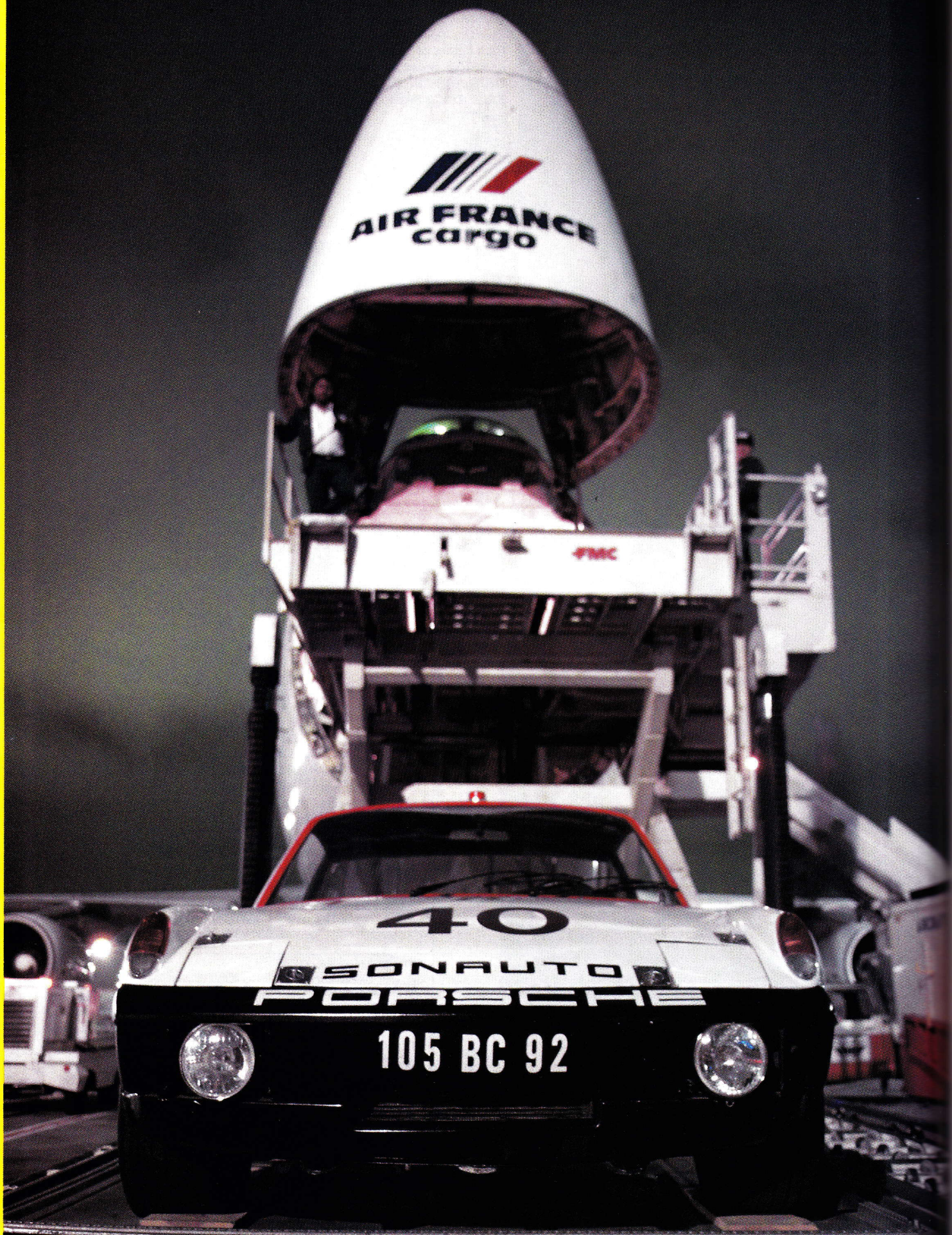


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Excellence

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FRENCH FLYER

By Peter Mills

Roostertails of spray follow the white Porsche 914-6 GT as it flies down the right-hand edge of the Mulsanne Straight at 150 miles per hour. It is 1970 at Le Mans. June monsoons have made course conditions for the 24-hour endurance test dreadful. Many leading race cars have slipped off the asphalt and have shortened or narrowed themselves against guardrails lining the circuit.

