

PANORAMA

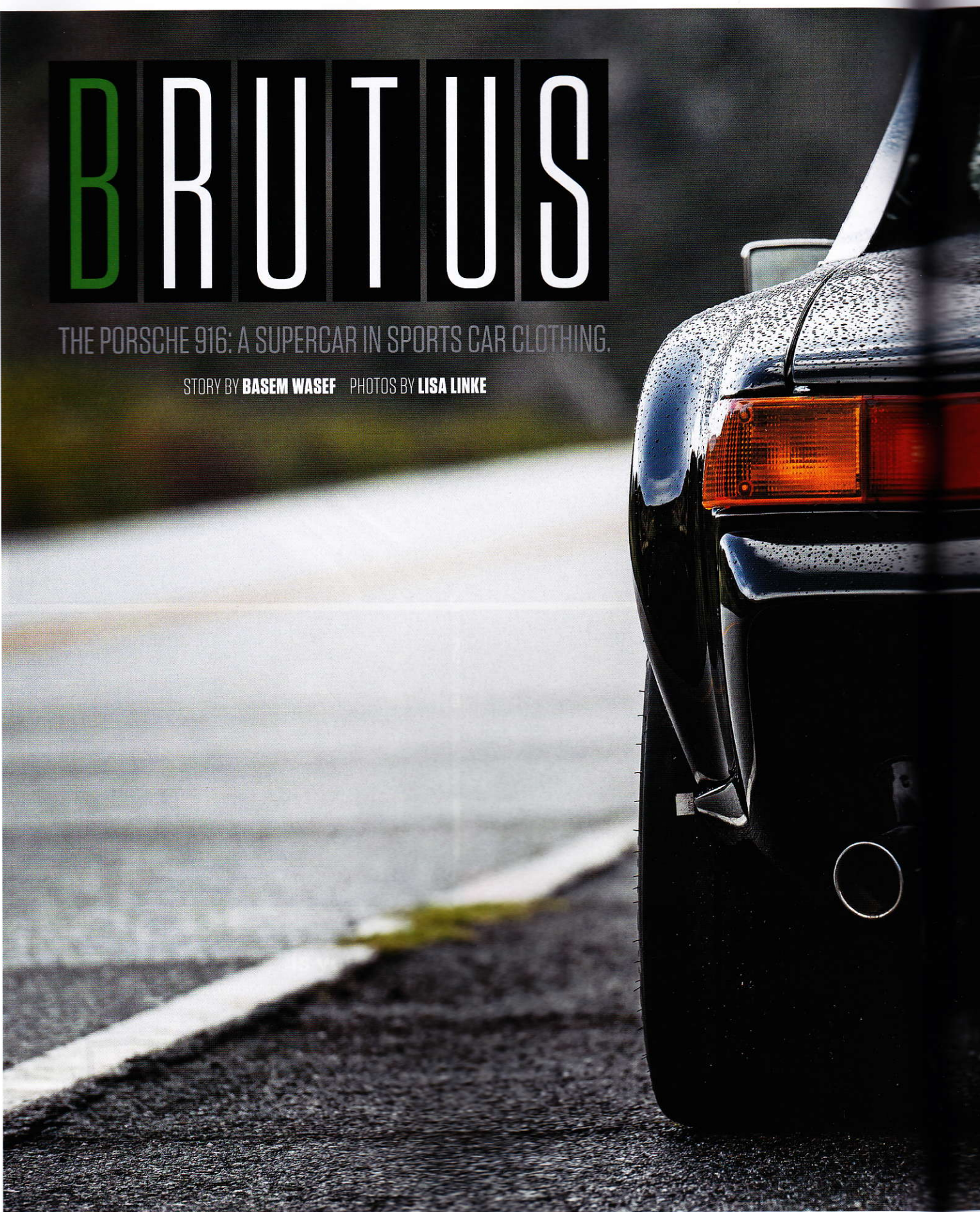
737



BRUTUS

THE PORSCHE 916: A SUPERCAR IN SPORTS CAR CLOTHING.

