

MARKET UPDATE: PORSCHE 356

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT PORSCHE
excellence

BOXSTER *FIRST DRIVE OF PORSCHE'S
911-POWERED ROADSTER!*
spyder



FEBRUARY 2016
\$5.99 (Canada \$5.99)

THE FIRST FLAT-6 PORSCHE HAD CHEVY POWER?

WE DRIVE AN ORIGINAL 550 SPYDER IN STUTTGART



RENNSPORT

REUNION



The fifth Rennsport was the biggest one yet. We were there to check out the historic machines, watch the on-track action and experience the event that brought 57,531 Porsche fans to Laguna Seca.

STORY BY DAVID COLMAN
PHOTOS BY DAVID COLMAN AND JUDY COLMAN

Porsche, an outfit that's always been ahead of its time, also does a better job of turning back the clock than any other company. Witness their "Select" line of "Porsche Lifestyle" offerings that pays tribute to the company's storied past. This year's Select brochure contains a new grouping of items called the "RS 2.7 Collection. An icon makes a comeback: The 911 Carrera RS 2.7 look returns."

If the Viper Green and Grand Prix White RS Collection doesn't appeal, you could opt for that long-time favorite, the Martini Racing Collection ("New designs from our partnership with a motorsports cult favorite," says Porsche). The timepiece to have at Rennsport was the stunning new Martini Racing Chronograph.

Limited to 2,500 pieces, this watch was on the wrist of just about every distinguished guest Porsche invited to this event.

Like that watch, Rennsport is an exclusive and cult-like experience. Few events of such magnitude occur only every fourth year. In that sense, Rennsport is reminiscent of the Olympics. Accordingly, Porsche has crafted a fitting program worthy of Olympic aspiration.

The planning that went into this year's event boggles the mind. Since 2015 was the second go round for Rennsport at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca (Rennsport IV was held there in 2011), both the company and the track were better prepared than last time.

Porsche retained the services of 25 car



PHOTO: KIRK DOBERENZ

event specialists from San Francisco's Page One car delivery outfit to take care of all eventualities. Smartly outfitted in Rennsport uniforms, they ferried hundreds of specially invited members of the international motoring press back and forth every day. They also transported Porsche's elite corps of former and current drivers from airport to event to hotel.

In order to create a VIP hospitality center worthy of Rennsport, Porsche dramatically remodeled the existing facility at Laguna Seca that occupies prime real estate above the front straight. This sizable building, which once housed the working press corps at major events, was transformed from a cramped and grubby newsroom into a stunning triumph of Bauhaus archi-



ecture aptly titled “Porsche Zentrum.”

Out front, welcoming gatekeepers handed you the impressive event program, and motioned you into the inner sanctum of the Werks clubhouse. Porsche managed to transform what had been a Motel 6 into the Ritz. Not a single interior partition remained from the old facility. Everything was painted Grand Prix White. The pithiest of aphorisms that graced the walls inside read: “A Porsche is not an Everyday Sports Car. It is a Sports Car for Everyday.”

The sweeping deck, which affords a view of the entire track (save for Turn 8, aka the Corkscrew), had been refurbished, repainted and fitted with Rennsport V bunting. A barista and cappuccino bar

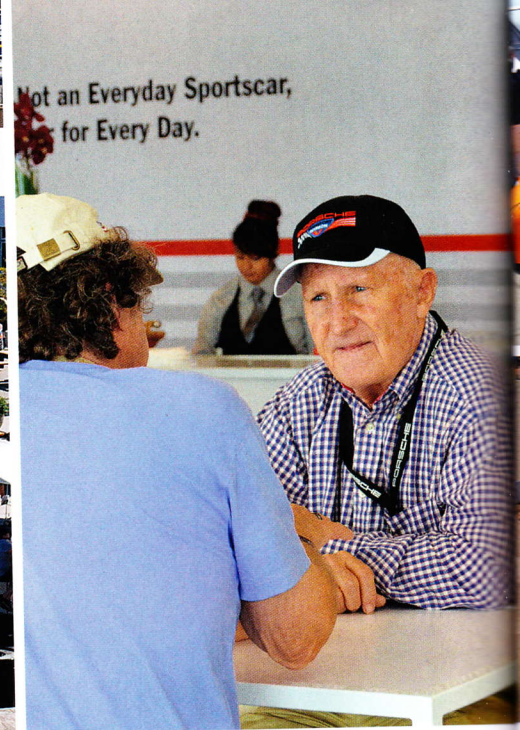
anchored one end of the patio. A racing-height windscreen stretched the entire block long length of the terrace. This was done, presumably, to prevent ill winds from ruffling your Mimosa.

