

AN HONEST



AFTER SITTING FOR 40 YEARS,
THIS CONVERTIBLE D IS A DRIVER ONCE AGAIN.

STORY BY **DAVE MATHEWS** PHOTOS BY **MICHAEL ALAN ROSS**

In early 1958, Porsche had what euphemistically could be called “a situation.” Porsche’s Speedster, darling of the West Coast crew-cut crowd, was losing its appeal. After three strong years, sales were in decline. ♦ Several years earlier, Max Hoffman, Porsche’s sole U.S. importer, asked for an entry-level model for the Southern California market—one that was fast enough to win at the racetrack, cool enough to cruise the local In-N-Out Burger, and practical enough (in a manner of speaking) to scoot to the grocery store for a dozen eggs. Hoffman envisioned a lightweight car that was devoid of anything resembling creature comfort—a driver’s driver. His request carried weight. At the time, more than one in four Porsches manufactured were exported to North America.

Although the Speedster was popular in the western U.S. market, the model was by no means a financial success. Strictly a fair-weather car, it did not sell well in Europe because of the wetter, colder climate. And, because the Speedster was the least expensive of Porsche’s model line, its profit margin was nearly nonexistent for both the factory and the dealer network.

Nevertheless, the Speedster remained popular with hard-core California road racers. They loved the stripped-down Porsche. It ran hard, didn’t break, and consistently won races. Where the car lost its appeal was with the weekenders and the wannabes who were simply going for the look—elbow out the window, pack of Lucky Strikes rolled tight in the sleeve of a white T-shirt, Steve McQueen-style.

Those buyers wanted a little more comfort to go along with that look. The more casual Porsche buyer required a roof that didn’t leak, an interior less wind-buffed than the exterior, windows that cranked rather than curtains that slid, a rear window that actually provided a rear view, and a bit of seat padding thrown in for some comfort. Although Porsche sold more than 4,100 Speedsters during its model run, its day in the sun was over, and something had to be done. The company wanted an entry-level model to offer the not-so-high rollers: a Porsche with a few frills that still hovered around the \$3,000 target price. Something more livable.

That something was the Convertible D.

*****PORSCHE*****

*To all Representatives abroad
Circular Letter No. 23/58
Stuttgart, July 31st, 1958
Re: “Convertible D” successor of
our previous model Speedster*

Our program of expansion and rationalisation [sic] has brought up the necessity to employ a second bodymaker, Messrs. D r a u z at Heilbronn which we have selected, will not only have the most favorable suposition [sic] in regard to their facilities but also in view of their location.

...The new trade name “CONVERTIBLE D” is for the model which succeeds our previous model Speedster and was, as already known, designed for the Western part of the US market only and therefore did not find a good market in other countries...

...It is our hope that this new design with its present equipment will not only be approved on the European market but also abroad, because it represents a fine connection between a convenient touring and a sports car...

This official bulletin went on to describe the “important improvements” the Convertible D offered over the outgoing Speedster, such as: (1) enlarged and reinforced, yet still removable, windshield; (2) new



Crank windows and upholstered seats are two “upgrades” separating the Convertible D from its more spartan predecessor, the Speedster. Additional engine gauges and an aftermarket radio are purely utilitarian.



un-upholstered top, similar in shape to the Cabriolet top; (3) enlarged rear window; (4) upholstered, non-reclining seats; (5) wind-up windows; (6) door pockets on both doors; (7) windshield washer; (8) tonneau cover; and (9) redesigned dashboard that allowed for the installation of, dare we say it, a radio and ashtray.

The model would be offered with two engine iterations—the 1600 Normal that generated 60 horsepower and the 1600 Super that produced 75 horsepower. Two of them, however, sneaked through the factory gates with the fabled four-cam, 100-horsepower Fuhrmann engine.

The new model would only be available in standard factory colors: Ruby Red, Meissen Blue, Ivory, and Silver Metallic. But then, as now, money talked. Other colors were available on the QT if the buyer was willing to pay. Reflecting its strong sense of Germanic practicality (and complete lack of marketing verve), Porsche named the new model the Convertible D because the bodies were built by Drauz Custom Coachworks. During its one-year production run, the factory produced 1,330 or so Convertible Ds, making it the rarest regular production model in Porsche history.

ALL OF THAT brings us to the car you see here—Jordan “Jody” Kraly’s Convertible D. A long-time member of PCA, Jody currently belongs to the Jersey Shore Region. He joined in 1969, shortly after purchasing this D, a car he happened upon by accident.

As with any good story, there is generally another story that precedes it—and sometimes one before that. Jody was first bitten by the bug while riding shotgun in a friend’s Porsche. “I was an aviation cadet at Graham Air Base in Marianna, Florida in the summer of 1959. A fellow cadet had a ’59 coupe. We thought it would be fun to try out the country roads in Georgia.”

