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Through The Esses - From Briggs To Brian To Porsche

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The name Cunningham can be found in the record books of sportscar racing going all the way back to the 1950's when wealthy American sportsman Briggs S. Cunningham campaigned cars bearing his name in races across North America and at Le Mans. He was an icon of the sport, always bringing a competitive effort to the grid and always surrounded by outstanding teammates who could wring every last drop of speed out of the white and blue Cunningham cars.

Brian Cunningham is the grandson of Briggs Cunningham and he too has established himself as a racer to be reckoned with. Recently he took time off to become a partner in Porsche of Lexington with Jamal Mashburn. Cunningham is a man who takes great pride in the product he sells, and he is looking forward to putting that product to the test next season in the Grand Am Cup Series.



"I took a voluntary sabbatical from racing to get my new business up and running. I made a lot of good friends in racing and I am very pleased to say that Bob Snodgrass is one of those. When I was racing with Marcus Motorsports in the BMW we ran together - in different classes - in the Grand Am Rolex Series, so we had many opportunities to talk. I told him there was no Porsche dealership here in Kentucky and there should be. One thing led to another and I was able to secure an interview with Porsche for myself and the group we put together."

But the interview was only the beginning of a process Cunningham thought was over before it even got to turn a wheel.

"When I first sent a letter of proposal to Porsche a few years ago, they wrote back and said they weren't looking to expand the number of dealerships at that time. They said they would keep me in mind but I really didn't think they were being more than polite with me. I thought for sure that letter was the brush off. Then, about six months later I got a note saying Porsche was investigating the possibility of a dealership in Kentucky and would I be interested!

"To be honest, while I have a good amount of experience in racing and working with race cars, I didn't have one bit of experience in the business of running a car dealership. But I can say I have all the zeal, enthusiasm and desire I need to want to do this. It is easy to sell something to others that you yourself believe in. I have more belief in Porsche as a sportscar and a road car than any other car out there. When I drove for Tom Milner (head of PTG, BMW's primary U.S. Motorsports research and development team for the BMW M3) he tried to convince me that BMW was best but I really feel the Porsche cars are the best cars out there. I think that comes across when I am talking to potential Porsche of Lexington customers."

The start up of his new Porsche dealership took a few years and a lot of sweat and hard work to bring to fruition.

"It has been three years since I had the initial seed of an idea to open a dealership. In April of 2004 we received the invitation from Porsche. Getting the dealership started has taken 100% of my time, effort and resources. From the point I got the invitation to today it has been non-stop work. Getting the group together, collecting the demographics Porsche required, and putting the financing together and all the rest has been an all-consuming effort."

With all the places in North America in which one might expect to find a Porsche dealership, we wondered why Cunningham had chosen Lexington, Kentucky.

"When I was racing over in Europe, trying to keep my open wheel aspirations alive, my girlfriend - and fiancée at the time- and I lived with her parents in Silverstone, England. I soon had more opportunities opening up in the U.S. - in Indy Lights - so we decided to move in with my folks in Danville, Kentucky. We were also having a baby so living with my folks was a way to avoid being new parents in a strange town. That is how the town of Lexington became the focal point for opening a Porsche dealership.

"There is a lot of money here in Lexington, Kentucky. Several big corporations also have headquarters here including Lexmark and Tempurpedic. And Toyota has a manufacturing facility here as well. It is also a great place to live and work, with a population of almost 500,000 people. It is very cosmopolitan and is of course a center of activity for horse racing. There is also a large coal industry here and there is really nothing between Lexington and Knoxville, or Lexington and Charleston, West Virginia to service Porsche owners and Lexington's growing economy.

"The entire southeastern part of the state has no access to Porsche dealerships for at least a two hour drive. We looked at that and the demographics were right, and people want these cars, so we said lets see if we can't create a market here and open up the area."

And Porsche of Lexington is indeed open with a smiling racing professional on site ready to talk fast cars with people who can appreciate the attributes of a sophisticated and race-bred automobile. Cunningham is proud of the place in which he works.

"Our facility is 10,500 square feet. You can visit our facility at [Porsche of Lexington web site](#) We are a state of the art facility with wireless technology throughout the building. It is a wonderful new facility."

Cunningham's racing resume includes having a GM Factory ride in an Oldsmobile Aurora, running with Harry Brix in IMSA. He has also had seat time with The Racer's Group and J3 Racing, The man has raced with Steve Marcus Motorsport, and for Tom Milner's Team PTG. And along the way he even had a one race ride with Alex Job Racing.

"I did a couple of races for Steve Marcus this summer and I ran the 12 hours of Sebring with Alex Job. That was my first time racing with Alex and it was a dream come true for me. Back in 1999 we finished second in the ALMS GT Championship to Alex's team. Ever since that time I had wanted to run with him. You can't find a more honest, decent and honorable man in this sport than Alex Job. When the opportunity finally came up I jumped at it! While our race wasn't the best exposure for each of us as we had transmission troubles an hour and a half into the race, I loved being with him and being on his team. I would love to work with him again."

Now that he has opened for business to sell fast cars to others, we imagined there had to be some high octane blood still pumping through his veins to get back into racing full time. We were right. He is actively pursuing a full time ALMS drive, and has already made plans to reunite with a good friend for the entire 2006 season in Grand Am Cup.

"Now that the doors to the dealership are open, I want to be involved in racing too. This effort took all my time but now that it is a reality, I do want to have some serious time spent in racing. I need to get back and revisit what put me in this office chair in the first place and that is my involvement with racing. I have a full year deal with Steve Marcus for next year in a Porsche 997 we will run in the Grand Am Cup series. (The cars will be prepared by Synergy Racing - press release [here](#))

"Steve is partially supported by us and we have helped him to get two new cars. Steve has been a big supporter of mine and I felt it was time to return his support. We are helping with parts as well. These cars sell as fast as we can get them in. We took two cars and designated them as race cars. They were built expressly for Steve and for the Marcus Motorsport race team.

"Long term, I have every desire to make Porsche of Lexington a part of the racing environment and a recognized figure in Motorsports. When you think Brumos or Champion Porsche, you think racing. While our name might not roll off the tongue as easily we do have a desire to make a mark in racing. Working with Synergy and Steve we have a great opportunity to get started on that goal. I am confident Steve's ability to run a successful racing operation with the best equipment and people will move me closer to achieving that goal."

Indeed the future looks bright for the grandson of an American sportsman who made his mark at speed. Brian Cunningham too intends to continue putting his mark on the racing world and on the world of selling beautiful cars. He has enjoyed a good degree of success in racing, having been a GT championship runner up in Grand Am and the ALMS. As is to be expected from a racer, he is looking to continue that success going forward.

"It is exciting to be where I am right now. You know, you have a couple of years where you are working hard and you aren't sure where the reward is and then you finally start to see everything coming together. You see happy customers, and new cars you've sold being driven off the lot, and then to know you are getting back into racing...it is just a fantastic feeling! 2006 is looking to be one great year!"

Interestingly enough, it was Briggs Cunningham who gave Porsche its very first USA win at Palm Beach in a 356 cabriolet. And he ended his driving career with a win in his last race at Sebring in a Porsche 904. In that race, he beat the factory Porsche effort. It is ironic that so many years later his grandson has joined the "factory effort" and together they are looking to go all out to be winners with Porsche both on and off the track.

We are looking forward to seeing Brian Cunningham back up to full speed again in 2006.