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COAST IS CLEAR

We take time out to visit Seacoast Specialist Cars, New Hampshire's leading independent Porsche service, sales and restoration shop...

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Bordered by Maine to the east and Vermont to the west, New Hampshire is the fifth smallest of all the USA's fifty states and the tenth least

populous. Visitors from afar looking for quiet time away from the hustle and bustle of everyday modern life travel to this relatively quiet north-eastern locale for its relaxed pace of living, which proves particularly popular with visitors from the north (chiefly the Canadian province of Quebec) and states located south, including Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Tourists from Britain are something of a novelty in this part of North America, and though myself and *911 & Porsche World* photographer, Chris Wallbank, are met with a warm welcome wherever we find ourselves exploring, the English haven't always been so well-received in this neck of the woods. Indeed, New Hampshire was the first of the British American colonies to establish an independent government and state constitution, going on to supply ships, military personnel and ammunition in the war against Britain in the battle

for American independence. Near two hundred and fifty years later, despite local vehicle license plates proudly displaying the maxim, *Live Free or Die* (in recognition of New Hampshire's key role in the American Revolutionary War), tensions have thawed, as demonstrated when we walk through the doors of Candia-based Porsche indie, Seacoast

stunning Shark Blue 992 Carrera. The 986 and 992 might represent bookends of our favourite sports car maker's modern era of manufacturing, but don't be fooled into thinking Seacoast Specialist Cars only serves owners of water-cooled Porsches — look closely at our pictures and you'll note the presence of a 911 Carrera Cabriolet and a 911

SC. "We work on Porsches of all ages, from early 356s to the latest products to roll out of Zuffenhausen," Tom explains. "It's true to say the bulk of our

TWO YEARS INTO HIS TENURE AT THE MAIN DEALER, TOM DECIDED THE TIME HAD COME TO GO IT ALONE ONCE AGAIN

Specialist Cars, and are greeted with open arms by founder, Tom Vagi.

Looking around the company's primary service area, it becomes immediately apparent Tom's team takes care of a wide variety of Porsches. At the back of the workshop, high aloft a ramp, is a 986 Boxster recently relieved of its flat-six. Head technician, Christopher Kustos, is busy rebuilding the drop-top's engine, which is perched on a stand near a stunning black 944 Turbo trimmed in eye-popping Can-Can red leather. As we discover, this is Tom's personal Porsche, which I'll come to later.

At the other end of the workshop, also riding high on a service ramp, is a

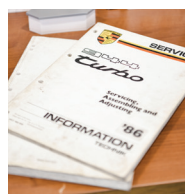
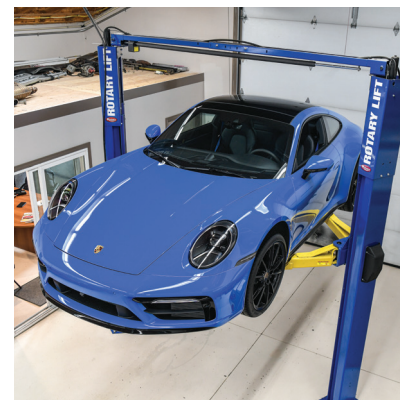
work focuses on the maintenance of 996-, 997- and 991-generation 911s in constant use, but as you can see, my team also has strong knowledge of Porsche's transaxle family of sports cars, as well as air-cooled classics."

It's easy to see why New Hampshire's easy living is such a strong draw for holidaymakers. This same quality also attracts well-heeled retirees in pursuit of a quiet life by the coast. As I found out not long after setting foot in what's known as The Granite State (on account of its many quarries), it's not unusual to come across wealthy local residents who have amassed impressive collections of sports cars. Some of these fleets,

Facing page

Seacoast Specialist Cars may be a young company, but the team has decades of experience working on Porsches

Below Whether old, new, water-cooled or air-cooled, all Porsches are catered for at this Candia-based company





though undoubtedly impressive, are modest in size, while others fill massive barns. Needless to say, Porsches rank high among the inclusions, going some way to explaining why Tom saw fit to start Seacoast Specialist Cars back in April 2022.