Inside the building, Porsche provided a comprehensive reading and reference library of invaluable out-of-print Porsche-related books. Lavish food and drink bars graced both ends of the structure. An ever-changing menu of delectable offerings appeared with metronomic regularity: light breakfast, full breakfast, full lunch, afternoon cheese board, snack tray and petit fours. I have experienced the hospitality of 747 Lufthansa First Class. This was better.

The magnetic hospitality refuge

attracted famous race drivers like iron filings. It served as sort of a wild driver sanctuary, attracting the rare and legendary competitors that have raced this company’s cars over so many years. Former greats were everywhere, approachable, conversant, mingling and, best of all, still alive.

I spent 45 gratifying minutes interviewing that maestro of all trades, Elliot Forbes-Robinson. At an adjacent table sat Vic Elford, now walking with the aid of a cane, but looking spry as ever. How about a word with Gerard Larousse? The Frenchman was busy chatting with 956 program architect Norbert Singer. Over there, Dutchman Gijs Van Lennep, 917 pilot extraordinaire, is engaged in discreet conversation with Rudi Lins, of 908 fame.



And who is that stellar looking gent in the starched white Rennsport shirt? The one wearing the lava orange pants and a wristwatch machined from a 911's cylinder head. It's none other than six-time Le Mans winner—four in Porsches—Jacky Ickx. Some of these same drivers will compete on the track this weekend. But the real Reunion part of Rennsport is taking place not at the Corkscrew, but here and now in Porsche Zentrum.

Day One: Like a Kid in a Candy Store

If you chose to spend the entire three-day run of the event confined to Zentrum alone, you missed ever so much more in experiences than you gained in comfort. My wife Judith and I dedicated the first day of the event, Friday, September 25, to walking through the immense paddock for the better part of seven hours. This Odyssey started with a tour of "Park in the Paddock," located near the entrance to the pits, where the first stop was the immense shopping bazaar.

Nothing but 911-shaped thumb drives could be had here for less than \$50. Nonetheless, at noon on Friday, this building was absolutely teeming with enthusiasts from around the globe seeking to be the first to return home with "Camouflage Tape Espresso Cups" identical to the pattern "used to shield the 919 Hybrid from prying eyes before its first outing." These demitasses were virtually indistinguishable from the Op Art upholstery decorating the seat inserts of the first 928s.

Even if you chose to buy nothing here, you still got something for free. Porsche distributed an endless supply of nifty cloth flags bearing the company's logo. They also handed out free eight ounce bottles of cold water. These were decorated with labels reading "20 Years Porsche Tequipment" and depicted a California surfer next to his beach buggy Macan Turbo.

Next stop, of course, was a lunchtime pause at the "Best + Wurst" stand for that traditional staple of Rennsport, the imported Bratwurst topped with requisite potato salad and genuine sauerkraut. Thusly fortified, we began our endless review of the machinery on display.

In the immediate area of Porsche's Park in the Paddock, the factory had strategically located a few of its more compelling current offerings, including a Speed Yellow 2016 Cayman GT4 (\$100,845) and a Lava Orange 2016 911 GT3 RS (\$205,415) with \$3,715 worth of "LED Headlights in Black."

Best of all was the 2016 911 Carrera GTS Rennsport Reunion Edition. This beauty, finished in color to sample Fashion Grey, sported 20-inch black Sport Classic rims, a black Alcantara interior with Carmine Red trim, and a host of special options and decorations. Though not priced at Rennsport, I later discovered one for sale at \$148,000 with the notation that only 25 would be built.