They slowed down, more or less, while passing through one of those small, southern Georgia flyspecks of a town, and soon found themselves the object of a local constable’s attention. After a stop and then some discussion—he talked and they listened—the officer brought the boys before the town judge. They were charged with speeding and the official pronounced his judgment: \$30 or 30 days.

“We tried to explain that we were poor cadets and didn’t have \$30,” said Jody. “The judge responded, ‘Well, how much do you have?’ We scrounged up \$13 between us. The judge quickly revised his penalty—\$13 or 13 days.” With the fine paid, the boys headed back to base wiser but not that much poorer. Jody’s buddy had hidden a \$20 bill in his shoe.

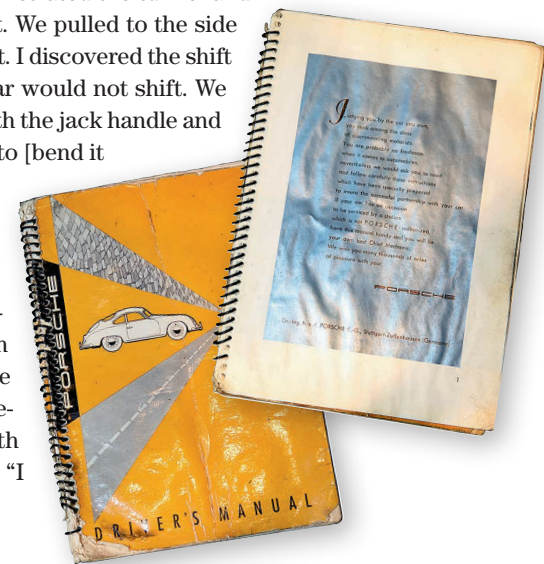
Jody left active duty in March of 1966 and joined United Air Lines the following month. Occasionally riding to work with a fellow pilot who owned a 1962 coupe, that bug bite he suffered in 1959 once again began to itch. He wanted his own Porsche.

The D was not Jody’s first Porsche, that honor going to a 1964 356 “faux” SC sunroof coupe. Faux? “I bought

it from a private party guy of Teutonic descent, as I deduced from his accent,” recalled Jody. “The shipping arrival notice from Bremerhaven listed the car as a 356 SC, but the engine number didn’t match. It had a Normal engine in it. Apparently, the seller did this often, buying cars in Europe and shipping them here to unsuspecting, starry-eyed Porsche shoppers. In any case, it was still fun to drive, so I drove.”

And drive he did. At the time, Jody used his Porsche for transportation to and from work. “It was fun to drive, and it always started.” During one of his commutes to JFK International Airport, trouble struck. “I was on the Jersey Turnpike during rush hour, in the center lane, with a Goya Foods truck on my right and another truck on my left,” related Jody. “The Goya driver stepped on the gas to pull ahead, and the universal joint between the truck’s rear bogies came apart. A huge Y-shaped piece [of metal] flew out in front of me. Since I had nowhere to go, I aimed to pass over it in the center of the car. [The piece] penetrated the tunnel and just missed my right foot. We pulled to the side of the road to talk about it. I discovered the shift tube was bent and the car would not shift. We jacked up the car, and with the jack handle and some muscle, I was able to [bend it back enough] to get second and fourth gears.”

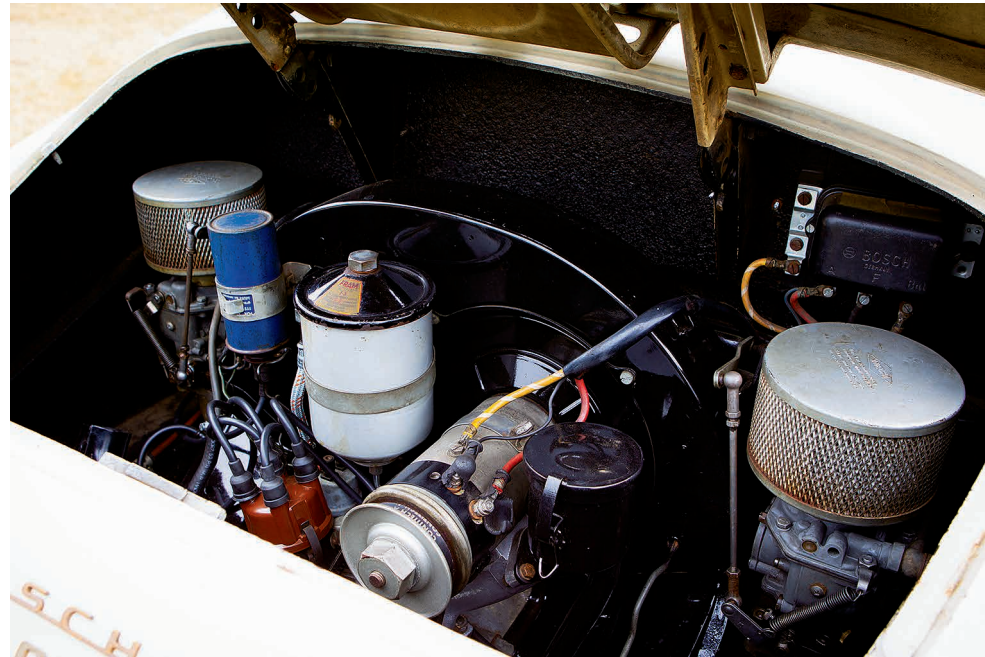
After his trip, Jody limped the car to Princeton Porsche in Lawrenceville, New Jersey to get an estimate of repairs. The estimate was \$225; consequently, Jody settled with Goya for that amount. “I



