



VIALE CIRO MENOTTI

ISSUE 88

the magazine for maserati enthusiasts

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The Story of my



Text and photos by: Michael C. Wilson

Maserati 4Porte

The story of Maserati 4Porte ZAMBC1101AA301092 begins back in late 1987 when I was driving on N.E. 8th in Bellevue, Washington. I had just pulled up to a stoplight in my 1981 Alfa Romeo GTV/6 2.5 when the most gorgeous 4-door sedan I had ever seen in my life pulled up next to me. I had never seen a car like this, and had absolutely no idea what it was. When the light turned green I allowed him to pull away first so I could ascertain what this rolling piece of art was. There in brightly polished chrome letters across the trunk was the answer: "MASERATI 4PORTE." This was the first time in my life I looked at something and said: "It will be mine... Oh yes, it will be mine." My first step in the journey was to find a Maserati Club. Since I already belonged to the Northwest Alfa Club, I knew what a wealth of

knowledge car clubs could be. What a shock to find out the Maserati Information Exchange (MIE's old name back then) was right in my backyard in Bellevue, Washington!!!

The First Time....

After joining the club and ordering all back copies of *Viale Ciro Menotti (VCM)* that dealt with the 1980-87 4Porte and reading everything technical I could about them, I felt I was armed with enough information to actually start looking for one to park in my garage! As luck would have it, back in those days Frank Mandarano used to sell/broker used Maseratis through MIE, and he just so happened to have an absolutely gorgeous 1986 Bordeaux colored example. My wife and I scheduled some time one Saturday afternoon to test-drive it. When we first arrived at MIE and I laid eyes on it for the first

time, I was in love! After opening the door and sliding behind the steering wheel into that driver's seat that was more comfortable than a leather La-Z-Boy recliner ever dreamed of being, I knew that I had found the car for me! My 6-foot, 2-inch frame fit perfectly! I didn't feel like I had to fold myself in half to drive it like I did in my Alfas. When Frank had me turn the key and fire up that V8, I can still remember the goosebumps on my arms and the chill that ran up my spine. I had never in my life heard a sound like that. 4.9 liters of Italian glory, breathing through eight carburetor barrels on four Webers that made a sound that rivaled that of the angels singing in heaven! Just when I thought it couldn't get any better, we took it out for a test drive. First off, let me say that the 4Porte is not what most Italian exotic car buyers would say is "quick." However, the

comfort; the smell of leather and wood; the look of the car and sound coming from those twin pipes more than made up for that fact that this car would not do zero to 60 in 5 seconds. Who cares? Like Frank told my wife, Mary and I, "The 4Porte was built to take four passengers in as much comfort as possible at a top speed that was nearly the fastest of any production 4-door sedan at the time." The thing I remember the most about that test drive was getting out on Southbound I-405 and driving at nearly 85 mph, and yet feeling as if the car was barely going over 40! The 4Porte is so big – you have no semblance of speed!

He who snoozes, loses

After this wonderful test-drive my wife and I decided to check out a few more examples before making our final decision. Over the course of

as the Internet!! I could not simply e-mail a dealer and say, "Hey Joe, could you e-mail me a dozen or so shots of the inside and outside of your 4Porte?" Nope, it was all done by phone or snail mail! I was not making any headway whatsoever in my search and at this point I thought of the old saying, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Why was I looking across the country for a 4Porte when there was one 20 miles from my house at MIE??? So, I picked up the phone and called Stuart Avery and asked him more about it. My heart sank lower than the Grand Canyon when he told me they had sold it two weeks after my wife and I looked at it! *D'oh!* Another old saying crept into the back of my mind at that point, "He who snoozes, loses."

began looking for any new 4Portes that might have appeared since the previous issue, and there it was... "1980 Maserati 4Porte, Blu Sera with tan leather interior. 48K miles. Only one owner, and properly maintained and serviced by local Maserati dealer." I snatched up the phone faster than lightning and waited patiently as the phone rang 3000 miles away in Miami, Florida. "Good evening, Ted Vernon Collection, how may I help you?" I believe the first words out of my mouth were, "You can help me by telling me that the 1980 Maserati 4Porte you have for sale is STILL available!" After we both had a good laugh, he told me that it was still available. I probably spent an hour with Ted talking about this car, and his colorful past. For those of you that don't know, Ted Vernon used to

be an actor (starring in such "B" rate movies as "Hammerhead Jones, and "Scarecrows"). After he retired, he set up shop in Miami where most of his business was with used Rolls Royce and Jaguar automobiles.