Of 24 Porsches that started, only 12 finished. But what a finish it was! Porsches won virtually every class and category — the white-with-black-trim Sonauto/British Petroleum 914-6 GT, averaging 99 miles per hour, took the GT production-based class and sixth overall. The winning Porsche 917 averaged 119 miles per hour for the day-long race.

Almost two decades later, the same 914-6 GT is flying again. Only, this time its wheels are not turning; its chassis is secured to a metal pallet inside a 747 cargo jet bound for Los Angeles International from Europe.

Its races are over. In fact, the 914-6 competed in only one major event following Le Mans: the 1970 Tour de France, in which it also finished sixth overall. It wore the yellow and green colors of its major sponsor, BP, for that series of races held at various French tracks.

Apparently, Sonauto (France's distributor of Porsche automobiles) planned to enter the 914 at Le Mans in '71, and had the car repainted to its original factory white-mit-schwartz scheme. Plans changed — that year 911s were becoming more popular due to their larger engine displacement — and Sonauto's BP 914-6 GT was left at the bench when the transporter was loaded. Its major league racing career was over.

But not its notoriety.

During the 1970 24 Hours of Le Mans, Solar Productions was filming the race for the Steve McQueen movie, "Le Mans." In addition to placing camera crews around the circuit, a Porsche 908 race car, with three cameras on board, was entered to obtain on-track footage. Sonauto's 914-6 GT survived the cutting room floor and appears in the movie five times.

Both the white Sonauto and yellow/green BP versions of the car have been the subjects of 1/43rd-scale Pit models.

When the jumbo jet with the Porsche packed aboard landed in Los Angeles, Southern Californian Mike Hagen, who had been tracking the 914 for years before being able to gain ownership of it, could hardly wait to take possession of his prize.

However, a problem developed at that point. Let Hagen tell it: "Customs held it for eight days. It looked too much like a stock (production) car. They were afraid of getting burned (by someone driving it on a public road). We finally convinced them with our documentation that we weren't going to drive it, except on a race track."

When I first spoke with Hagen on the telephone, I wasn't sure what to make of him: Was he an investor? Or a collector? Nothing in our initial conversation prepared me for the fact that he is

hooked on Porsches, with a definite weakness for 914-6 GTs.

Because of his avid interest, careful research and ability to sift the wheat from chaff when others offer advice, he has parlayed purchases, trades and his own reconstruction work on various Porsches into a collection anyone would envy. He currently has five Porsches:

—the Sonauto 914-6 GT;
—one of the BF Goodrich 924 GTR

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turbos driven by Schurti, Miller and Bedard at Le Mans in '82;
—an SCCA-prepared C-Production 914-6;
—a 1970 914-6 that he converted to GT specs for time-trialing; and
—a 911S that he and his father, Jack Hagen, co-own.

Mike Hagen did not deplete a fortune to obtain these cars — he didn't have one to start with. He is an average working stiff with a long-hour job involving hazardous materials. He handles environmentally dangerous wastes, trains



others to do the same or simply to recognize what is dangerous before it's too late. It is a multi-faceted, interesting, dangerous occupation. With his work, it is a wonder that he found the time to even fiddle with one Porsche.

How he gathered his current collection — which he keeps scattered in various shops and garages throughout the L.A. Basin, depending on what stage of restoration the vehicle is in — is a tale of its own.

Hagen's sister-in-law bought a 914-6 new in 1970. By 1974, she and her Irish setter were looking for something with a little more room; an Opel Manta as it turned out. However, the Buick dealer was only willing to give her \$1,300 (!) for the Signal Orange Porsche with primer spots, so Mike bought it for \$2,000. That was his first Porsche.

Almost as soon as he got the car, he began competing it in Porsche Owners Club time-trial events. To improve the 914-6's handling and performance, Hagen purchased part of a GT conversion kit: fiberglass trunk and engine-deck lids, fender flares and oil lines. He quit racing the car in 1977 while waiting for parts. Finally, he planned a trip to visit relatives in Jacksonville, Florida, so that he could also see what the holdup was on the parts, some of which had been

ordered from Peter Gregg's Brumos Porsche in the same city.