Jody drove the D to and from work. His commute was enjoyable—most of the time. Rush hour traffic congestion and hot summer weather caused him to rethink his daily driver. “One day in August I drove to JFK in my skivvies.”

The black fan shroud of this engine would seem to indicate this model is a 1600 Normal. It is, by no means, normal. Stone chips and discolored paint reflect years of use.

Opposite: The skimpy top is rarely up on Jody Kraly's D, even in late winter.



bought an electric welder for \$99 and fixed it myself," he continued. "I then sold the car, since I considered it 'hexed,' and went shopping, finally finding the D."

JODY BOUGHT HIS D from a local owner who wanted something newer. The D better suited Jody's personality and driving style—blue sky above and a juicier engine behind the back seat. As a former pilot of the F100 Super Sabre, which plane geeks will remember as America's first supersonic fighter, Jody had a tendency to drive like his hair was on fire.

His D, which started life as a 1600 Normal, was "heated up" to Super 90 specs: pistons, cylinders, and a Racer Brown camshaft. The carburetors were fitted with Super venturis and jets. The additional torque and horsepower required a beefier clutch. Jody installed a Volkswagen Transporter 200mm pressure plate and clutch assembly. He machined the flywheel to accept the new parts and eliminated the problem of a slipping clutch.

"I was always a gearhead," he confided. "I have

been working on cars since I was about 12. I remember changing a muffler on my father's 1941 Cadillac. I got better as time went on. I removed and reinstalled the engine and transmission on the D myself. I took apart the front end, replaced the bushings, and did the other stuff I deemed necessary."

As with his "faux" SC, Jody drove the D to and from work. His commute was enjoyable—most of the time. Rush hour traffic congestion and hot summer weather caused him to rethink his daily driver. "One day in August I drove to JFK in my skivvies. It was then I decided I needed an 'airport' car with air-conditioning. The D became my fun car only. After that, with children coming and all the other responsibilities, the car sat in the garage—for 40 years."

IN EARLY 2017, Jody visited his friend Bob Irvin, the parts manager at a local Chevy dealership, when the topic of Porsche came up. "I've got an old Porsche," Jody mentioned. He said he'd been thinking about re-

habbing the D. Over the years he had accumulated bits and pieces for the project, but he recognized that some of the necessary work was beyond his purview and was stuck on what his next steps should be. Bob replied that his customer and friend, Rob Ida, owned and "fixed up" old Porsches. In fact, Rob's shop was just 20 minutes down the road, he told Jody. One thing led to another.

