

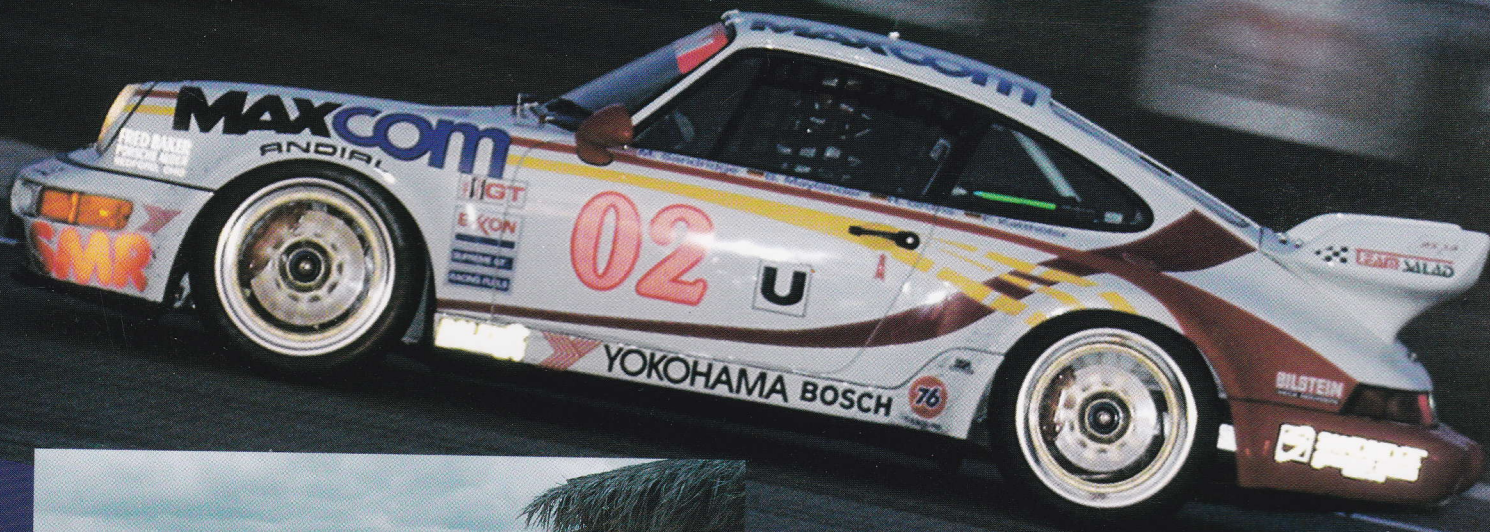
# Excellence

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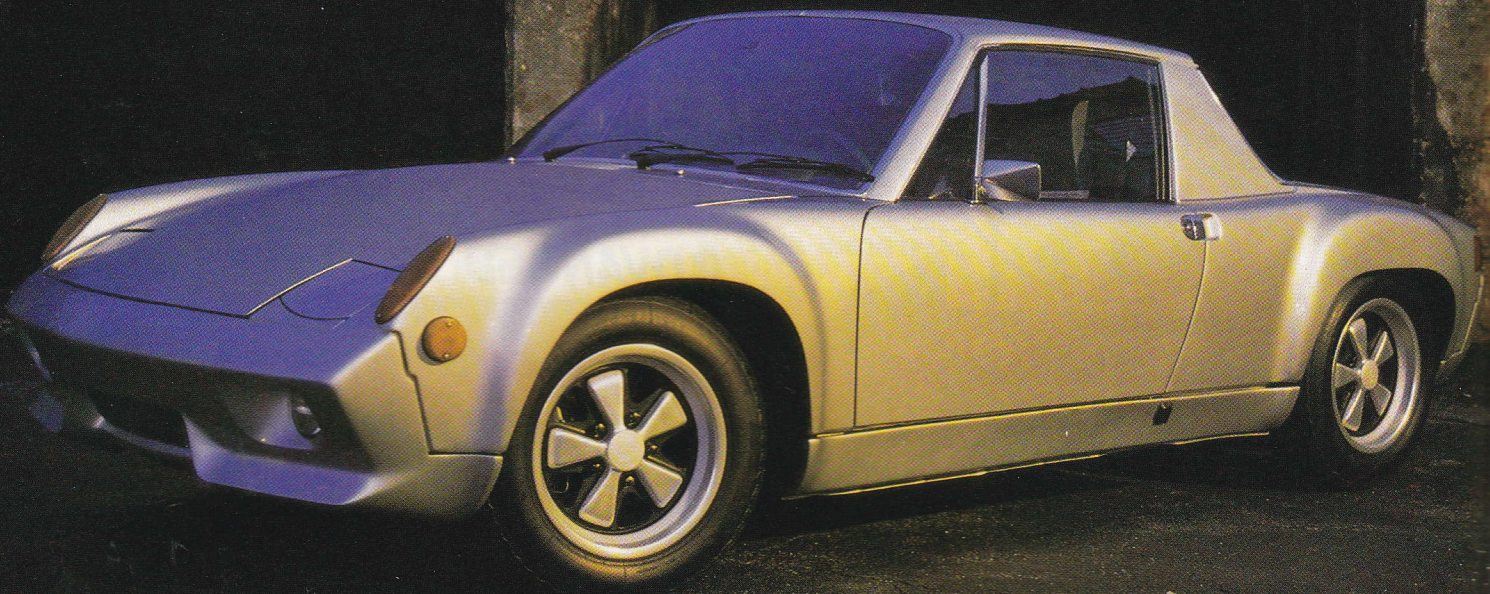
One Of Eleven—A Rare 916



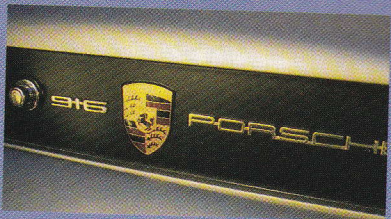
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# ONE OF ELEVEN



by David Colman

Photos by Sean Traywick

**I**t's almost as though George Hussey convinced himself to pay the price of admission just to see what was inside the tent. Except this was no circus, and he didn't spend just a few bucks to take that peek.

Rather, he laboriously assembled \$116,000 to purchase the 916 which Peter Gregg imported for Brumos Porsche in 1972. Those familiar with the 914 generally acknowledge that the eleven 916 prototypes constitute the apogee of development for Porsche's production mid-engine roadster. Hussey blames his pricey purchase on insatiable curiosity. He reasoned that the only way for him to learn the secrets of the 916 was to buy one and examine it for himself. Those who know Hussey would expect no less than such consummate curiosity from the man who runs Automobile Atlanta, and bills himself as "Dr 914." For a mid-engine zealot like Hussey, bringing the very car which appeared on the cover of *Road and Track* (February, 1972) back to his Georgia shop from Florida was akin to retrieving the Holy Grail.

Of all the 916s, the ex-Gregg car is without doubt the best known. Aside

from its cover exposure, 914 233 0012 was the only 916 that Porsche "Americanized" to comply with federal safety statutes, and officially exported to the United States. In Florida, Gregg and Brumos were charged with installing an air conditioner, an option thought to be essential for Stateside duty. But due to concerns about the proposed \$15,000 selling price of the 916, Porsche abruptly cancelled the entire project just two weeks before its scheduled debut at the October, 1971 Paris Salon.