AT YOUR SERVICE

"I've been working on Porsches for thirty years," he tells me. "I started as a mechanic's apprentice in New York State and, by the age of twenty-six, opened my own shop specialising in Audis, but with a side-line in Porsche servicing and maintenance. After sixteen years, I sold up and moved to New Hampshire. Seeking gainful employment, I joined the local Porsche Centre, where I took on the role of Service Manager."

Christopher was working as a technician at the same site, but this isn't where the dynamic duo met. "We're cousins," Tom laughs. "Christopher interned at my old shop. We then worked alongside one another at the state's primary Porsche Centre, and now toil together at Seacoast Specialist Cars."

Two years into his tenure at the main dealer, Tom decided the time had come to go it alone once again. The hunt for suitable premises began in earnest. Meanwhile, over on Raymond Road, Candia, less than twenty minutes from

New Hampshire's Manchester-Boston Regional Airport, a classic sports car concern occupying prime workshop, storage and showroom space was undergoing significant restructuring. Coincidentally, this was where Tom stored his 944 Turbo through the winter months. "Forty-eight hours before leaving my job at the Porsche Centre, I contacted the owner of the business in Candia with an enquiry about an air-cooled Porsche I'd seen in the firm's stock list. As the conversation progressed, I learned the

workshop was becoming available to let on account of the company's one and only technician retiring."

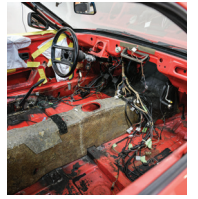
Tom wasted no time heading over for a chat. The opportunity was obvious: generously sized working space no longer in use, attached to a classic car business with no in-house technician and no established relationship with a service centre. It was clear each party could help the other. Fast-forward a few hours, and with an invitation for Tom to take on the workshop for his new

Above and below
Many different jobs were in progress during our visit, from a 986 engine rebuild to detailing a 997 GTS

Bottom Early 944 was a barn find and is now being fully restored







Top Tom has known his 944 Turbo since he was a teenager and plans to install a turbocharged three-litre inline-four in the not too distant future

Facing page Spotless workshop plays host to a diverse mix of Porsche sports cars

Porsche venture, plus the promise of work maintaining the historic vehicles in the adjacent part of the building, Seacoast Specialist Cars was born.

Having somewhere to work from is one thing, but drumming up trade is often the most difficult part of starting a company, not to mention making it a success. Tom was confident his long history working on Stuttgart's finest sports cars spoke for itself, although he didn't necessarily expect such a high number of his former employer's customers to follow him to Candia.

He's keen to stress he in no way encouraged the Centre's patrons to switch allegiance, but the relationships he'd built by going above and beyond expectation at the main dealer saw Seacoast Specialist Cars attract an immediate and loyal client base.

Tom is unboastful when talking about his reputation for excellent customer service, but away from Candia, while Snapper Wallbank and I have been journeying around New Hampshire and meeting fellow Porsche enthusiasts, we're struck by just how many owners have sung Tom's praises without being prompted to do so. It is abundantly clear any Porsche in the custody of Seacoast

Specialist Cars is in exceptionally safe hands.

Talking of which, during our visit, a gorgeous Carmine Red 991 Carrera GTS takes centre stage. I'm also unable to ignore the jet black second-gen 997 carrying the same three-letter badge,

IT IS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR ANY PORSCHE IN THE CUSTODY OF SEACOAST SPECIALIST CARS IS IN EXCEPTIONALLY SAFE HANDS

as well as the nearby Guards Red 944. The latter belongs to Britt Ellison, Tom's partner (in life and work) and the member of his team responsible for marketing. She reveals how her adoration for the scene-stealing 944 in the Molly Ringwald coming-of-age comedy film, *Sixteen Candles*, ignited her passion for Porsche.

