



TRANS FORM ATION

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH TWO OLD, ORDINARY PORSCHEs?
MAKE ONE SPECIAL PORSCHE.

STORY BY **DAVID MATHEWS** PHOTOS BY **NICK BERARD**



Some of us are afflicted

with an inexplicable yet undeniable need to maintain, sustain, and retain old cars. We would rather get a little grit under our fingernails than page through service lounge magazines while awaiting an oil change. I owned two old Porsches, each keeping the other company in my two-car garage. My wife's new Cayenne sat in the driveway. I had a dilemma. My wife called it a sickness.

My first Porsche was a 1974 914 2.0. We had a rocky courtship—Old Flame stranded me alongside a busy highway on our inaugural trip together. But once I treated her maladies (all it took was time and money), she and I joined PCA and together progressed from genteel social events and tours to autocrosses and hardcore driving events.

Modifications that made my 914 an effective track weapon diminished her street-worthiness. Later, as I moved away from the track scene, I moved away from Old Flame. Less interest and less driving equaled more maintenance issues. At 40 years of age, Old Flame presented a challenge as her creaks and groans grew more vocal. I asked friends for advice. Their suggestions ranged from helpful to horrible; constructive to cringeworthy.

My other old Porsche was a 60th birthday gift from my wife. The 1984 Carrera Targa was troublesome at first. It didn't like starting and didn't like running. It did, however, excel at stalling, bucking, and lurching. But after a sorting-out period, my "20-Footer" became a welcome, albeit sassy, addition to our household.

Although we enjoyed sunny drives on Cape Cod and road trips to South Carolina and Wisconsin, the Targa couldn't conceal the ravages of a misspent youth. My 20-Footer ran well but had the look of a reformed smoker—wrinkled and a little frumpy. Normal maintenance and gobs of Mothers Cleaner Wax could not stop the inevitable. Rust continued its insidious advance. Paint was puckering. Seals were shrinking. The seatbelts no longer retracted.

Pasha plaid seat insets and red safety belts set a lively tone. The 60th PCA Porsche Parade badge is a remembrance of what was to be... but wasn't quite.



My wife strongly suggested that I shed the old iron and buy something new, preferably with an automatic transmission and a rearview camera. Out with the old and in with the new. PCM, PDK, PSM—heck, two-speed windshield wipers were techie enough for me. Too many cars. Too little space. What was I to do?

The restoration of each car to original condition would cost a bundle. The thought of searching for OEM tool kits gave me the shivers. Upon completion, I would have two immaculately prepared but very ordinary cars. Each would demand a special regimen of minimal driving and continual primping and preening. I would still need the storage space I did not have to begin with.

I could have sold both cars and bought a fancy, new Porsche. However, I would have deserted two old friends. I'd miss the sounds. I'd miss the smells. I'd miss the skinned knuckles, splattered T-shirts, and spots of oil dotting the garage floor. Yes, I would have a great new car, but like a pair of new jeans, it wouldn't have that faded, threadbare comfortability.

AFTER MONTHS OF VACILLATION, I decided to combine the best characteristics of each car into one special Porsche. How did I get to this point? I followed a path of questionable practicality, illogical impetuosity, and maudlin sentimentality. My 914-6 conversion would weigh about 1,000 pounds less than the Targa and would generate considerably more horsepower than the 914 in current trim. It would be a hoot to drive. Low-slung. Diminutive. A classic 1970s two-seater with a rambunctious, air-cooled flat six that howled inches behind my head. Its styling would define simplicity. How could I resist?

Many decisions lay ahead, some personal and some practical. What was I to do about the transmission? The 901 transmission in my "Niner" had short gears perfectly matched to the 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine, but perhaps wasn't stout enough for an energized 3.2-liter flat six. The 915 transmission from my Carrera was right there for the taking. What about a computer chip? Which one? What exhaust system was best? I wanted a little bark with the bite, but nothing obnoxious.

Should the fenders be flared, stretched, or left alone? What about the wheels? Classic five-spoke Fuchs wheels screamed Porsche, but different wheels would provide favorable tire options.

What about the exterior color? The interior? Without carpeting, all I had was a scuffed floorpan. The skimpy console housed a few finicky gauges. The seats looked tired, as did the door panels. Maybe a splash of color would brighten it up. And all the stuff that would be left over? Surely there was value to the surplus engine, transmission, wheels, and other bits and pieces, but how long would I be stuck with a pile of used parts?