The car sounded like everything I wanted in a 4Porte. But how could I see it and not wait two days or longer for pictures to arrive. Then it hit me! Look in your new MIE Club Member roster and look for a 4Porte owner in the Miami area and ask if they are willing to look at the car for you! What a novel concept! I ran upstairs and found the

roster and flipped to the "Florida" owner's section and found the name of a gentleman who not only lived in Miami, but also knew exactly where "The Ted Vernon Collection" was located! He was more than happy to run by and check it out for me, and to call me back on his dime to let me know his thoughts! The next day



the next month or so, I must have made a dozen phone calls to private owners, dealers, etc. inquiring about perspective 4Portes. When you only build 2100 examples of a car from 1980 thru 1987, you don't find these cars at every used car lot! And to make matters worse, back in those days there was no such thing

I have found "The One"

After sulking around the house for a week or so after missing my golden opportunity, everything changed one day after work when I got home and picked up the mail. The mailman had just delivered the July 1988 issue of Hemmings Motor News. I turned immediately to the "M" section and

when I got home from work, I could hardly wait for the report to come back. Sure enough I got the call that night! He told me that the car was in very good condition, started right up, no smoke, and nearly everything electrical functioned properly. I think that next to the Aston Martin Lagonda, the Maserati 4Porte has the most electronics on it, and it's the one area any potential 4Porte buyer should check thoroughly before purchase! After I hung up, I walked into the living room and told my wife, "I think I have found 'The One.'"

Buying and waiting, and waiting, and waiting....

After making the decision to move forward on this 4Porte, I wired Ted \$500.00 to hold the car until I could fly down and inspect it myself. So, the following Friday I hopped on a plane and arrived at Miami airport around 10 a.m. Imagine my surprise when this huge white limousine pulls up to the curb and a guy gets out, holding up a placard with "Mike Wilson" written on it! For a 28-year-old punk like me, that was pretty cool. We drove the 5-6 miles from the airport to the dealership, and the minute I got out of the car, there it was. Holy smokes, what a gorgeous car. The depression of losing the Bordeaux colored 4Porte at MIE vanished quicker than a box of chocolate in front of Forrest Gump!

After raising the car up on a ramp and checking the underside, taking it for a drive and wiping the grin off my face, I sat down in Ted's office, hammered out a deal and wrote him a check. Good gosh, it was mine! I can't believe it - I now owned a Maserati 4Porte! After I flew back home (reading and re-reading the owners manual), I started the process of finding a shipper to get the car from Miami to Auburn, Washington! Frank Mandarano recommended a shipper that he had used in the past many times, but the recommendation came with a caveat, "Just don't be in a hurry." Now, when you are 28 years old and



The day ZAMBC1101AA301092 arrived.

just purchased a Maserati, "don't be in a hurry" is not something you want to hear! However, I went with Frank's recommendation and made the arrangements to have the car picked up. Imagine my surprise when Ted Vernon called me one week later and told me the car was picked up in an enclosed trailer for its long journey! I was happier than a kid on Christmas morning, and knew that I was now only 10 days away from seeing my new Maserati. Or so I thought...

The next phone call I got was four days later letting me know my baby had arrived safely in Ohio from the first leg of its journey and was now waiting to be transferred to another truck heading west to bring it into my waiting arms (I mean garage). There it sat, and sat, and sat. One week turned into two weeks, then into three weeks, one month, etc. I now understood what Frank had told me: "Don't be in a hurry." Finally, on October 7, 1988 (over two months since I bought the car) I got the call from the shipper that the car had just been picked up and should be in Washington State in one week. Sure enough, almost one week to the day I got a call at work stating that they would be at my house around 1 p.m. on October 15, 1988. I will never in my life forget that day! I was sitting out on the front porch, and I could hear the sound of a large truck com-

ing up our hill. When he rounded the corner and I saw that gorgeous piece of Italian artwork sitting up there glistening in the sunlight, I forgot all about the two-plus months it took to get here!