"Tom bought the car as a barn find," she reveals. "Mice had done a number on the interior, engine bay and wiring, but nonetheless, he was presented with a complete 1983 944 rolling on its original 'cookie cutter' wheels." The initial plan of action was to turn the car into a 924 Carrera GT replica, but reasoning it too good to alter, Tom decided to gift the radiant red transaxle to Britt and restore to factory

specification. To satisfy her desire for a modified Porsche, he's also promised to build her a personalised G-series 911 Targa. "After the 944 is finished," he smiles. "One project at a time!"

A walk through Seacoast Specialist Cars reveals a sizeable room dedicated to engine rebuilds, a stack of state-of-the-art Porsche diagnostic equipment, a wheel balancing and tyre fitting machine, row upon row of tool chests, a large overhead parts store and ample office space. "We also offer detailing services, including paint correction and the application of paint protection film. Additionally, we have solid relationships with trusted bodywork preparation, paint and interior trimming specialists, enabling us to project manage restorations from start to finish."

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

At the time of our tour, a handful of customer cars sit out front, but regular free-to-attend coffee mornings bring in a much higher number of Porsches from far and wide. "We're very much 'open house' during these meets, encouraging attendees to have a look around and chat with fellow enthusiasts in the comfort of our working space," Tom says, proudly.



"I know only too well how stiff the main dealer customer experience can be. The Seacoast Specialist Cars approach is far more informal – this is a friendly and inviting place for customers to get to know their cars a little better."

It's also totally spotless. This is a crucial aspect of modern workshops – no longer do Porsche owners expect to be told to sit quietly in waiting rooms while their cars are spannered in areas hidden from view. Today's enthusiasts wish to learn more about their four-wheeled

friends and want to understand what's involved in keeping them on the road. A working environment every bit as clean as a showroom is essential. Seacoast Specialist Cars has it licked.

Earlier, I mentioned Tom's 1988 944 Turbo. He previously owned a 1991 Carrera 4S, used as his daily, but sold to raise capital for investing in the business. A 1997 Cayenne is now put to work as his runaround, leaving the 944 as his plaything. This turbocharged transaxle was no consolation prize, though, as he explains. "I first saw the car when I was a teenager. It was just four years old and drove through the small town in New York State I called home. I was bowled over and wondered

if I'd ever be in a position to own a 944 Turbo of my own." Little did he know he'd end up as this very Porsche's proud pilot.

"Years went by. I saw the car in town from time to time. Eventually, its lady owner passed away. Her kids inherited the Porsche and, through my previous outfit, asked me to look after it for them." Understandably, Tom was thrilled to be

THE CAR NOW BENEFITS FROM KONI ADJUSTABLE DAMPERS AND IS LIKELY TO RECEIVE A FULL RESPRAY NEXT YEAR

commissioned to dote on a 944 he'd held in such high regard for such a long period of time. "I became this Turbo's permanent caretaker. As a result of its owners living in New York City and the car being here, near the Canadian border, it saw little use. After three or four years, I was asked if I could find it a new home. I wasted no time in buying it for myself!"

Factory-equipped with a limited-slip differential and the aforementioned bright red leather interior, the car now benefits from Koni adjustable dampers and is likely to receive a full respray next year, along with a custom turbocharged three-litre engine built in-house at Seacoast Specialist Cars. "There is no limit to the scale of work we'll take on,"

Tom stresses. "The important takeaway is to understand we will manage and execute all jobs to the highest of standards, irrespective of the value of Porsche being worked on or the scope of the task at hand, whether it be servicing, a transmission rebuild, detailing or whatever else a customer commissions us to do. We never shy away from

work and always ensure it is completed to the highest possible standards."

As for what's next, with the neighbouring classic vehicle

sales and storage facility winding down, and in recognition of Tom's lofty ambitions for the development of his young business, he hopes to take occupancy of the entire building on Raymond Road, thereby allowing him to not only increase the number of sales cars he is able to keep in stock at any one time, but also to create more space for technicians to undertake servicing and restoration work. And with New Hampshire among the wealthiest of all American states, appetite for Porsches in this part of the world shows no sign of slowing down. With it comes the need for a trusted independent marque specialist. Seacoast Specialist Cars is set for success long into the future. ●

Above Workshop is in a prime location, a short drive from the busiest airport in New Hampshire