, and that permits me to drive at a high level while still maintaining a margin of safety. The car instills the confidence that allows me to drive close to other drivers I know and trust.

One relatively obscure fact about RSAs is that they do not have power steering; while not well suited for street driving, it is ideal for high-speed track driving.

What modifications have you done to your Porsche?

Slippery slope No. 3...Starting with a stock RSA, it has been a gradual and ongoing process with the big improvements taking place over a period of years and timed to match my development as a driver. I believe that seat time is more important than car upgrades; the investment sequence I follow is safety equipment first, then trailer, then performance. The major upgrades include safety equipment such as custom-fitted racing seats, roll bar, harnesses, HANS device and bigger brakes with racing pads; handling enhancements feature dual-adjustable



remote reservoir shocks and full monoball suspension, adjustable sway bars and two matching sets of track wheels and tires. Due to the intensity of track driving the conventional definition of "consumables" is expanded and accelerated; averaging 25 track days per year, I go through several sets of track tires and always keep a spares package of new filters, rotors, pads, axles and wheel bearings on hand. The engine was rebuilt to factory specs in 2005; in addition, it has a lightweight flywheel, racing clutch — and for a little cachet — a ring & pinion once driven by two-time F1 champion Mika Hakkinen. One of the most satisfying experiences has been refining the set-up by performing custom alignments myself, including ride heights and corner balancing. The latest and most useful enhancement has been a data logger that allows lap-by-lap, and segment-by-segment, comparison with other drivers; we've all learned and improved from discussing the differences revealed by the data.



How long a PCA member and in which roles have you contributed? I joined PCA in April 2000. My primary passion is DE, so most of my contributions have been associated with the DE program. I supported the tech team for a few years, and then I was Potomac track coordinator from 2002-2008. As track coordinator, I arranged the track schedule, negotiated the track-rental contracts and managed track-event logistics.

What do you find compelling about DE? It provides the opportunity to develop advanced driver skills in a safe, controlled environment. I am an adrenaline junkie at heart; when starting out I recall that I was not only thrilled while driving on track, but I could feel the buzz the entire next day; the one exception was my first trip to Watkins Glen — that buzz literally lasted a week.

The best way to describe the experience of a race track such as Watkins Glen is that it's like driving a roller coaster. My favorite tracks are fast and have flowing high speed corners with lots of elevation change.

One exciting dimension of DE is the opportunity to learn new circuits, especially when they have reputations as professional racer's favorite tracks. I've coordinated many road trips over the years, including to tracks such as Road Atlanta, Mont Tremblant and Mosport.

A scheduling goal is to find consecutive events with enough track time to justify the drive; this year, we're driving two events at Road America followed by an event at Mid-Ohio!

From car preparation to loading/unloading and track maintenance, the logistics associated with DE can be intensive; even if you treat each event as a mini-vacation, you don't get much rest. One key benefit is the mental separation from the stresses of work; even if only 60 miles away at Summit Point the level of concentration, commitment and excitement is so high that work is the last

thing on your mind. While DE is not a competition, it is internally competitive; in the Red run group my competitor is my best lap time given the conditions, and my challenge is overcoming performance plateaus to reach new levels. As an instructor, you have the opportunity to share passions and experiences with students, and it is gratifying to watch them learn and improve.

Thanks to an idea from a club member and the work of many volunteers, the past two years we featured Vets on Track where we had the honor of hosting wounded warriors from Walter Reed Medical Center. For those interested and capable of getting into a race car, we even provided some hot laps on track in a specially designated run session. In 2008, Master Sergeant John P. Souza rode with me and afterwards he proclaimed it was "better than riding in a Black Hawk helicopter!" He asked that I sign his journal, but the best parts were his disbelief when I asked *him* to sign *my* hat, and then his wife, Deb, thanking me for putting a smile on his face; a smile she hadn't seen in a long time. Personally, I found this to be the highlight of the DE season.

Anything else? One of the best features of the club is meeting so many wonderful people. The social aspect of the DE experience is compelling; from seeing familiar faces in the paddock to making life-long friends. If work or a broken car prevents me from attending track events, I certainly miss the driving, but as much as anything I miss being with my friends. There is a genuine *esprit de corps* in the paddock; for virtually every situation that can come up there is someone who has already experienced it and will generously share their knowledge. This social dimension is why my new trailer was designed with the awning and access door on the left side: so that I can park parallel to a friend's trailer and create a comfortable paddock gathering place.

Photo by Glenn Virgin, 2009
GPVirginphoto.com

Above: Eric's RS America is one of 701 of that model made in 1993. It is optioned with a limited-slip differential but has no sunroof, air conditioning, or radio.