I was told to expect dark days in those coming months. Rust lurked. Fluids leaked. Threads stripped. Studs broke. Delays occurred. Budgets overran. Would my wife still love me, or were my days of marital bliss numbered?

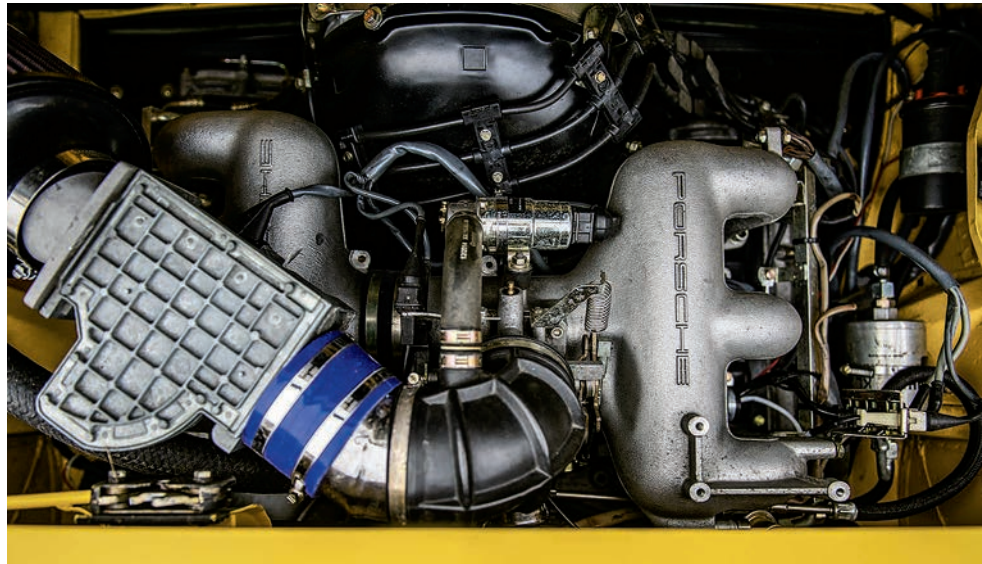
In the spring of 2013, I moved forward with my project. Because of the extensive work required—heck, we were remaking my car—I wanted two shops, each with specific expertise, that worked closely together. I select-

ed shops in the Milwaukee area for a few good reasons. My primary residence is in Milwaukee, and I wanted to be near the work. Dean Fabritz, owner of Fabson Engineering in Cedarburg, had wrenched on several of my Porsches in the past, always with satisfying results. Dave Kowall, a Master Porsche Technician and fellow protagonist in Milwaukee Region mayhem, partnered with Dean. This shop was a no-brainer.

I chose Paintwerks in West Bend to do the necessary structural repairs, body modifications, and painting. The owner, Dave Zimmer, is also a member of the Milwaukee Region and an expert at transforming piles of rusty metal into concours-winning masterpieces.

On a cool and cloudy day in May 2013, I bid my cars farewell and maneuvered them onto the loading ramps and into the dark recesses of a huge auto transport trailer. I wanted one final moment behind each steering wheel, one last wiggle of each gearshift lever. With the 914, I tugged the stick tight against my leg, then a notch aft. With the Carrera, it was a slight nudge apart, then

The 3.2-liter flat six fits snugly in the engine compartment. The interior defines simplicity, form, and function. Opposite: Railroad underpass provides a suitable echo chamber.



forward. I watched the truck pull away. Hands in the pockets of my faded Levis, I shrugged and turned toward the house. My wife stood there, hands in her pockets, shaking her head. For better or for worse, she had her garage back.

MONTHS PASSED BEFORE I saw my two cars again. Dave Z. met Dean and me at Fabson to assess the condition of my cars, determine what I wanted and why I wanted it, how long it would take, and how much it would cost. They had accomplished some very basic exploratory surgery. There was rust infestation below the battery tray and around the pedal cluster. There were dimples and bubbles, nicks and scrapes. But overall, Old Flame was in better shape than many of the cadavers Dave Z. had resurrected.