After my prized possession was unloaded from the truck, I unscrewed the gas cap and poured in two five-gallon containers of 92-octane fuel. As the trucker pulled off into the sunset, I climbed behind the wheel and took in the sights and smells of this Italian beauty. I put the key in the ignition, turned it over just far enough that I could hear the fuel pump running to ensure those thirsty Weber's were full of their life giving blood. I pumped the accelerator four or five times and turned the key to the start position. Imagine my surprise when the car coughed once, sputtered a couple times and roared to life! Good gosh, what a sound! By this time several of the neighbors had come out to ogle at this blue Italian beast, as I let it settle down into a perfect 800 RPM idle. As I walked around showing everyone the car inside and out, I was grinning ear-to-ear that all the electrical stuff was working properly! The trunk opened on command, as did the gas door, all the gauges were coming up to normal operating ranges, the lights all worked, the A/C was blowing cold air. All was right with the world! After all the gawkers had

left, it was **now time** to take it for my first drive. **Let me tell** you, I didn't want to come back home! I was in heaven! I drove it down into the city, filled the fuel tank up the rest of the way, drove it to where my wife worked so that she could see it, back to my work to show my co-workers and then back home! Almost 100 miles the first day!

The Restoration

December 8, 1988. Why does that date stick in my mind? That is the day a friend of mine with a Pantera was at my house taking his first look at the car. I had it up on jack stands, performing my first oil change when Jeff says to me, "Hey, Mike, come here and take a look." I walked back to the right rear tire and Jeff was showing me what looked like a loose wheel bearing. You could rock the tire back and forth. It wasn't a lot, but enough to concern me that I should probably replace the wheel bearings, after all it couldn't hurt. Well, let me tell you, what started out as a one to two hour job turned into 15 years! Yes, you read that correctly! FIFTEEN YEARS!

Wouldn't you just love it if I ended the story right there, and didn't finish? Oh, I wouldn't do that to you!

So, you may be asking yourself, "Why did it take him 15 years to replace the wheel bearings?" Well, as with any project, you find more and more things to do as you get into it. So, as I took off the rear hub carriers to replace the bushings I said to myself, "Self, since you have these hub carriers off, why don't you pull off the shafts and replace the u-joints? After all you are right here." So, I did. Then when the shafts were off, I applied the same reasoning to the rear shocks and springs (and hey, you can't just do the rear shocks and springs, you need to do the fronts too!). The logic then followed to the upper and lower A-arms and their respective bushings, then the brake discs, the brake calipers, the drive shafts, and the list went on and on.

Over the next 15 years, I would let months and sometimes years go by before I would get a bee in my bonnet and head out to work on it some more. I would find something else that I would need to replace or repair. At one point I had realized that every suspension component had been removed, sandblasted and powder coated back to a nice Maserati black color, every bushing, bearing and u-

joint had been replaced. The brake calipers had been rebuilt, the rotors reground, the carburetors had been rebuilt, new o-rings in the intake manifold, rebuilt water pump, new radiator hoses, and this list goes on and on for three pages (yes, I kept track of everything I did, as well as a photo history of the "Before and After" shots, a few of which are shown on these pages.)

During the course of this time, Kerry McMullen bought MIE/MCI from Frank Mandarano and moved the entire operation two miles from my house here in Auburn, Washington. For those of you that don't know Kerry, I would tell you to get to know him and talk to him!! He is really a great guy! He and Stuart Avery have been the biggest inspiration for me to get my 4Porte back together! And, being only two miles from my house, it was very easy to get parts and advice!

On the road again

In April of 2004, I finally said, "Enough is enough! I really need to get this car back on the road!" Since I am on the Board of Directors for the Seattle Italian Concours (www.italianconcours.org), I knew that our upcoming 13th Annual





show in September was going to feature Maserati in honor of their 90th anniversary. I wanted to put together an "Evolution of the 4Porte" display, with the assistance of Kerry McMullen, to show an example of each of the five series of Maserati 4Porte, with mine representing the series III. So I got busy and started putting everything back together. The finishing touch was a new exhaust system, and Stebro stainless steel tips for my rear exhaust section.

After everything was back together, I lowered the car onto Terra Firma for the first time in 15 years. I could immediately see that I was going to have to have the car towed to an alignment shop, as the front wheels were sticking out like Howdy Doody's ears!

I drained out all the old gas, and refueled the tank with 10 gallons of fresh petrol. Next I removed all eight spark plugs and shot oil down inside each cylinder. I removed the fuse for the fuel pump, disconnected the coil wire, and turned the engine over 10-12 times to ensure I had oil in all the galleys, up in the heads, etc. Then I put the fuse back in, hooked up the coil wire, and went through the same routine I had done 15 years earlier.

Turned the key to accessory and let the fuel pump run to build up pressure. I pumped the accelerator 4-5 times, said a quick prayer and turned the key. 15 years of work ran through my mind as the engine fired to life for the first time. I thought I could almost hear the engine talking to me saying, "I can't believe you kept me quiet for 15 years!!"