Brumos subsequently sold their 916 to William Hall, a Jacksonville resident whose only son had died while racing Peter Gregg's 904 at Savannah Raceway. Many years later, in 1989, the silver 916, still belonging to Hall, again became the subject of an extensive photo essay, this time in Brett Johnson's book, "The 914 and 914/6 — A Restorer's Guide To Authenticity." Johnson used Hall's car, along with another 916 belonging to Jerry Leonard of Indianapolis, to document the numerous features which differentiate the 916 from all other 914 models. For those of you unfamiliar with the litany, here's a brief recap of those idiosyncrasies:

- 2.4 liter 911S engine (190 DIN hp, 159 lbs. ft torque)
- Type 916 gearbox
- Ventilated disc brakes at all four corners
- Bilstein competition shock absorbers
- 914/6 GT fender flares, rockers and front oil cooler
- Special edition front and rear bumpers
- 7 x 15 in. Fuchs alloys, 185/70 VR 15 tires
- Steel roof panel welded and blended in place
- Velour carpeting and leather interior trim
- Fully carpeted front and rear trunks
- Becker Mexico AM/FM cassette stereo
- Radio antenna molded into windshield
- 911 oil pressure/temp gauge on dash
- Fuel gauge relocated to center console

Most of the 916s sported monochromatic paint treatment which imparted a pleasantly unified appearance to the rather disjointed-looking 914 design. Only the prototype 916 was finished in black. The rest were light yellow, silver (3), metallic brown, metallic blue, dark blue, viper green, white and red. One of the three silver cars sported Day-Glo bumpers and rocker panels. It can be seen on page 26 of the October, 1972 issue of *Christophorus*. Ludvigsen reports that a German enthusiast bought this one

“for DM 41,000, about \$12,800...it was silver except for the front, rear and rocker panels, which were a red so harsh it made the eyes water — spectacular garb for this super 914.”

At first, the literature about the 916 indicated that 20 units had been constructed prior to termination of the program. Ludvigsen first reported that number in 1976, in “Porsche — Excellence Was Expected,” and as recently as 1987, Porsche Cars North America was conveying the same information in their own “Self-Study Workbook — Porsche The Heritage.” But current scholarship reveals that only 11 916s were actually built. Ingo Seiff lists that number in his 914 appendix to “Porsche — Portrait of a Legend.” The most comprehensive accounting published to date about the 916 can be found in Dick

Reef and Ernst-Jan Mastenbroek’s invaluable “Caught By Camera — Porsche 914” (Euroboek, 1991), which lists the build number, chassis number, engine number and color of all eleven cars.

Over the years, 914 enthusiasts have become so conditioned to repeating and embellishing the legend of the 916, that the car has come to assume mythical proportions. After all, that total of eleven units makes it one of the rarest Porsches ever built. So rare, in fact, that five of the eleven were snapped up by members of the Porsche and Piech families immediately after the cancellation was announced. Ferdinand Piech took 914 043 0195, Frau Piech took 914 233 0011, Wolfgang Porsche claimed 914 233 0014, Dr. Mich. Piech took 914 233 0017, and Gerd Porsche accounted for 914 233 0015. Ever since, they



**There can be little doubt that had Porsche gone ahead with production of this most sinuous 916, its looks alone would have overcome buyer resistance to the high proposed asking price of \$14,900. Discontinuance of the 916 spelled the end of the 914 as a high performance Porsche.**

have traded among collectors for increasingly astronomical prices.

It was therefore with some trepidation that George Hussey meekly suggested to William Hall that should the latter ever be inclined to sell his 916, the former would be most interested in purchasing it. As soon as Hussey hung up the phone, he started mocking his grandiose aspirations — “I said to myself, ‘Damn it George, here it is the middle of the winter, and you don’t have a bench to sleep on. Hall will probably say \$250,000, and there’s no way you can afford that!’” Instead, Hall, who rarely drove the car, offered it to Hussey for \$116,000, a price Dr. 914 considered tantalizingly affordable — “Not that I had the money. But I figured if I sell this and that, and put him off three months, and work at it, I could raise that much cash.”

The first thing to go was Hussey's zero mileage '88 911 Cabriolet, which contributed \$40,000 to the slush fund. From then on, though, a tight market forced Hussey to borrow the last \$50,000 needed to buy the 916. It was a sacrifice he was willing to make in order to bag the toughest quarry in the 914 world. On his best-ever birthday, April 25, 1993, Hussey pointed the 916 north out of Jacksonville, having finally become the owner of the legendary car Peter Gregg had imported two decades earlier.