STORY BY **BASEM WASEF** PHOTOS BY **LISA LINKE**







A flat-six wail bombards the streets of Stuttgart

in the early 1970s, the blast of sound spitting from a low, dark silhouette cutting through the cityscape. The form isn't Zuffenhausen's familiar long-nose shape, nor is a businessman or banker behind the wheel. The diminutive sports car is being piloted by Corina, the fiery daughter of Porsche R&D boss Ferdinand Piëch, and the tale of its development, real-world usage, and eventual migration to the United States traces the tantalizing path of Porsche's aspirations to produce a high-powered, mid-engine supercar. ♦ Corina's fondness for the tiny two-seater was entirely comprehensible. Nicknamed "Brutus" (and denoted as such with a tail-mounted nickel badge), this wide-bodied one-off boasted a compact footprint and a snorting six-cylinder engine. But the sum of its unique bits represented far more than simply a hopped-up 914; it was an entirely different beast compared to the 914/6s that preceded it, and the ten 916 prototypes it spawned.

FIRST, SOME HISTORY. Following its introduction in 1969, the 914 famously drew the ire of Porsche cognoscenti not just because it was a co-venture with the more pedestrian Volkswagen brand (which was, back then, a separate entity from Porsche), but for its approachable price point. That produced relative ubiquity—nearly 119,000 units were produced between 1969 and 1976—which represented an affront to the 911's more exclusive pedigree. Originally conceived as a replacement for the 912, the budget-minded 914 was never a threat to the venerable 911 because it departed from its time-tested platform, even if its engine happened to sit in the "right" place. Its powerplant was favorably positioned amidships, but it was motivated by a meager 1.7-liter flat four sourced from the VW 411, and later a 2.0-liter mill.

Porsche upped the ante by exploring a more powerful six-cylinder 914 variant, which promised to nip at the heels of the 911T by borrowing its 2.0-liter powerplant. But a price advantage of only \$500 made the quirky-looking, swollen-fendered car a slow seller that sat on dealership lots and dragged down the 914's reputation.

Ferdinand Piëch being Ferdinand Piëch, he was already deep into the exploration of yet another model that set its sights on a far more upmarket target: the

mid-engine Ferrari Dino 246. And that's where Brutus came in. While the run-of-the-mill four-cylinder 914s had taken aim at low-hanging fruit such as Fiats, MGs, and Datsun Z cars, this balls-to-the-wall 914 threw all its cards on the table with the intention of brutalizing its pricey, prestigious foes. It was, for all intents and purposes, a supercar in sports car clothing, much in the way that Piëch's two eight-cylinder 914 proofs of concept revealed the mad engineer's blind ambition.

ALTHOUGH IT POSSESSED a serial number based on the 914 (9141430195), Brutus, as it was named by Corina, was technically the first 916 prototype, of which a total of 11 examples would be built. As such, Brutus was replete with countless handbuilt parts and individually engineered solutions. Keen eyes might notice its fiberglass bumpers, which were equipped with bumper shocks and girders that made them ready for 1973's stricter crash standards. More crucial, though, was Brutus' uniquely developed 2.9-liter flat-six engine that produced a pulverizing 345 horsepower. Fuel was fed by a 100-liter (26.4-gallon) mild steel tank, which required invasive installation techniques. Although the stock 914's firewall obviated the need for strut bar reinforcements, placement of the massive tank (which also



Although it resembles a 914/6 at first glance, Brutus wears unique bumpers with a front cutout for its trunk-mounted oil cooler. The bespoke Fuchs wheels are original; custom rubber was created for the restoration by Coker Tire and Michelin.

found its way into 914/6 GT race cars) required cutting the firewall and compromising the car's inherently stiff front end. Subsequently, a reinforcing strut bar was added, but it never offered the solidity of the original front-end setup. That flexibility caused racing driver Hurley Haywood to moan about the handling of his Brumos 914/6 GT race car.

Aiding its chassis stiffness and crash safety was a roof that was welded into place, replacing the removable T-tops. As with other six-cylinder 914s, Brutus was equipped with smaller sway bars in the rear and larger bars up front (the reverse of the setup with four-cylinder models) in order to accommodate the added weight of the larger engine. The rear suspension was essentially the same as a 914/6's (save slightly higher spring rates), and the front end was plucked from a 911S, incorporating the same steering rack and larger rotors and calipers.

Whereas Brutus represented a no-holds-barred approach to the hot-rodded 914 concept, subsequent 916 prototypes featured a more sensible 911S-sourced

2.4-liter engine. By the time it became apparent that the six-cylinder 914s were not selling well, the writing was on the wall for the 916: the project was abandoned, and some examples were sold off while others were returned to the factory and retrofitted with 2.7-liter mills.