After marveling that the once entry-level Cayman has now surpassed the \$100,000 level once occupied by the 911, and that the 911 has soared into exotic

territory once belonging to Ferrari, we readjusted our financial compass for this updated version of True Porsche North.

The time had arrived to check out the amazing Chopard Heritage Display. For those of you unfamiliar with the Chopard brand, it's a storied Swiss watch-making firm with a long motorsport tradition. They currently help sponsor Porsche's 919 World Endurance Championship (WEC) effort. At Rennsport, Chopard gathered the most stunning collection of factory race cars this side of Stuttgart. Instead of the usual informational placards identifying and obscuring the cars, the organizers relegated signage to banners hung above each model, allowing for unimpeded photography.

My personal favorites here were not the obvious all-conquering Panzers like George Follmer's 1972 L&M 917/10, but rather the odd balls you hardly ever see mentioned or depicted. Particularly intriguing was the trio of discreetly decorated 911Rs from 1967 (11899003, 11899015R, 11899017), the unmolested and unraced Signal Orange 1970 914-6 GT (914 043 0705), and the wildly decorated Rothmans 911 SC RS 954 from 1984 (WPOZZZ91ZES11007). The 1992 968 Turbo RS (WPOZZZ962N5820065), one of only four constructed, professed to be the rarest RS variant ever made.

Directly across the paddock from the Chopard display, Porsche had requisitioned all 20 of Laguna Seca's permanent garages for display of their own museum



collection and current race cars. The first garage housed a 1998 911 GT1 mounted on a white plinth block, illuminated dramatically with studio lighting. The legend inscribed on the wall behind it read: "Be Part of Our Motorsport family. Your car in Good Company."

Next door was a charming vintage pit scene recreation from Le Mans featuring Gulf Porsche 917K (#21) surrounded by all the period tools of the trade: a battered Shell fuel churn mounted on its stand, a Cleco air gun with a center-lock socket, a small rolling tool cabinet with fan-out shelves, a red wooden storage locker and a genuine pit sign reading "IN." The designers of this provocative diorama had managed to include everything but John Wyer, Pedro Rodriguez and Steve McQueen. Best of all, viewers were allowed full access inside both the GT1 and 917K displays!

The same unlimited freedom to observe all sides of each display applied to all subsequent garages. Working our way through this series of industrial chic locales afforded the rare opportunity to photograph the nose of the following gems from ground level: 718 RSK, 718 WRS, 906, 908/02 Flounder, 917K Gulf, 917LH Martini, 936 Jules, 956 Rothmans, and 2007 RS Spyder DHL.

At the very end of the conga line stood the current 991 911 GT3 RS tucked beside the 919 Hybrid. Both mounts were fresh off FIA World Endurance Championship wins at Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas. The hubbub down at this end of

Opposite, left to right: This view of the "Park in the Paddock" shows a 1951 356SL and 2016 911 GT3 RS on display. Elliot Forbes-Robinson lays it all out for the author. This page, clockwise from top left: The first production 1970 914-6 GT shines in the sun. This 1998 911 GT1 is a part of one of the garage exhibits. A 1984 Rothmans 911 (954) SC RS was in the Chopard display tent. The Gulf-Wyer 917K that Pedro Rodriguez and Leo Kinnunen ran at Le Mans in 1970 was in the paddock. The 1979 Le Mans-winning Kremer 935 K3 looked stunning. This unique "1947 Custom" was found parked in the infield.

garage row was intense, with dozens of uniformed technicians prepping the proud pair for lapping sessions throughout the weekend.

Interestingly, Porsche had decided not to transport the extra 100 tons (!) of gear and supplies needed to activate the 919's Hybrid system. They also left behind the battalion of crew required to administer the recharging program. The 919 would tackle Laguna Seca without Hybrid power, and without front-wheel drive.

