

**TOM CONWAY**  
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# Porsche 356 Registry

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Cover: Simon Bowrey's Carrera GT. Photo by Jayson Fong  
 This page: Factory delivery to a group of PCA members, circa 1965. Photo by Larry Jones.



# Tom Conway



Story and photos by Sean Cridland

Tom and Valerie Conway stop for a photo op during a drive in Tom's 42,000 mile 356 B coupe.

Right: Still a hands-on businessman, he consults with CarQuip mechanic Nick Altieri as a freshly rebuilt engine gets some finishing touches.

Opposite: There is a steady demand for Tom's expertise; the shop is always busy with early Porsches.



Tom Conway speaks with the quiet confidence of someone comfortable in his own skin. One of the rare breed of people who was actually born in and grew up in Boulder, Colorado before the growth boom of the 1970s and '80s, he's seen a lot of change, both in his own community and in the kind of people who are, like him, diehard Porsche fanatics.

Born into a family of miners and carpenters, Tom is a fifth generation Coloradoan who learned the value of hard work and the spirit of adventure early on. He had a rural paper route when he was ten that offered a variety of challenges, both in distances covered and elements encountered. His usual delivery tool was a little Vespa that he customized for efficient paper delivery. But more than a few times – when winter weather deposited thick layers of drifting snow – he had to borrow his sister's horse to get the job done. During free time, he and his friends would roam the Rocky Mountain foothills looking for arrowheads and pottery shards, climbing the rock faces and exploring caves.

In High School, he was one of the "cool kids" because of his home-built '34 Ford three-window reverse-door coupe powered by a Nailhead Buick through a Goertz transmission, and slowed with hydraulic brakes, etc; a car which was eventually replaced by an even faster Chevy Nomad station-wagon with a Corvette engine, positraction and a four-speed transmission. His hot-rod phase came to a close only when his high school shop teacher caught his attention with a 356 Convertible D he was restoring. Not long after that, he had a college friend who had a white Speedster and Conway thought it was one of the best cars he'd ever seen.

It didn't take long before Conway "caught the bug" for Porsches and began a passion that has consumed and enriched the rest of his life. At age eighteen, he bought his own first Porsche, a wrecked 1955 Speedster for \$275 that he worked hard to get road-worthy. It had suffered a fire so hot that the carburetors had melted down into the engine. One of his first "learning" stories reveals the naiveté of a young American unfamiliar with foreign cars. After removing as many of the ancillaries as he could, he still had a very hard time getting the engine out through the top lid, though he did manage it... But he wondered why German engineers would make the lid SO small to make the process so difficult - till he saw a friend remove a VW engine from underneath.

Then there was the time on Easter Sunday of 1961 he and his brother – when the car first ran on its own – took it around the block with only carefully stacked cardboard boxes for seats. It felt pretty good, Conway remembers, so they went for another lap. They weren't so fortunate the second time around. Enthusiasm got the

better of them and off the road they went, a rock damaging the door-post. That jump-started his interest in metal and body work, a skill he's parlayed to business success and a life of great friendships and adventures throughout the western United States.

At first, he had taken the damaged 356 to a local shop, but says the guy that had fixed the car did such a bad job it inspired Conway to start working for him. He knew it could be better, but he needed to learn how to make it that way. Armed with a new set of skills and some experience, he eventually he found a mentor with more refined tastes at the Chrysler dealership where he spent four years developing his skills. Only a few years later he was in business for himself with foreign-car bodyshop, specializing in Porsche and VW metalwork. His life-long passion for getting things right has led to his reputation for being one of Colorado's premier Porsche metal workers, who has a perfect eye for lines, gaps, and form. But Conway is no one-trick pony.

The late sixties and early seventies were an exciting time for young people in America and especially in Boulder. That, combined with the endless hours of metalworking – pounding, straightening, cutting, leading – could burn out anyone, especially a young guy living in one of the most exciting small cities in the world. Conway found an interesting sideline that took him on a separate journey for a number of years: artistic ceramics.

One of his friends asked if he could design and make a potter's wheel. With his now well-developed mechanical skills, that was easy enough. But then the Boulder Co-op asked if he could make eight more. To do them in number would take a little more engineering to do it efficiently, but that wasn't difficult for Conway. One thing led to another and from 1974 to 1980 he eventually made several thousand of them, making decent money and a lot of friends in the Boulder art world. Of course he often traded art for his wheels, gathering an extensive collection of world class ceramics.