Knowing the front end of the car was horribly out of alignment, I still could not resist the urge to drive it up the street just to make sure everything was functioning. Fifteen years of oil was burning off the engine, the new exhausts were smoking as the paint was setting in, and the Webers were popping from not being synchronized and tuned. All the feelings I had 15 years earlier were rushing back like the Red Sea over the Egyptians. I started feeling guilty as to why I let this much time go by. Oh well, that was all behind me now! Only good times and blue skies lay ahead. Or so I thought...

Disaster Strikes

Our 13th Annual Seattle Italian Concours is getting closer, Kerry and I were frantically trying to get our

"Circle of Maseratis" and "Evolution of the 4Porte" displays put together. Colin Craig's Series I Quattroporte in Canada committed to come to the show, and my Series III is on the verge of being ready. We also found a Series IV that may be able to come to the show. A brand new 2005 Series V 4Porte will be there, and darn – it's only a Series II that we can't find. No surprises, as only thirteen were ever built! We both know there is one down in Texas, but Kerry isn't sure the owner would be willing to truck it up to the event.

I called a tow company to come to my house and load my 4Porte onto a flat bed and take it to a local shop that has a good reputation for tuning Webers and has carried out numerous front and rear end alignments on several other 4Portes in the area. The restoration has almost come to an end – there is light at the end of the tunnel. Soon I'll be able to drive my baby anytime I want! The excitement is back like it was 15 years ago when I drove it for the very first time.

Earlier in the article I told you about how I felt the first time I ever saw the 4Porte, it was something that I will never forget. Well, there is another time I will never forget – July 29, 2004. Just three days after I have my

4Porte towed to the shop, I get a call at home. The words still are like poison when I think about them: "Mike, this is Greg. I have some bad news for you. We had just finished the front and rear alignments on your Maserati, and as the mechanic was bringing it back onto the lot from a test drive, one of the Weber carburetors spewed gas, backfired through the carburetor box and started an engine fire!" I was devastated! How could this happen??? Fifteen years of hard work! All the hours. The blood. The sweat. The tears. I wanted to start bawling like a baby. I had

it had started. Most of what he said was a blur. But, I did pick up on two things he said. The cosmetic damage was not bad, and the only thing that worried him was the auxiliary venturis on two Webers had melted and were sucked into the intake manifold. They could not get a compression reading on those two cylinders. I knew it could be one of two things. Either the pistons now had holes in them, or the aluminum was stuck under the intake valves and they were not closing all the way.

I jumped into my car and ran down to the shop. Greg was right. The

it? Not even the vacuum hoses or spark plug wires were damaged! I was feeling a bit better in regards to the cosmetic portion. I knew the hood could be repainted, and Kerry could get the quilting for under the hood. It was the engine that was the big concern.

Folks, let me tell you. Run – don't walk to a collector car insurance company to get your babies insured! My 4Porte was insured through Grundy Worldwide for an agreed upon value. It's the best insurance experience that I have ever had! They had an estimator at the shop



At one point of the restoration you can see all the parts off the car. Note the rear transaxle frame, drive shaft, A-Arms, and wife's purse to pay for everything!

visions of the car being burned to the ground. The gorgeous leather fried like a pig over a barbecue. Images were rushing through my head as Greg was trying to explain what happened, like how the fire was put out about 15 seconds after

cosmetic damage was nothing like my wild imagination had envisioned. What I saw was simply a large bubble on the hood from the heat. The under hood quilting was burnt to a crisp, and the clear plastic cover on the fuse box was warped. That was

within two days to view the damage. They were not willing to foot the bill for the repairs, without knowing what kind of damage was in the engine. I had a choice to make. One – I could take the entire amount of money that the car was insured for



Carburetor fire damage.

and buy myself another 4Porte, or two, I could deduct the salvage value of the car, and Grundy would cut me a check for the balance. It took all of five seconds to make up my mind, I went with option number two. I was not about to walk away from fifteen years of work. I knew I could get my car back.

I had Kerry McMullen come out to

the house and look at it. He could not believe the small amount of damage. By this time I had removed the heads, and guess what folks??? There was no damage to the pistons or cylinder liners! The molten aluminum from the carburetors had stopped at the valves. The Italian Gods were with me.

Working with Kerry and Stuart, I

made up my shopping list of stuff that I needed to start Part Two of my restoration. New Carburetors, head gasket kit, valves, springs, timing chains, under hood quilting, fuse box cover, etc.