To this point, the Reunion component of Rennsport had yet to kick into first gear for my wife and I. Despite the fact that we shared more than 40 years of membership in the Porsche Club of America (PCA), neither of us had yet run into any old friends. All that changed when we headed for the competitors section of the paddock. As we trudged up and down each row, trying to keep straight those we had visited from those we hadn't, we bumped

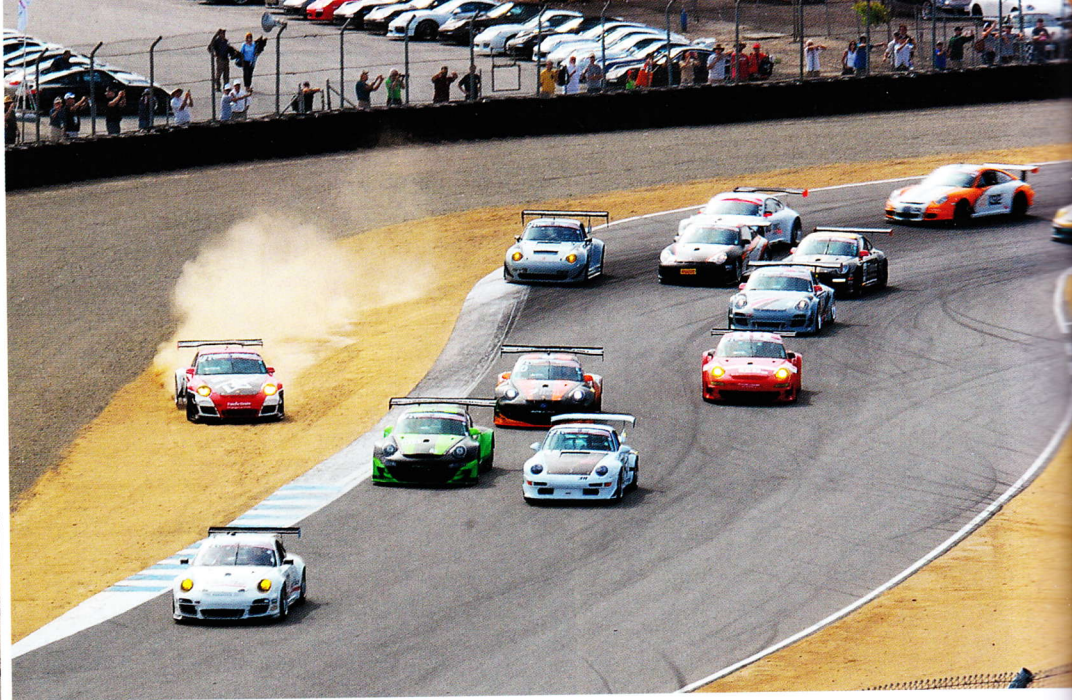
into many old acquaintances, rekindled friendships from years gone by and relived autocross and time trial wars.

Day Two: So Much to See!

We dedicated Saturday, to walking the spectacular vendor row, then inspecting hundreds more Porsches displayed on Laguna Seca's vast dry lakebed. The comprehensive PCA display orchestrated by Tom and Sandy Provasi of California's Loma Prieta Region was quite impressive. This diehard couple also organizes Werks Reunion each August in Monterey. For Rennsport V, the Provasis had assembled an ambitious array of feature cars.

Next to a charming Light Ivory 1957 Denzel 1300 sat an imaginative concoction titled "1947 Custom." This hammered steampunk-looking one-off purported to be "A reproduction of the post-war, pre-production Porsches designed by Ferry Porsche." It certainly looked the part of a Gmünd project, right down to its use of an early Volkswagen engine for motive power. Later that day I caught sight of it zipping past Porsche Zentrum, its pilot wearing a black leather skullcap and racing goggles.

By the time we had worked our way through the PCA special collection, and examined a couple of dozen 912s and 914/6s, we were ready for some shade time. By then, the sun was dropping fast, a trajectory that matched our flagging spirits. There's so much more to see and only so much energy to see it all. With our



tanks empty, and without an on board Hybrid system to harvest additional energy, we retreated from Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca to close day two.

Day Three: The Renn in Rennsport

By Sunday morning we still had yet to make our first visit to Porsche Zentrum. But we more than compensated for that oversight. On this race day, the factory hospitality center was the first stop on our agenda, and it pretty much sufficed as the last stop as well. The expansive view of proceedings from Zentrum's deck prompted us to set up shop there with grid sheets, binoculars and telephoto Nikons at the ready.

