

First Love

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A DECREPIT 1967 911 IS BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE.





Wolfgang Koller was helping rearrange boxes,

crates, and antique furniture in a friend's barn in 1996 when a vaguely familiar shape caught his eye. "Hey, what's that over there? Is that really a Porsche?" he asked. ♦ "Yeah," his friend replied. "Just holding onto it for someone. He didn't have room for it, so I offered to let him keep it here." ♦ Wolf thought back to the first time he had seen a 911. He'd been a young man, still in his teens. The Porsche's sultry shape was unlike any other vehicle on the street that day—diminutive, toylike. Its smooth, soft silhouette differed dramatically from the sharp angularity of American cars with which it shared the road. Its raspy, air-cooled, flat-six bark was like nothing he'd heard before. Some day, he'd hoped.

Back in the barn, the 911 listed to one side. A creamy coffee brown, it was obscured by cartons and trash, and dusted with the detritus of abandonment. With saggy tires and a crumpled left fender that housed a droopy headlight, it resembled a disheveled vagrant with a lazy eye. Wolf didn't care.

"This is pretty cool," said Wolf. "Do you think your friend would mind me taking a closer look—maybe sit in it?"

"Nah, go ahead. It's unlocked."

Wolf opened the door and slid into the driver's seat. The dash and steering wheel were dusty, the seats worn. Pulling the door closed, he noticed the sound it made as the latch engaged—the distinctive ping that underscored understated quality. He looked through the hazy, fly-specked windshield at the sultry shape of the hood and fenders. He ignored the jagged gashes of rust on the floorboards.

"This is so darn cool," he remembers thinking.

He fell hook, line, and sinker. One thing quickly led to another. Phone calls were made to the owner, and boxes were shoved aside. A battery charger, some baling wire, a gallon of fresh gasoline, and a portable air tank assisted the resuscitation. It took hours of tinkering, fussing, and short bursts of verbal "encour-

agement," but finally the four-cylinder engine that had replaced the original flat six sometime in the murky past choked and coughed to life.

Following a raggedy, wobbly test drive, Wolf negotiated ownership of his very first Porsche: a 1967 911, identification number 305157. A replacement fender, an extra trunk lid, two new floor pans, a used muffler, and a box of miscellaneous bits and pieces completed the deal.

The new relationship proved to be as challenging as it was rewarding. When it was right, Wolf thought it was wonderful. It just wasn't right very often. Wolf joined PCA and enjoyed its variety of activities, but he always parked his disheveled 911 down the street and out of sight. He planned to do a total restoration as soon as his bank balance allowed it.

Two years into his savings plan, Wolf was thrown a curveball. A friend called with an intriguing offer. "Say, I know you admire 356s. A guy I know has a pretty nice 1965 SC that he wants to sell. Original. Numbers matching. You interested?"

The opportunity was simply too tempting to pass up. It didn't take long for Wolf to rationalize the purchase of another old Porsche. He emptied his "Save the 911" account and proceeded with vigor and enthusiasm to grab the 356 SC.

Opposite: A frigid, snowy day is warmed by the sight of Wolf's 911. Below: A study in understated elegance.



During the next few months, Wolf made a feeble attempt to sell his 911. “I got several responses, but nothing came of them. I gave up pretty quickly trying to sell it,” he admits. While Wolf’s newest acquisition reveled in sunshine and fresh air, his raggedy 911 returned to storage for a 14-year hibernation.

WOLF’S ENCHANTMENT WITH his 356 SC was robust, but transitory. He regularly returned to that moment in time when he first “experienced” a 911. His barn encounter flashed before him. He weighed the benefits of two vintage Porsches and the awesome task of restoring one while keeping the other relatively healthy.

In the summer of 2012, Wolf made a decision. The 356 market was strong, and the money he could get for it would finance the restoration of his 911. He would sell the 356 SC but wanted the car to remain local; after all, it has been a Midwestern car since the 1960s. He placed an ad in *Steinlifters*, the PCA Milwaukee Region magazine. In October, the 356 SC went to a new home.