Attention moved to my Carrera. Dean would need to examine the internals of that flat six for a complete diag-

nosis. The front suspension and the brakes would easily be grafted onto my 914. The Fuchs wheels had suffered from a hard life on the road but appeared salvageable.

Analysis: Doable. Time frame: Late spring or early summer 2014. Cost: To be determined. Well, actually, the guys did provide an estimate, but considering my wife might actually read this story, I have decided to refer to the cost euphemistically: reasonable and prudent, considering the scope and magnitude.

More months passed. I pored over photos of narrow-bodied 914s, fat-fendered 914s, and everything in between. Never would I have guessed how many ways the body panels of a 914 could be pulled, contorted, shaped, or massaged. At first, I was keen on the idea of a sleeper-type, unassuming, slab-sided 914 that, when prodded, would scare the bejeezus out of the prodder and the proddee. But the beefy, in-your-face look of flared fenders and pouty-mouth hint of something menacingly



When the needle flashed past 6000 rpm, her tone changed from symphonic to cacophonous—like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir morphing into Led Zeppelin.

significant was a siren's song. I decided to go with the M471 bodywork.

I struggled with color choice. My car's personality was changing—becoming more aggressive. Should the color change as well? I considered white and black, as well as various reds and grays, but nothing grabbed me. I moved to blues and greens. But at the end of the day, I stayed with yellow. Not much else of the car remained original, but the color did.

My two Porsches became regulars on Fabson's shop floor. Deconstruction began in earnest. Unbolting, re-bolting, snipping, cutting, welding, and grinding. Boxes of new stuff, piles of reconditioned stuff, and heaps of discarded stuff mounded around each car.

Dave K. pulled the engine, transmission, and various bits and pieces from my 914 for later sale. The guys checked the 915 transmission. It would need first and second gear synchronizers. The operating sleeve was

worn and would need to be replaced. Later, we would add a Quaife ATB limited-slip differential because I planned to include autocrossing and track days with lively street driving.

Dean and Dave K. pulled and rebuilt the brake calipers from my Carrera. Dean reconditioned the control arms and replaced the stock tie rods with turbo tie rods and the original rubber bearings with PolyBronze bearings from Elephant Racing. We kept the adjustable front sway bar setup, already in place on the car. Dean fortified the rear suspension with Bilstein dampers to match those in the front, and replaced the original trailing arm bearings with PolyBronze bearings. He'd beefed up the rear spring rate to 180 pounds.

Close inspection of the 3.2-liter flat six revealed her need for freshening. Leak-down testing indicated that a valve job was in order. The connecting rods, camshaft, and timing chain were inspected.



FIVE-SPOKE FUCHS WHEELS were critical to the look I wanted. I worried over who should do the wheel work. Harvey Weidman wrote the book on Fuchs wheel restoration and modification, and he was a 914 guy. One phone call to Harvey confirmed my choice. “Yep, absolutely I can restore your wheels. You should consider letting me widen them to sevens and eights to fill out those wheel wells. And of course I can do the anodized, RSR finish. Yes, they will look outrageous.”

Stefan Schleissing, the mad genius at GTS Classics in Austin, Texas spent hours helping me make the right decision on seats for my car. The factory seats offered as much support as the back seat of my uncle’s 1956 Buick Roadmaster. On the other hand, I did not want to contort myself into some torturous racing seat every time I headed to the grocery store for a loaf of bread. Stefan suggested a “Sebring” seat with duralastic belts for the driver, and a less constricting “LeMans” seat with conventional support for the passenger. Snug? Yes. Claustrophobic? No.

Not only was the fit of the seat critical, the style and color were also very important. The exterior of my car was going to be vastly yellow, and the interior vastly black. Stefan snagged me with an outrageous black and white Pasha plaid, complementing black leather seatbacks and bolsters. For those unfamiliar with Pasha, simply imagine houndstooth infused with LSD. It is difficult to look at the design without cocking one’s head sideways and closing an eye. Not only were the seats to be Pasha’d, each door panel would have a splash’a Pasha between black leather trim. And red safety belts. My 914-6 would truly be a psychedelic ’70s time machine.