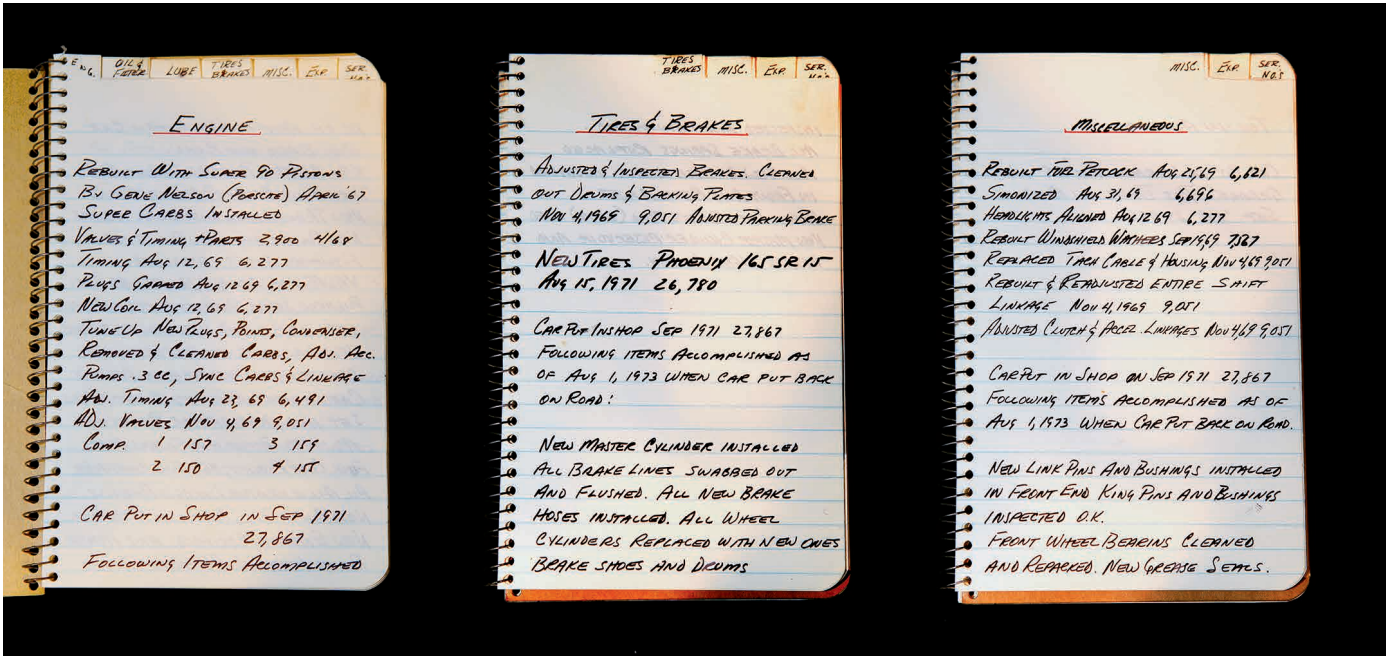
Rob Ida, no stranger to the pages of *Panorama*, is a third-generation car enthusiast and proprietor of Ida Automotive and commands a cult following in the world of hot rods, custom cars, racers, and exotics. His philosophy is simple: "We pride ourselves on unique and tasteful execution in creating vehicles and components that cannot be found elsewhere."

One might think that Rob would suggest restoring the D to its original glory; after all, pristine examples regularly command six figures when changing hands. Not so with Jody's D. "What I liked about Jody's Porsche was that it was an 'honest' car," said Rob. "Its patina gave it character. I just did not want to change that."

Rob and Jody hit it off immediately and together developed a plan to get the car back on the road. And that revealed more interesting twists to the tale. As mentioned earlier, Jody collected bits and pieces over the years. "During those years [while working for United Air Lines] I always tried to walk on layovers, and I thought, why not walk to a Porsche dealer? I shopped around. I looked for chromed accessories, gaskets, gauges, and even found a foglight switch. I thought to stock up on parts because I planned to keep the car for some time.

"I also went around to junkyards. You could find 356s in those days. I accumulated a lot of stuff, not the least of which was a coupe transmission because it had a longer fourth gear, brake parts, brake shoes, and even a back seat cushion in the correct red color. There were gaskets, gauges, shifters, carburetors, fuel pumps, windshield wipers, arms, and a wiper motor. I just picked up anything that was applicable. I also bought NOS doors...just in case."

And, likely a reflection of Jody's flight training and



Detailed records document the maintenance performed throughout Jody's ownership of the Convertible D. Below: Old friends motoring off for a little coffee and conversation.

attention to detail, he recorded *every* part he purchased and *every* service that was done. Everything related to his D is documented in a handful of spiral notebooks. From whom did he buy the D, when, and where? Yep, right there. The date he installed that new exhaust manifold and extractor exhaust? 1 Aug 1973. And the new heavy-duty clutch? 28 Mar 1975.

Rob agreed to use parts that Jody had found in his years of “picking.” The parts not used were bartered for the work being done. “We didn’t sit down to discuss what this and that was worth,” said Rob. “We just generally decided what was a fair trade and shook hands over it. Everything worked out.”

Lou Hodi, owner of Hodi’s Performance and a local legend in air-cooled German tuning, was enlisted to pull and inspect the engine. Amazingly, it needed nothing except new seals. Rob and Lou replaced all of the brake

lines and the master cylinder and swapped the coupe transmission that Jody installed back in the day with the D’s original transmission. Because the interior was showing its age, Gerard Automotive refurbished the seats and carpet. What is Jody’s take on his car now? “I wanted the car to be comfortable, to be safe and sound. It is that.”

ROB IDA AND Jody Kraly have become good friends. Bob Irvin remains one. Both guys say Jody regularly stops in to say hello and to have a cup of coffee. “Jody loves to drive his car,” said Bob. “It can be pretty darn cold outside, but as long as there is no snow on the ground, here comes Jody, top down, for a visit.” Jody responded without hesitation when asked why he drives as he does. “Do you own the car, or does the car own you?” There is no question who’s the boss when it comes to this Convertible D. ☯



Acknowledgment to the 356 Registry and Convertible D Registry for technical and production details.