After selling the SC, Wolf moved his 911 out of the barn and into a restoration shop. He chose Dave Zimmer, owner of Paintwerks in West Bend, Wisconsin, to accomplish the metal surgery. Dean Fabritz, owner of Fabson Engineering in Cedarburg, Wisconsin took on

the mechanical end of the project. Although he was no track junkie, Wolf wanted his 911 SWB to be, well, spirited. Dean obliged by finding a 2.0-liter flat six that he promised to massage to match Wolf’s driving style. “No garage queen, this car,” says Wolf. “I planned to drive the wheels off it.”

Recognizing how special a short-wheelbase 911 was becoming in the air-cooled 911 market, and considering that every few days Wolf would call for a progress report, Dave began work on Wolf’s car in the fall of 2013. In addition to the mismatched engine, shoddy shortcuts soon became evident. Fiberglass repairs pockmarked areas around the left rear quarter and taillight box that had been pushed in nearly half an inch. The panel below the rear seats was a hodgepodge of rusted steel and plastic mesh.

The parcel shelf, the left lower rear window frame corner, and the left rear seat bucket, all rusted from water pooling beneath the rear window, were replaced. After the rocker panels were repaired, a new floor was welded into place. Jagged rust holes behind each front wheel well were patched and ground smooth.

“I completely stripped it down, with the wiring harness and steering gear being the only things left intact,” says Dave. “It has all matching body numbers with the

exception of the left front fender. Sometimes, there is just no getting around hitting a deer.”

The car would be repainted in its original Aga Blue, the color matched perfectly to an interior panel and compared against factory markings on the instrument cowl; the interior in brown tones. Wolf requested personal touches as well, like wood trim that replaced the swath of waffle-weave vinyl along the lower dash.

While Dave continued to cut, patch, grind, and ready the 911 for paint, Wolf and Dean were busy sourcing vendors for necessary parts and services. Wolf connected with Jack Arct in Portland, Oregon to restore the wood-rimmed steering wheel. No off-the-shelf, Pep Boys special, Jack’s hand-crafted wheel incorporated nine separate pieces of walnut, each personally selected by him and Wolf. Autobahn Interiors in San Diego re-covered the original seats and door panels in beige leatherette and provided the German weave brown carpet, matching exactly what the Certificate of Authenticity specified. Palo Alto Speedometer refinished all of the gauges.

Wolf purchased a set of 15x5.5-inch Fuchs wheels, a real find on eBay, to replace the 14-inch Fuchs that somehow ended up on the car. “There is a much better tire selection when it comes to 15-inch wheels, and I

think the larger wheels look better and give better road handling,” says Wolf.

However, the newly acquired wheels needed to be refinished to match the restoration underway. Only the best would do. Wolf contacted several wheel refinishers, including Weidman Wheels in Oroville, California. “[Harvey Weidman] is a meticulous guy who manages the process start to finish, no matter who the wheels belong to,” says Wolf about why he chose him. “Other places left me feeling a bit disappointed with their lack of enthusiasm.”

Wolf shipped the wheels to Weidman, then placed a follow-up call ten days later. “Harvey asked where I got the wheels. He talked about the road rash on each and the dents in two of them. And he talked about the ‘big dinger’ on one. My heart sank.” No matter, Harvey was confident he could make the wheels like new. And he did. “All I can say is they far exceeded my expectations,” says Wolf.

DURING A TECH SESSION held at Paintwerks in the spring of 2014, Wolf’s car was the subject of scrutiny and inspection. Dave Zimmer spent a good deal of time showing the “bad” areas of the car and explaining how he intended to fix and repair them. “Most of the folks attending the

The iconic 911 silhouette. Its timelessness cannot be overstated.

