

Porsche 356 Registry

Arizona Treasure
as printed in

Porsche 356 Registry Magazine

Volume 41, Number 4: November/December 2017



AZ Treasure



David Gill's 356 SC GT Tribute

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Early morning walkers are startled from their reveries by a deep, throaty, unmistakably Porsche metallic roar echoing through the red-rock canyons around Sedona as two guys “of a certain age,” sporting huge grins, blast through the hills and dales of a perfectly landscaped golf-course retirement community. The walkers’ necks tense and their faces sour till they see the sparkling Auratium green 356 SC GT tribute with subtly applied silver trim. They relax, thinking, “Oh, that’s just David.”

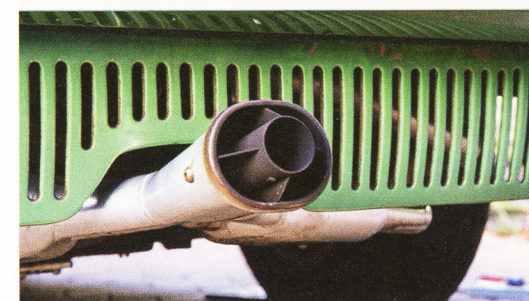
From the inside, looking out, the experience is sharper, more visceral, pleasingly rebellious. The car is perfectly fitted with an array of subtleties that gives the overall impression of it being a perfectly restored 1970s – dare we say it – 911; such is the fit, finish, and performance. Driving the car, you’d swear it was brand new and you wouldn’t be far off. Though you’d swear David Gill’s 356 SC GT tribute car is fresh from the Werks I assembly line, it’s a recent build, by way of California and Iowa.

Of course, 356 aficionados know that the 1964 SC GT was an extremely rare evolution of the lightweight S90 GT coupes and the 356B Carrera GT coupes. It was that rarity which fueled Gill’s inspiration to create his own version for cruising the twisty, high desert roads between Sedona and Flagstaff. But, it started so, so far away, between the lush jungles and languid beaches of Oahu, Hawaii.



Lee Schlabaugh

The Schlabaugh brothers also restored a Pre-A Speedster for David. Right: The T-6 non-sunroof donor body for the GT project was solid but certainly needed some help. Part of the process was de-chroming and filling trim holes, plus a trick rear valance built as part of the body.



The louvered rear valance with re-shaped lower area perfectly complements the “Sebring” exhaust’s single outlet.

Gill’s parents moved there during World War II, and he credits his acute sense of color and appreciation for aesthetic subtlety to growing up in the islands. Oahu’s rich multi-cultural community led Gill to learning several languages and a love for living in other countries. After leaving the islands for college, a stint in the Peace Corps, then graduate school, Gill found himself working for many years in South America, in Peru and Brazil.

Eventually, he came back to the United States to work corporate real-estate development, first for Sears, then on his own as a consultant for several large bridge-building projects, before retiring to Sedona, in 2006.

His fascination with Porsches came during his college years during a visit to one of his childhood friends who was running a repair shop in Honolulu. Parked at the back of the lot was a 1957 Speedster. Not having paid much attention to cars before, Gill asked, “What’s that?” After a quick schooling on the history of Porsche and air-cooled automotive technology, it was suggested that Gill approach the owner of the car about paying off his bill in exchange for the car. The owner agreed, the title was signed over and Gill had purchased his first Porsche for...\$150. It was merely the first in a long line of Speedsters, including a 1955 restored in 2005 by Lee and Neil Schlabaugh of Stalltek in Wellman, Iowa.

Still there was something on his mind. His background as a project coordinator fed a desire to “personalize” a car. He wanted to apply what he calls his “marionette approach” (pulling the strings to make things happen) to create the coupe of his dreams.

Gill had always admired the lightweight 1964 SC GT coupes but price and availability put those out of reach. Instead, he decided that the concept could be the perfect starting point for an outlaw. He started with a sound 1964 SC chassis he purchased from John Willhoit, took a few bits from his storage bin and then started mixing ideas from some of his favorite cars. At one point, he had owned a 1962 Super 90 with Brumos history. Though the car was well beyond saving, he kept its aluminum doors and seats and threw them into the mix of parts that went to the



GT-style seats were custom made in a slightly wider size by Stalltek, and upholstered by Autos International. Aluminum doors came from the "donor" GT David owned previously. Hinges were created to look like aluminum hood lightened pieces and the Spyder-style mirror carries through the "minimum chrome" theme. Custom carpet covers the floors.



Schlabaughs who worked their magic on the car between 2008 and 2009 and delivered the car just in time for the 2009 356 West Coast Holiday in Sedona.

There was never a pretense of re-creating one of the original SC GTs. Instead, Gill hoped to channel Porsche's concept of what might have been - if the rules were looser and current technology were available. Though none of the original lightweight cars had a sunroof (why would they?) Gill liked the open-air feeling of his Speedsters. He found a sunroof clip and had the Schlabaughs apply it to his dream car. Eschewing an electric motor, they sourced a crank system from a Volkswagen.

David had owned a Carrera 2 which had a vented rear valance covering the exhaust headers, but he never cared for its ad hoc appearance, with its seam and weatherstrip molding. For the SC GT tribute he asked the Schlabaughs to make one integral with the car; a very small, almost invisible detail that adds immensely to the clean appearance of the car. As if to draw attention to the seamless rear valance, he chose the single-pipe Sebring exhaust made by Jim Costas of Detroit, a look he's always liked. In the process, the rear reflectors and their holes were deleted.