Hagen relates: "I went to Brumos and talked to Buddy Kennedy there. He didn't seem to know anything about my order, but he said that there were some parts stored out back that might be what I was lookin' for. When he said 'out back,' he meant it. We walked out in a field behind the dealership to a small building — sort of like a garage — and Buddy unlocked the door.

"There were all sorts of GT conversion parts just gathering dust. Buddy said they just wanted to get rid of them. I made an offer and wrote a check for everything. It cost me more to air freight the parts out to California than it cost to buy the inventory."

As insurance, and to provide parts to others, Hagen made fiberglass molds from the bumpers obtained from Brumos. Hagen reports a strange turn of events: "The 914-6 GT that was recently resurrected — Peter Gregg's old car found in Mexico — has reproductions (bumpers) from my molds made from Gregg's original 914-6 GT spares!"

In 1980, Hagen purchased a partially constructed C-Production 914-6 that had the rare, 6-piece chassis reinforcement kit. "Some of the 914-6 race cars had the kit, some didn't," he says. "John

Mason put the rollcage in." This car has been worked on over the ensuing years, but is not yet finished. As you will see shortly, Hagen is to be excused for the delay in completing the C-Prod 914.

He was just getting warmed up in this race car buy/trade business. As it turned out, the market was beginning to warm up as well.

Car broker Kerry Morse, who also deals in parts for exotic cars, first mentioned the possible availability of the Sonauto Porsche 914-6 GT about 1981. As Hagen recalls, "Kerry thought the owner (of the Sonauto 914) might want a (Porsche) 906, so a trade might be in the offing. I'd heard about a 906 for sale in Sacramento, so I decided to take a look at it.

"The guy in Sacramento got the car from Garretson's, who bought it from a Hong Kong resident who raced it there, and previously, in Germany."

Hagen continues, "I checked the car out and decided to buy it: parts plus 'car' with a 'splashed' 908 body on it. It was ugly, with a capital 'U'. It took me five years to collect about 98 percent of the parts needed to restore it. The market started to jump about then, and car restoration (for the 906) was going to be \$100,000."

The six-figure restoration cost was

probably more than Hagen could afford, although he did not say this to me. With his ultimate goal still the Sonauto 914, a trade would make much more sense than to spend money he might not have on a car he really did not want.

In the meantime, the fellow who, in 1981, might have been interested in trading the 914 for a 906 had long since divested himself of the Sonauto Porsche. By now (1986), there was a collector who approached Hagen about trading for his 906 Porsche race car. A three-way deal was struck: The buyer would purchase the J. David (Dominelli)/Fitzgerald Racing 935 K4 Moby Dick Porsche and trade it to Hagen for the "parts-in-a-box" 906.

Suddenly, Hagen had a "real" car to time-trial. Plus spares: three body sets and molds; 35 wheels and tires; brand new, hand-cut rain tires; and a bunch more pieces and parts too numerous to mention.

"I ran the car twice (at time trials)," says Hagen. "After driving an 800-horsepower automobile, nothing else seems very exciting. I remember that it had a terrible turning radius. My van has a better turning radius. On one turn at Riverside Raceway, it was all I could do to try to break the (spooled) back end loose so I wouldn't go straight into the dirt. It ate turbos. That's one of the reasons I stopped running it."

In early 1988, Hagen placed the ex-Fitzgerald 935 on display at the L.A. Auto Show. "I was having trouble storing it. It was so wide, I had to move two cars out of a shop to fit it in." The auto show proved to be an excellent place to "store" the Porsche. "A guy called up a month after the show," says Hagen, "and we started to put together a deal that led to my trading the 935 and getting two race cars (the Sonauto 914 and the BFG 924 FTR turbo) in return."

Hagen is vague about how the deal was put together, except to say that Kerry Morse helped forge it and that it involved a series of trades. The only other information available indicated that the Sonauto 914-6 GT had been displayed by its German owner in a museum in Sinsheim, West Germany, "... right next to an ugly, boxy Kremer 935 (on one side) and some Mercedes-Benz two-door rally car on the other."

Regardless of how the deal was put together, Hagen is finally a happy, if busy, man. When I tried to meet with him to get pictures of the 914-6, he was up to his elbows in alligators trying to get the Sonauto and BFG race cars ready for June's Porsche Parade "Porsches at Le Mans" time-trial feature at Laguna Seca Raceway. Although stretched thin, he succeeded in racing both cars in separate heats during the event.