The time had finally arrived to enjoy the on-track festivities we had been ignoring all weekend. On Saturday, the first contest, the "Gmünd Cup" for 356 era competitors, went to the 1953 Porsche Cooper-Porsche "Pooper" of Cameron Healy of Portland, Oregon, who scored a 4.688-second victory over the Devin Porsche 356 pre-A of Gregory Campbell of Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. George Balbach's 1961 Porsche Roadster came third.

The second contest Saturday, the "Eifel Cup," saw a very close battle for the win go to Alan Terpins of Sao Paulo, Brazil. His 1968 911 T/R bested the 911S of Fritz Seidel of Milwaukee, Wisconsin by just 1.006 seconds. Fritz Gruber of Punta Gorda, Florida, made a good showing for the 914 clan, driving his Brumos 914-6 GT to third.

Sunday's program kicked off with the "PCA Sholar-Friedman Cup." Patrick Lindsey, a full-time professional GT racer

Above, left to right: The Canepa 962C (left) and Bleekemolen RS Spyder (right) battle for the lead in the Stuttgart Cup race. Craig Ames off-roads his Cup 911 in the Sholar-Friedman event.

driving a 2014 911 GT America, walked off with a 16.673-second victory over Joe Toussaint's 2014 911 GT3 R.

Next up was the final round of the 16 race Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge. This Rennsport Reunion Cup would decide the championship for the 2015 season. On Saturday, Round 15 had gone to the GT3P of Elliott Skeer with Jesse Lazare 4.992 seconds back in second. Going into Sunday's Round 16, Skeer held a 261-234 point margin over Lazare.

Although Skeer dropped out of Sunday's race on lap two, and Lazare went on to finish third, Skeer still won the season title for Kelly Moss Motorsports. Sunday's Round 16 win went to prodigy Colin Thompson, besting Angel Benitez by 4.632 seconds.

The "Weissach Cup" race, much anticipated due to its entry of three Gulf Wyer 917Ks, turned into something of a competitive bust. Rennsport organizer Bruce Canepa from Scotts Valley, California cantered to an easy 18.301-second win over the Gulf 917 of Chris MacAllister of Indianapolis, Indiana. The third Gulf 917 of Charles Nearburg dropped out on lap two after leading the field at the start. Gunnar Jeannette of Sandy, Utah did a yeoman job hauling his unwieldy 1969 908LH up to third.

After two straight sleeper contests, it was exciting to witness the close dash for the

"Carrera Trophy." Pro driver Leh Keen, at the wheel of the ex-Ongais Interscope 935, had dominated the time charts of this 44-car field all weekend. But he dropped out of the race on lap two, leaving a pair of Coca-Cola 935s driven by Charles Nearburg of Dallas, Texas and Patrick Long of Playa del Rey, California to battle for the win. Although factory driver Long was able to close on Nearburg in traffic, he never managed to pass the Texan, who won by just 0.227 seconds. Fred Kaimer, another Texan, came third in another 935.

Sunday's last race was the feature contest for recent vintage racing Porsches. This "Stuttgart Cup" promised to be a close battle between a bevy of RS Spyders. But the driver who topped the time sheets all weekend, Cooper MacNeil of Hinsdale, Illinois, driving an ex-Penske/DSL 2007 Spyder RS, fell 35.445 seconds behind winner Jeroen Bleekemolen of Tavares, Florida, also in an RS Spyder. Patrick Long, in his third drive of the weekend, captured third spot in a 962, overmatched by the much newer Spyders.

Put It on Your Bucket List

We can only hope that Rennsport Reunion VI returns to Laguna Seca in 2019. The organizers of this event really have their act together. Sports Car Racing Association of the Monterey Peninsula (SCRAMP) track personnel went out of their way to be helpful all weekend, and any rough edges from Rennsport IV were distant memories this time around. This quadrennial extravaganza is without question the lifetime bucket list event for the Porsche faithful. ■