The 911’s Aga Blue flank reflects an early Wisconsin snowfall.





tech session were unaware that it was my car,” says Wolf. “Many of them thought I still owned the SC.”

As with any major restoration, delays were frustratingly frequent. Dave completed the preliminary body repairs and paintwork in October of 2014, but Fabson had no room on the shop floor to resume the mechanical part of the restoration. Other projects were underway. Race car preparation, an important part of Fabson’s business, would begin in January 2015. Parts needed to be located. And there was other restoration work to attend to.

Spring turned into summer and then fall before Wolf’s car found its way into the shop. Work finally began again. Dave Kowall, Dean’s shop partner, did most of the heavy lifting with the engine. As Dean explains it: “We started with a 2.0T engine and enlarged it to 2.3 liters with 86mm pistons. We changed the camshafts to an ‘S’ profile. The intake and exhaust ports along with the valve sizes were converted to 2.2S specs. The case was blueprinted and modified to address the problem areas that magnesium cases have. Stronger fasteners were used for the head studs, case, and rod bolts. Carrera tensioners were installed. The Weber carburetors were rebuilt and fitted with new throttle plates and shafts. The distributor was recurved to ‘S’ specs. We

also installed an MSD digital ignition module.”

But quirky things frustrated the restoration process—like the gas tank. “The bottom of the tank was covered by a gelatinous, molasses-like mass of muck,” relates Wolf. The tank was sent to a small shop run by an eccentric old codger whose shop was home to a variety of Model T and Model A automobiles, as well as trucks dating from the 1940s to the 1970s. Beautiful classic hood ornaments adorned the walls. When Wolf asked how his gas tank was cleaned, “Spike” explained the process with the caveat that the EPA was probably better off not knowing.

Powder-coating engine tin was another challenge that Wolf chose to personally source. Finding the right shop was more difficult than he thought it would be. “I called one, then another, then a third. And I called some more. Prices varied and so did timelines. And quality,” he says. Finally, he found a shop that fit his requirements—one that specialized in powder-coating Amish buggy wheels. The price was right; the quality was excellent; the timeline matched Wolf’s. Buggy wheels to Fuchs alloys—wouldn’t Porsche be proud?

WOLF’S 911 WAS mechanically complete and ready to move back to Paintwerks for final touches in April of 2016, two and a half years after the project started.

Opposite:
A wooden steering wheel and lower dash were two “must haves.” The beige leatherette offers a nice contrast.
Below: A modified 2.3-liter flat six provides significant enthusiasm.



Wolf's son, Kurt, was on hand to take a video of the event. Dean slipped behind the new wooden steering wheel and twisted the key. Wolf stood behind his dark blue coupe, listening to the engine bark to life. That carbureted flat six made glorious music.

Together, Dean and Wolf went for a shakedown cruise, then returned to the shop so that Wolf could take the wheel. "I was so nervous," he says. "I forgot simple things like where to hold the steering wheel and how best to stop the beast. I downshifted through all five gears. Why? Who knows?"

Once back at the shop, Kurt replaced Dean in the passenger seat and they were off again. Same route, but less nervous this time. "It was really cool," says Wolf. "I was amazed at the sound of the engine." Wolf's 911 returned to Paintwerks shortly after for carpet installation and final polishing, primping, and preening, then it was off to Pro-Tech for a full frontal installation of paint protection film.

Wolf looks back on his decision to give up his 356 SC for a chance to bring his 911 back to life. "[The SC was] a sweet ride. I notched 7,000 miles on the car during the first five years I owned it," he recalls. "My son and I drove it to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania one weekend. I made frequent trips to Road America. I rallied with it



Madison's icy Lake Mendota shimmers in the background. Rebuilt Weber carbs are true works of art.

and won several trophies at local shows, including one on Club Day at the Milwaukee Masterpiece. But regularly during those years my mind would drift back to the 911." For Wolf, re-embracing his first love was the right thing to do. 🌀