I had to not-so-patiently wait for Hagen to re-plumb some gas lines before dark set in, in order to shoot photos at the track. Fortunately for both our sanities, he performed the work with no difficulty and I finally got the photography completed.

When I earlier took pictures of the 914-6 at Air France's cargo terminal at LAX, there was very little time to examine the Sonauto machine closely. At the Monterey race circuit there was ample time to look the Porsche over. I was amazed at how stock the car appears to be.

There is no rollbar inside the passenger compartment, although Hagen advises that there are holes and plates so that a bar can be installed. Porsche insisted that the rollbar built into the roadster was stronger than a racing bar. In 1970, at Le Mans, the addition of a rollbar was not required! (How things have changed...for the better...safety-wise, in two decades.)

Out of sight, but definitely of benefit to the safety and handling of the 914-6 GT, is the factory-welded, six-piece chassis reinforcement kit that strengthens the unibody from the rollbar back to points directly over the rear axles.

According to Hagen, this 914-6 was pulled off the assembly line and race-prepared by Porsche technicians. It was assigned to French Porsche distributor Sonauto for racing before the



car left the factory. Little more than that is known. "The factory records are not very detailed," claims Hagen.

The car was equipped with a 2 liter, 210 DIN horsepower Porsche 901/25 flat six race engine coupled to a 5-speed, synchromesh transaxle with a 40 percent limited slip differential. Gear ratios for transmission and ring and pinion could be changed depending on race course requirements.

Although the GT's flared fenders are made of steel, many other body parts were replaced with lightweight fiberglass components — specifically the front trunk lid, the rear deck lids cover-

cial. The rear trailing arms are "boxed" to prevent suspension flex, and high-pressure oil lines stretch forward to a front-mounted engine oil cooler (hidden behind the front bumper). The front engine mount and the transmission mount in the rear are reinforced.

Beautifully bent and welded exhaust header pipes (sans heater boxes) underneath the mid-mounted motor are a giveaway that this engine has more kick than the standard 125 horsepower powerplant. Checking out the upper engine compartment by lifting the deck, reveals a pair of three-barrel 46 IDA 3 C/3 C1 Weber carburetors, one for

each cylinder head bank. Hidden from view are the 906 camshafts, pistons and cylinder barrels.

The car's ride level seems high by today's standards. That is due, says Hagen, to 1970 rules that stated GT category automobiles had to be able to drive over, and clear, a box 80 cm x 80 cm x 10 mm tall (31.5 in. x 31.5 in. x 4.0 in). "The areas they had to watch were where the suspension parts hung down," he adds.

I asked Mike how he succeeded in his quest to obtain the creme de la creme of 914-6 race cars.

Mike credits friends for much of his good fortune. "I got good advice. I did lots of homework." And then he adds, "It's cheaper than a jet boat!"

"You really have to do your homework. When you're interested in a race car, use these guidelines to get an idea as to the car's value: 1) How many were made? (Rare is best.) 2) Who drove it? 3) Where was it driven? 4) Did it run Le Mans? 5) Did it place?"

"Who drove the car is not as important as where it was raced," he claims. "Le Mans is very important (to a car's value) at this time."

Maybe it is a moot point as to whether or not an average working stiff will be able — now, or in the future — to duplicate the wheelin' and dealin' that netted Hagen the car he was after. Maybe it's enough to know that one man succeeded in making his dream a reality. And certainly others will follow. But only a very few "others." Those willing to put in the effort, the research, the plain hard work necessary to reach their objective.

ing the engine and rear storage area, the front and rear bumpers. Plexiglas was substituted for glass in the rear window. An upholstered racing bucket seat was installed for the driver.

By going to this much work to reduce weight, Porsche engineers and mechanics were able to trim 100 pounds from the 914-6 GT's normal 2,070 pounds. Even full of gas and fluids (race ready), the racing GT was almost 100 pounds lighter than its street counterpart.

Except for the obvious sponsor decals and race numbers, there is very little exterior evidence that this 914-6 is special.

Underneath there is more evidence to the practiced eye that this car is spe-