On the trip home, Hussey found out that the hot setup for 1972 had turned a little tepid by 1993: "It was sort of disappointing, because I was used to a 3 liter 914-6 we had built with late suspension and brakes which handles beautifully. The 916, with its 185/70 tires and 15 inch wheels, and little sway bars, is sort of scary by comparison. It oversteers because the front sway bar is too small, so you can feel the rear end coming around on you. And the mechanically injected 2.4 engine in it is just fine...until you compare it to a Motronic 3 liter."

While Hussey was mentally prepared beforehand for such disappointments in performance, he was not ready for the succession of rude surprises he discovered after he parked the 916 in Atlanta and began stripping it for cleaning. The first thing that caught his attention as he removed the interior Perlon carpeting was the color of the car's footwells, which were not silver, as he had expected, but white. Further investigation led him to a color code plaque which listed the hue of his car as "L80E" which is the Volkswagen code for white 914-4s built on the Karmann assembly line. The Porsche version of the same color, for 914-6s assembled at Stuttgart, was "1110" for "Light Ivory," or "Hellelfenbein" in German.

Could it be that this ultimate 916 was really nothing but a converted 914-4? That would be like finding your Brancusi had been cranked out by the Franklin Mint. Like discovering Keene had painted the Chagall you bought for big bucks. Yet that's just what further investigation revealed. Although the "silver" 916 is titled as a 1972 car, Hussey is convinced that it is actually a 1971 914-4, a "mistake car" which Porsche pulled off the Karmann assembly line and sent to Werk I for transformation into a 916.

For example, by 1972, all 914-4s boasted adjustable driver and passenger seats. While this 916 does offer that feature, Hussey found that the adjustable passenger seat was added afterward, confirming his belief that the model year of origin for this car was actually 1971: "When you take the passenger seat out, you can see where they glop-welded in two little hinges so they could fit the adjustable seat." Other dead giveaways are the lack of dash fascia vents and retractable seat belts, both items

which had become standard by 1972. It's no wonder Hussey sounds bemused, if not outright miffed, as he recites the findings of his investigation. His expensive peek under the bigtop has proven the emperor has no clothes.

As soon as doubts began to form about the lineage of his 916, Hussey headed for the front trunk, where he nervously peeled the carpet back which the factory had glued over the VIN number on the right front inner fenderwell. By that point, he was



#### 916 CHASSIS NUMBERS AND CURRENT OWNERS

CHASSIS NUMBER	COLOR	OWNER
914 143 0195	black	David Herzberg, South Carolina
914 233 0011	light yellow	Yoshiho Matsuda, Japan
914 233 0014	metallic brown	Matthias Goetten, Germany
914 233 0016	red	Manfred Sommer, Germany
914 233 0017	metallic blue	
914 233 0012	silver	George Hussey, Atlanta, Georgia
914 233 0015	silver	
914 233 0020	silver	Bill Story, Florida
914 233 0013	viper green	Wolf Scutz Tattenpach, Germany
914 233 0018	dark blue	Jerry Leonard, Indianapolis, Indiana
914 233 0019	light ivory	Crispin Manners, Devon, England

almost resigned to finding a 914-4 serial number. Much to his relief, however, he read "914 233 0012." At least the car does have a proper Porsche 916 chassis number, if not a proper 914-6 chassis.

In the engine bay, Hussey discovered amateur welds which reveal the secret of a four-cylinder chassis conversion. The clumsy oil tank brackets and motor mounts of this 916 look nothing like the production parts to be found on a factory-assembled 914-6. Dr. 914 details his autopsy: "Instead of

punching the engine mount and doing spot welds, it's been welded on the exterior perimeter with a torch. We could have done a better job blindfolded. By looking at the way the apprentices in the racing shop welded in the six cylinder engine mount, and the little holders for the oil tank, and cut the holes for the tank, it was a real quickie job. Of course, this was only a prototype, so why do any fit and finish?"