BRUTUS FELL INTO the hands of Corina, who adored its irascible power and nimble handling. "She hot-rodded it at hellacious speed, damaging the car left and right and never getting ticketed by Stuttgart police," says 914 expert George Hussey. "She was a thrilling woman in every way," he adds. Corina also had a fondness for custom interiors, and brought her beloved Brutus to Porsche design chief Anatole "Tony" Lapine numerous times for complete re-upholstering based on her fashion whims. Once she ordered an interior in ostrich; another time, she opted for elephant hide. Her costume changes for her car's interior became so frequent that Lapine finally put his foot down and cut her off from Porsche's trim shop, relegating her to an automotive life more ordinary.

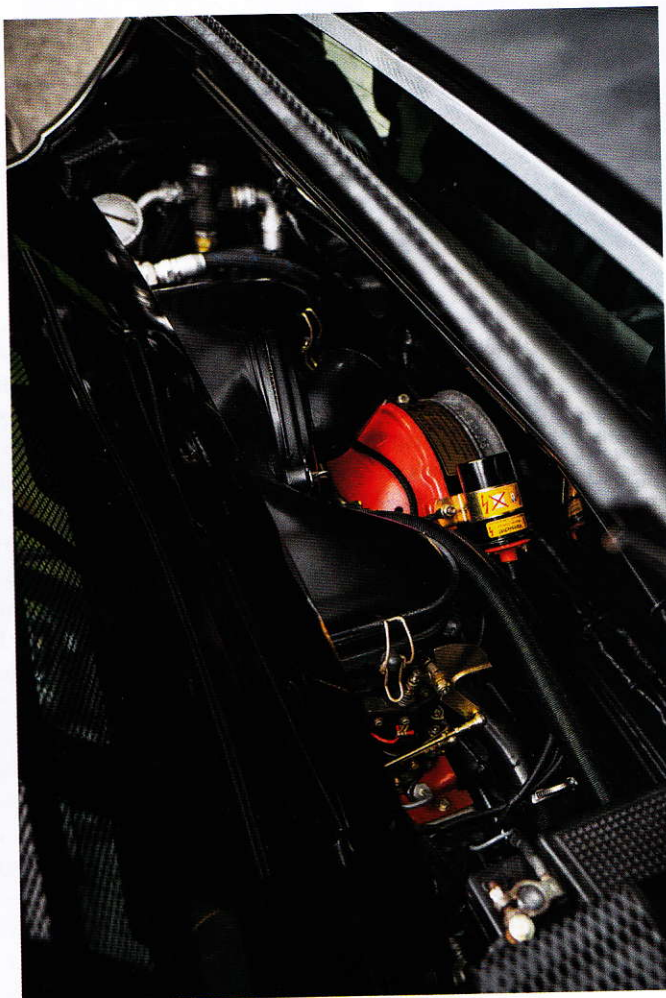


After six years in the Piëch family's possession, Brutus was sold to a U.S. Army doctor. He eventually passed away, and the car ended up with another American owner. By the time Porsche enthusiast Steve Goldin and his friend Matt McSwain purchased Brutus, it was in pieces and needed a full restoration. With the assistance of racer Jürgen Barth, documentation was lined up and the two-and-a-half-year resuscitation of Brutus was initiated.

Time had not been kind to the car, which at that point indicated 46,000 kilometers (28,500 miles) on the clock. Rust and poorly repaired bodywork meant the panels had to be completely stripped, sandblasted and refinished. Porsche RSR engine guru Drew Slayton freshened the mechanically injected 2.9-liter powerplant, which was the only one of its kind and had its own unique block, not a bored-out 2.7-liter unit.

Disassembly revealed that numerous parts, from the connecting rods to the Bosch injectors, are stamped with the word "prototype." Parts sourcing proved a daunting task, as was the challenge of piecing together its

Whereas Brutus represented a no-holds-barred approach to the hot-rodded 914 concept, subsequent 916 prototypes featured a more sensible 911S-sourced 2.4-liter engine.





The restoration of Brutus involved meticulous attention to detail and, at times, the fabrication of parts in order to maintain fidelity to the original configuration.