His interest expanded beyond the mechanics of the simple kick-wheels he was manufacturing. Conway took a lot of classes and seminars around Colorado and—true to his nature—developed a strong interest in what many consider the "black art" of glazing, a process which requires a strong understanding of chemical elements and their relation to heat. Perhaps he was away from Porsches, but always in settings which would later contribute to his artistic and scientific understanding of the accurate recreation of the contour curves found on Porsche cars.

That period also allowed him time to travel around the Four Corners region, exploring the haunting deserts and canyons where the ancestral Pueblos – some call Anasazi – made their homes more than a thousand years earlier. Typical to his nature and the times, he also built a handmade home with recycled materials that his wife Valerie calls the most solid house she's ever lived in, even in Boulder's occasional high-gust windstorms. But bodywork was always something he continued with, even





Tom hasn't lost his touch with bodywork, whether it's delicate (top) or brute.

The inventory of 356, 911 and other Porsche parts at CarQuip is impressive.

if it was a sideline during this period of his life.

In about 1980, he eventually came back to his love of Porsches and opened CarQuip in East Boulder where he specialized in 356 and early 911. Economically, it was a roaring time in Front Range Colorado and Conway had a very strong business with a staff of 18, fixing, buying and selling used Porsches. One of his strong suits was rebuilding transmissions. Conway says, "As a teen, I'd been rebuilding Muncies. 901s were a little more complicated, but I learned over time." Eventually his reputation grew enough that he was rebuilding transmissions for several notable Porsche shops around the country, including Vasek Polak's shop. In 1985, as some of the competition among shops started taking its toll, he started buying out parts inventories from some of the closing businesses and developing one of the best 356 and early 911 parts inventories in the western United States, a business he's been running now for more than 30 years.

Though his business and family life kept him from being a full time racer, he did do some DE and track events in the 1980s, but with kids in college, he didn't have the time or money to devote to racing on any reg-

ular basis. But in 1988, he read an article about the historic Carrera Panamericana and that sparked several years of adventures that still bring a gleam to his eyes. He started out with a 1955 bent-window Coupe. And he hired a co-driver who had done it before so he could prepare better and run faster. They did well on their first try, running as high as second, but eventually dropping to fourth in class and sixth overall when they lost a cylinder in the last leg of the last day.

The next year, he tried a little hotter engine, but during one of the practice sessions, coming around a corner between Oaxaca and the Bay of Tehuantepec, the engine light came on. Conway notes that "with all the elevation changes from sea level to ten thousand feet and back, you had to re-jet the engine. I made a stupid mistake and the engine ran out of oil when I was coming around a corner at about 100 mph." Sure enough, as soon as the light came on, smoke bellowed behind the car and the hot engine was done. Luckily, they had another, less powerful engine as a backup, which they installed overnight and started the race with no sleep. Still, they had a very strong finish.

He credits some of his success in Mexico with his ability to drive fast downhill. He says "a lot of people are afraid to drive fast downhill, but living in Colorado you get used to it." They did very well in mountains, but once they got on the long straits in northern Mexico, the more powerful cars would catch up and make go roaring past them. Of course he has several stories of near-misses on the wild Mexican roads where you can encounter everything from busses and trucks to farmers in donkey carts.

At the same time, Conway's been involved with helping several clients prepare their cars for PCA concours competition, most notably a couple of cars he did with fellow Coloradoan Mel Shapiro. You might remember Mel's Speedster being featured in the September 2014 *Porsche Panorama* magazine or Mel's Vic Elford Monte Carlo tribute car. Conway's efforts figured large in both cars.

Conway is still going strong, but is looking forward to retirement and taking on mostly projects that are in some way satisfying to his problem solving, artistic inclinations. He and wife Valerie enjoy traveling to Porsche Parade and West Coast Holidays in their Ruby Red 1963 356B 1600 Normal with 42,000 original miles. Tom's owned the car since the early '90s, but took it out of storage just before the Monterey Parade. Perfect timing, since they took third in the Preservation class before visiting the James Dean Memorial and cruising Yosemite, before driving home via the very sparsely traveled Nevada 6 and over 13,000 foot Loveland Pass as a topper.

Given Conway's eclectic interests and deep fascination with all things mechanical, there are sure to be some further adventures around the western United States. Ask what's next and he says "I still dream of driving laps at Laguna Seca... and Valerie wants to do some driving too." We'll be looking for them. 🚗