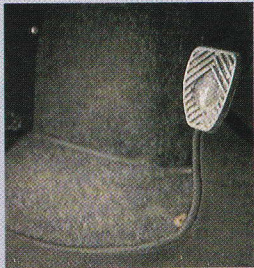
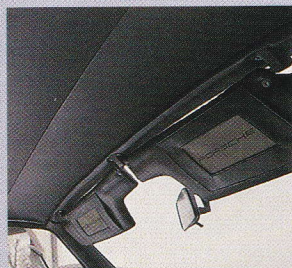
The same kind of slap-dash inattention to detail characterizes the engine compartment finish. Instead of silver

on the fire wall and surrounding sheet metal, or even the original light ivory, the engine bay is done up in hastily applied satin black paint: "They were so lazy they just got a can of black spray paint and spray-bombed the engine bay because they didn't want to shoot it in silver. After all, why go to the trouble of painting the engine compartment when they could just send someone out there with a spray can so it wouldn't look white under the deck lid."

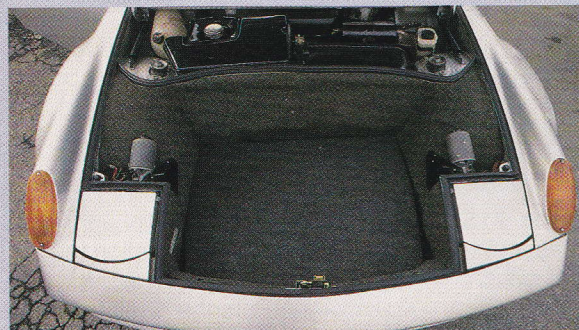


**After removing the center storage console to accommodate the air conditioner, Brumos installed this two-gauge VDO instrument panel**

**Right: Leather, leather, everywhere. Except on the seats and door panels, where Porsche cloth, provided by Tony Lapine, has replaced the original psychedelic paisley fabric which rotted at the Port of Entry. Below: The underside of the roof panel is completely upholstered in leather. Note the leather-covered sun visors as well, with hide map pockets sewn on the top side.**



**Near left: When new owner Hussey first felt the bulge below the speaker enclosure with his left foot, he thought a Coke bottle had become trapped under the rug. The hump results from the 914-6GT oil cooler lines. Bottom left: Everything looks exactly like a normal 914-6 except for the upholstered fender wells. Under the Perlon-covered plywood platform lies a shrouded oil cooler unit in lieu of a full-size spare tire.**



The Brumos air conditioner installation furthers the prototypical look of the car. In order to fit a 911 a/c compressor of the period to the 2.4 liter "S" motor, mechanics recontoured the firewall behind the driver's seat to accommodate the bulky apparatus. The resultant cockpit bulge limits rearward travel of the seat, precluding operation by tall (6'4") drivers. The leather-covered cardboard pad which the factory had carefully fitted to the interior side of the firewall suffered abuse in the modification. To make room for the compressor bulge, the mechanics simply cut a round hole in the cardboard, leaving the unsupported leather lying directly on the reconfigured steel of the firewall.

The Volkswagen Products Corporation (VPC) air conditioner is situated below the dashboard. Its location necessitated removal of the 916's vertical center storage console, which the factory had fitted with a fuel level gauge and a pair of warning lights for seat belts and brake failure. After removing this unit, Brumos substituted a two-gauge VDO instrument panel for the gas gauge and clock. The face of the clock, however, does not match anything else in the car, and Hussey thinks it "came out of a 912 or something — it's got weird green numerals, and it couldn't have been original." Ironically, the air conditioner is faced with the overwhelming task of cooling an interior suffused with heat from the GT-type steel oil cooler lines which run along the base of the driver's side rocker panel. When Hussey first located the bulge under the carpet next to his foot, he thought someone had left a Coke bottle under the floor mat: "When I picked up the carpet, I found the oil lines right there, inside the car, just like a 914-6GT. Imagine trying to cool this car down in Florida, with that meager VPC air conditioner, and those hot oil lines inside,

with just a molded carpet cover over them.”