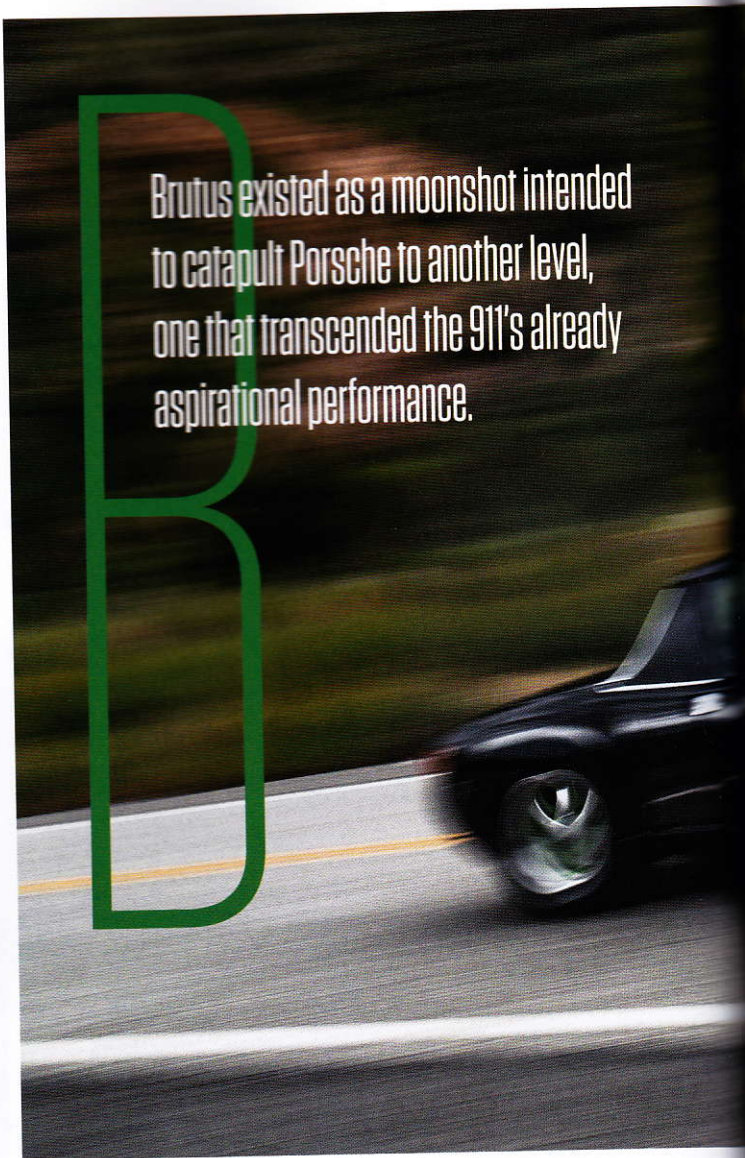
unique construction techniques. For instance, research revealed that the 2.9-liter engine used hydraulic lines from a tractor supply company near Porsche headquarters, requiring the parts to be reverse engineered. Some components were sourced through experts in Stuttgart; other times serendipity stepped in, like when Goldin was FaceTiming a Porsche enthusiast friend in Tulsa. The call was overheard by a person who owned a pile of parts that belonged to Brutus. "We would have never found those parts," Goldin says. "This guy had worked for him for 30 years, and he happened to be walking by and said, 'Oh, I know where that's at; it's in there.'"

ORCHESTRATING THE RESTORATION was Hussey, who happens to own the only other 916 that originally made it to the U.S. His car was imported to Florida for Brumos and was equipped with air-conditioning in order to explore its viability as a luxury performance car. Hussey's ownership of that 916 prototype (as well as oddities like a pristine 5,000-mile 914/6) enabled him to lead his team on a round-the-clock struggle to restore Brutus in

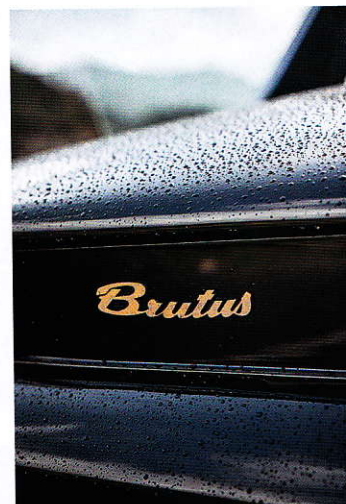
time for the 2017 Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance. According to Hussey, the process demanded an 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven-day-per-week marathon that included one of the team requesting to return home to his wife for Valentine's Day, only to have Hussey intervene. "I sent flowers and he signed the card," he says.