Since the fire, I have taken the heads to a Ferrari/Maserati shop and had them not only rebuilt and valve clearances set, but also bead blasted and repainted back with that gorgeous Maserati black crinkle paint. I have all the parts that I need to put my baby back together again in time for our 2005 Concours this year. I can hardly wait to turn that key once again, to hear that exhaust once again, to put that smile back on my face yet one more time.

The smile has finally happened! Officially, it was July 5, 2005 at about 1:15 p.m. The heads were put back on; the exhaust manifolds bolted back; new radiator hoses and clamps installed; oil and water levels restored; vacuum lines reattached, and the battery hooked up. The first step was a shot of oil into each of the eight cylinders. Next, I removed the coil wire and cranked the engine over to ensure oil was distributed throughout the engine, passageways and filter. Then came the test..... After I reattached the coil wire, I made my way to the driver's door. There I sat behind the steering wheel as I slid the key into the ignition. I turned it over to the accessory position and listened as the fuel pump started to whine and pump the life-giving fluid into the carburetors. Pausing for a moment of silence, I pumped the accelerator three times and turned the key. After only five seconds of cranking, the massive 4.9-litre V8 roars to life. WOW! What an incredible sound.

Another year has gone by since it has been started, and still it doesn't fail to make the hair on my neck stand up when I hear those exhaust pipes, and the air being sucked through those Webers! Once again



The large bubble on the hood from the heat.

I find myself so thankful that I decided to rebuild, and not destroy, this car. It once again has the capability of bringing years of happiness to this owner. All that is left to do now is a final tune and synchronization of the Webers, and to fix the bubbled paint on the hood. I am so looking forward to my first drive in my resurrected 4Porte!

And that final drive finally happened! On July 25, 2005, after tuning and synchronizing the Weber carburetors, it was time to drive the car down to the paint shop to have the hood fixed. What an incredible experience to once again drive "my baby." It is only a three-mile drive to Thoroughbred Collision Center in Auburn, Washington (a very nice, and reasonably priced body shop

who had fixed an Alfa we had years ago), but in that distance it was possible to ascertain that the brakes worked perfectly, the front end was perfectly aligned, and the Webers were not "popping back." What a relief that was!! I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs, fearing that another fire would ensue under the hood!

Three days later I picked up the car with the newly painted hood, and new under hood quilting installed. The drive back to the house was amazing! A guy in a new Mercedes pulled up next to me and gave me the thumbs up! 25-year-old car, and it still turns heads! Even the young body shop workers at Thoroughbred were commenting on

what an incredible car it was. My favorite comment was from the appraiser who said, "Boy, nobody builds a car like that anymore!" What a complement!

As I write this, the 4Porte was finished in time for the 13th Annual Italian Concours at South Lake Union Park in Seattle, which was held on Sunday, September 4, 2005. My newly restored 4Porte was in the "Circle of Maseratis" representing the 1980s decade. It was nice to see it amongst the other thirteen Maseratis that attended the show. She looked right at home! What a long, strange, trip it's been!

Final thoughts

"Has it been worth it, Mike?" you might ask. I can say without even a



My newly restored 4Porte was in the "Circle of Maseratis."

1991 Alfa Romeo 164L and a 1984 Lamborghini Jalpa. Italian cars are not fabricated from a cookie cutter mold, they have sensuous lines, they have history, they have exclusivity and they are just plain "Italian."

I will never get back the amount of money that I have put into my Maserati 4Porte. And to tell you the truth, I really don't care. For me, it's never been about the money. It's about preservation.

pause that, yes, it has been worth it. The love of cars is a strange thing and hard for the most of us to explain, as Barry McGuire has said many times on his show, "Car Crazy" on the SPEED channel. Is a four-door car that weighs two tons practical? Is 8 MPG practical? Is its reliability practical? For me, who cares? It has always been about the beauty of the Maserati 4Porte. It looks as if

Michelangelo sculpted the car from a block of marble. The way the back end is slightly raised and those twin pipes aggressively point out as if to say, "Don't stand too close." The smell of the leather on every inch of the interior. The burl wood insets, the millions of gauges and warning lights, and the list goes on. Italian cars have always held a fascination for me. That's why I currently own a

My 4Porte will be one more that has been saved from a date with a wrecking yard. One more on the road; one more at a concours show, and more importantly, one more that another person may look at when they are at a stoplight in Bellevue some day and comment to themselves, "That is the most beautiful 4-door sedan I have ever seen in my life, where can I get one?" ■