DAVE Z. BEGAN HIS WIZARDRY on my 914 the second or third week of December. After completing the rust repair, he moved to the front clip. We’d ordered a fiberglass 914-6 GT-style bumper, complete with the oil cooler cutout and mounting brackets, as well as the lower front valance. The problem came with hanging the darn things. The caveat “some fitting required” was an understatement. No matter how much Dave fiddled with the bumper and valance, the result exhibited either overbite or underbite, neither malocclusion visually acceptable. Finally, we decided to reuse the steel, non-chrome bumper that was lying on the shop floor. Dave removed those rubber bumperettes, fashioned an oil cooler cutout to match that of the lower valance, smoothed and shaped the outer edges of the bumper, and re-fit the original, using the factory bracketry.

Adding the steel GT flares took patience and perseverance. It may seem a simple matter to align those flares so that they fit visually and geometrically, but it wasn’t easy. As with many old cars, the right side didn’t match the left side. My car had not been involved in an accident—dimensionally it just didn’t match up. Perhaps it was assembled after a *Deutsche Bierbrechung*

or during one. But after the hammering, sawing, and smoothing, my 914’s body-building regimen shaped up nicely. It sported a strong front chin, bulky shoulders, and compact butt—a 914 with an attitude. In late summer 2014, Dave Z. completed the paint and bodywork and transported it to Fabson.



IT BECAME OBVIOUS that my plan to pilot Old Flame through colorful fall foliage was a pipe dream. The transmission was rebuilt and assembled; the oil cooler was plumbed. The front suspension was pretty much in place, and so were new vented rotors in the front and solid rotors in the rear. But the engine was in pieces and the wiring harness was still writhing on the workbench. Bits and pieces of my “deconstructed” 914 lay scattered throughout California, Texas, and Wisconsin. Competition Engineering was machining the heads. Web Cam Racing Cams was revising the cam to a “964” profile. Dean planned to replace the clutch and lighten the flywheel. A Steve Wong chip and modified throttle bodies were in the works.

Issues arose that required additional labor and un-

What’s not to smile about? Opposite: RSR-finished five-spoke Fuchs wheels were an obvious choice.

planned delays. Parts were sourced from dismantlers, manufacturers, parts suppliers, and custom shops. We suffered delay after delay.

Despite the freezing winter weather of 2015, or perhaps because of it, I had a burning urge to drive my Old Flame. I was through with five-buckle galoshes. I was ready for driving shoes. More than two years had passed and many thousands of dollars had exchanged hands—mine to theirs. The 60th PCA Parade was a few months away, the perfect venue to debut my car. When registration opened, I was Johnny-on-the-spot. I registered for Parade, entered a number of events, secured a room at French Lick Resort and Hotel, and relayed my plans to Dave, Dave, and Dean...and I waited. And then I waited some more.

In early June, with the mechanical work mostly complete, the car returned to Paintwerks for Dave Z. to install the carpet, the seats, and the safety belts, do some minor paintwork, make some alterations to the dash, and add the trim. Was it going to be ready in time for Parade? No, it was not. Disappointed? Considerably.

WEEKS PASSED. Finally, I received *the call*. After more than two years, multiple delays, and thousands of dollars, the transformation was complete. Of course, it rained that day. And the next. And the next. But eventu-

ally the monsoons subsided, and on a very sunny July afternoon, my long-suffering wife drove me to Fabson to pick up my car.

A bit nervous when I first squirmed behind the steering wheel, my mind drifted as Dean explained that the car ran great, that he made a few adjustments, and that it needed gas. Yeah, whatever.

The 3.2-liter barked to life. It was loud. Raucous. Enthusiastic. It made healthy noises. I forgot the shift pattern. I forgot to latch my safety belt. I forgot to adjust my mirror. After a quick stop for gas, my Old Flame and I renewed our romance on the back roads of Ozaukee County. She was eager, responsive, and intoxicating. When the needle flashed past 6000 rpm, her tone changed from symphonic to cacophonous—like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir morphing into Led Zeppelin. In the following days we enjoyed road trips to Road America. We revisited old memories, like dawn at the lakefront. We made new friends at a local Cars and Coffee.

What I wanted was a car that provided a retro-nod to the Porsche that began my 40-year love affair with the brand; one that would provide a kick in the pants and a smile to my face each time I turned that key, nudged the shifter, and released the clutch. My Old Flame does that. Was this transformation worth it? Oh, yeah! 🍷



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