The fine leather finish of the interior distinguishes the 916 from all other 914s. Absolutely everything has been covered with high-grade hide, including door panels with pleated storage pockets, seat frames, seat belt receptacles, windshield pillars, headliner, and all dashboard surfaces. Unlike the workmanship in less obvious areas of the car, the stitching of the leather is absolutely first-rate. Unfortunately, when the 916 moldered at the U.S. port of entry with its windows rolled down for an extended period, dampness ruined the original paisley seat inserts. Porsche stylist Tony Lapine supplied Brumos with replacement

But not everything on the 916 is as jury-rigged as the shift linkage, or the air conditioner. In fact, certain parts like the windshield, transmission case and brake rotors were clearly designed for mass production. Porsche went to the trouble of manufacturing a special windshield for the 916 which included an embedded antenna for the radio, a complication and expense clearly intended only for a production car. Though Hussey's 916 weeps water in the lower corners of the windshield in heavy rain, he is understandably reluctant to remove and reseal this one-of-a-kind unit.

Likewise, Porsche configured the 911's then-new 915 gearbox specifically for use in the 916. The 916 trans-

gearbox. Over the years, Hussey has encountered a number of 916 transmissions for sale on the used parts market, clear evidence of Porsche's intention to mass produce the car.

The 916 also sports vented 911-style rear brake rotors and calipers, a definite improvement over the solid rear rotors standard on the 914-6. Like the windshield and the transmission, the rear brakes were also produced in sufficient quantity for them to become available in the used parts aftermarket. 916 calipers and rotors are dimensionally identical to 914-6GT units. Hussey describes how they differ from stock 914-6 brakes: “To put a 911 rotor on a 914-6, you have to shim the caliper with washers to make it work. On the 916, the caliper has a different offset, so it bolts right on to the ventilated rotor. The 916 rotor fits the 914 because it doesn't have as big a ‘hat’ as the 911 unit does.”



Porsche cloth fabric in a pattern more muted than the original.

**W**ith its cultivated bodywork and interior appointments, the 916 is more refined aesthetically than mechanically. The crudity of the shift linkage for the 916 gearbox confounds Hussey's sensibilities: “The shifter is a real gizmo. The linkage is totally homemade. There's a 901 shifter under the knob, which has been dismantled, turned around, and rewelded to make it work. They attached a pair of 914-6 shift rods with just a bolt, and passed the linkage through a four inch hole cut in the firewall. It's suspended in air because there's no bushing at that point, just a rubber boot. I'd hate to shift this car fast, like in the middle of a turn on a race track.”

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mission looks identical to the 915, except for the fact that it has a 914 rear cover on it, and a square boss in the side of the case where the linkage attaches. Unlike the 915 transmission, the 916 shifts from the rear, like a 901

**S**ome 914 enthusiasts may find this expose of the 916's geneology to be a rude surprise. After all, any car that has occupied the top rung of the 914 development ladder for so long acquires a certain mystical cachet. To see it for what it really is — a quaintly dated development exercise — requires a disconcerting new prescription for your bifocals. Were all eleven 916s converted from 914-4 chassis? This is a question that can only be answered by close scrutiny of the other ten examples. Hussey, for one, is convinced that all the 916s were, like his, built from 914s that were more Volkswagen than Porsche. After all, he reasons, “Why would they butcher a perfectly good 914-6 to make a prototype?”

Though he may seem outwardly disgruntled about the shortcomings of his prized possession, Hussey is quick to boast that his 916 is the only 914 he has ever driven which will match a 911 for structural integrity: “There were two things I immediately noticed about it that were different from any 914 I had ever driven. When I hit a bump, it didn't go thump-thump, just thump — because of that steel roof. And the door closes with a vacuum.”

To some, \$116,000 might seem a tad expensive for a 914 with more to offer in the way of reputation than reality. For others, however, this rarest Volkswagen-Porsche of all would be a bargain at twice the price. If only they could find one to buy.