Restoring the cabin also proved to be unexpectedly challenging. "The interior looks basic, but there are some intricacies [to it]," says Goldin, as some materials needed to be sourced from Germany in order to retain the correct setup. Throughout the process, no bolt was left unturned, which was aided by the fact that Hussey's 916 was parked nearby and constantly used for direct reference. Decades of experience with the platform also didn't hurt, enabling Hussey to sleuth out the proper, Porsche-ordained solutions when necessary.

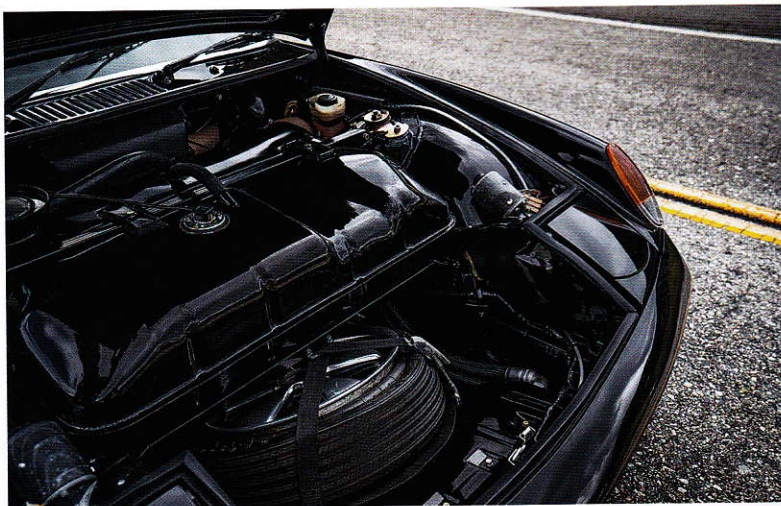
"If you look under the seat rack," he says, "you'll find the correct serrated washer. That's how perfect the car is in terms of every nut and bolt being in the right place." The restoration was eventually completed just in time for the 2017 Amelia Island Concours.



Brutus existed as a moonshot intended to catapult Porsche to another level, one that transcended the 911's already aspirational performance.



One of the few clues to this 916's identity is a nickel badge at the rear; the white headlight surrounds were typical of early 914s.



Brutus' 100-liter fuel tank disrupted the structural integrity of the firewall, necessitating the installation of a strut bar; the current interior trim is considerably more subdued than Corina Piëch's experiments with ostrich and elephant-hide upholstery.



BRUTUS EXISTED AS A MOONSHOT intended to catapult Porsche to another level, one that transcended the 911's already aspirational performance. It even upstaged the race-prepped 914/6 GT, which achieved the remarkable by winning its class at the 1970 24 Hours of Le Mans and finishing sixth overall during the banner year when Porsche won its first outright victory with the 917. Brutus' flared fenders visually recall the six-cylinder 914/6, whose 3,360 examples represent less than three percent of the 914's total production run, but its significance lies in the fact that it was a Hail Mary pass at greatness which, unfortunately, could not realize its potential at the time.

That perspective is particularly intriguing from a 21st-century perspective, since a newfound interest in 914s (and air-cooled Porsches in general) has sent values soaring. Had the six-cylinder 914 been a commercial success, it is quite likely that Porsche would

have pressed ahead with a supercar-like execution of the model that would have further eclipsed the 911, making the 916 akin to something like the Carrera GT or 918 Spyder of its era.

Brutus represents a production cul-de-sac, a symbol of what might have been had the public's appetite been more accepting of the six-cylinder production models. If anything, this one-off prototype's notoriety nearly 50 years after its construction points to the immaculate taste of a certain Corina Piëch, who had the good sense to make the misfit Porsche her own by installing a badge of her first name onto the dashboard.

Like many dreams, this unique machine slipped out of the young lady's hands, languishing in neglect for some 20 years before finding another life. At the end of the day, the intrigue behind Brutus delivers proof that sometimes greatness can take decades to be recognized, and tremendous resources to be celebrated. ●