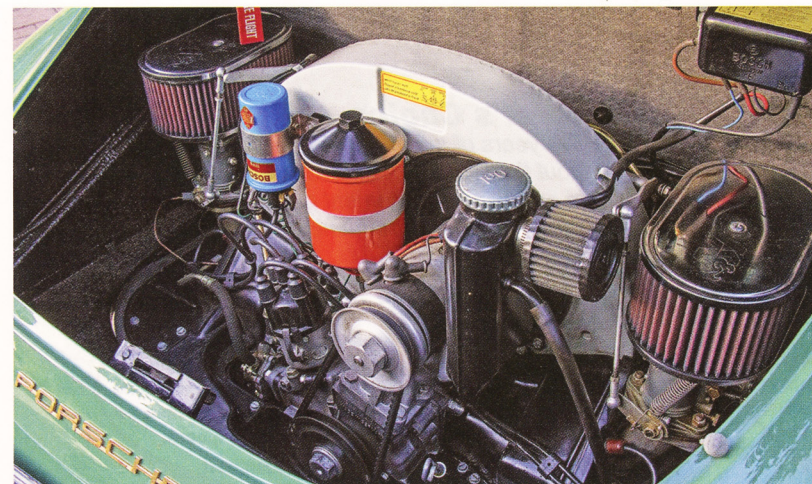


Lee Schlabaugh

Something he didn't care for was the look of double-grilled engine lids. Needing ample cooling, however, he had the Schlabaughs make him a Carrera-style single grille that's almost imperceptibly wider, along with louvers allowing freer air flow. Reaching back to his Speedster habit, the dash is Speedster-style. As the Schlabaugh's were piecing the car together, Bentley came out with a new, elegant looking chromed steel mesh grille for their cars. Gill liked the appearance better than the original headlight protectors seen on many 356 rally cars, so that look entered the mix for the front horn and light openings.

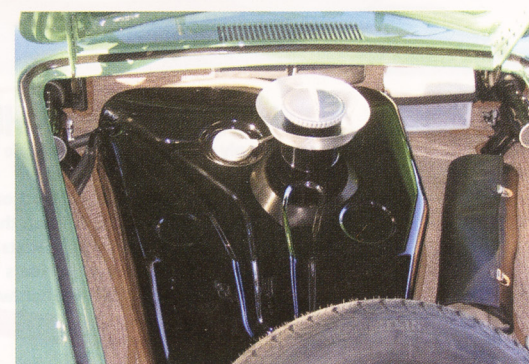
Next came Marchal driving lights to supplement to the Hella H-4 headlights. Rather than the usual T-6 fender opening for fueling, Gill preferred a center competition-style cap so the brothers made a large GT-style tank with a filler through a hole in the front lid. Though the front lid is steel, to maintain the lightweight tribute theme its brackets are made from from scratch, lightened and riveted like the aluminum lid hinges. All the windows except for the windscreen are Bill Brown plexiglass pieces with the proper fittings. The door windows are wingless. To accentuate the clean, flowing appearance of the original Porsche shape, several exterior components including rocker decos were deleted, including the bumper uprights, bumper overlap seams, back-up light, windshield squirters, and reflectors.

The interior also benefited from an "added lightness" approach, deleting all superfluous components, leaving only the necessary gauges and switches, the dash top-light.



The engine is a product of collaboration from several of the top-line Porsche vendors.

Right: The top-filler adds a racing look atop the large GT gas tank built by the Schlabaughs. The trunk is carpeted and nicely finished. Below: The rear louvers are a nice touch and help provide cooling air to the engine.



Lee Schlabaugh



The gauges are arranged in a group of five for better driver ergonomics, including an oil temperature gauge, and one for cylinder head temperature. As a modern convenience, there is an iPod-enabled radio mounted in a drop-down bracket under the dash. There is also a 12-volt power outlet for any other modern conveniences such as charging phones, etc.

You can't pour that much into the aesthetic character of a car and leave it mechanically anemic. Gill worked with local engine man Peter McCurdy to build what they call a streetable racing engine, using the best of everything available. With a 12 volt conversion system and electric primer fuel pump to ensure strong starts, it has a Charles Navarro LN Engineering 1883cc piston and cylinder kit, Carillo rods, Neutek SX-2 cam, lightened flywheel, head modifications by Competition Engineering, 44mm Solex carburetors modified by Jim Kaufman at Carburetor Rescue and the free-flowing Jim Costas Sebring exhaust described earlier. Compression is 9.5:1. With some tuning and development McCurdy was eventually able to get all the performance parts working in perfect unison when he installed a Bosch 050 distributor. Experience shows the torque curve is strong from 2500 all the way to 6500 rpms. Power is delivered through a Vic Skirmants transmission. Though the car didn't like the low speeds required for our photo sessions, on test drives it was fantastic, pulling much more like an early 911S than a 356. As the neighbors' scowls attested, the sound was superb, like no 356 you've heard before.

Handling is enhanced by Minilite 15" wheels with 185/70 HR Vredestein Sprint Classic tires, a significantly lowered chassis and a 17mm Willhoit sway bar. Stopping power is via Brembo disc brakes on all four corners with dual circuit master cylinder and dual reservoirs.

Gill has strong opinions regarding the ubiquity of red, black, silver, and gray Porsches: he hates it! Because of his Hawaiian and Latin American background, he wanted an appearance both organic and distinctive. He spent quite a bit of time on Willhoit's website looking at paint colors before deciding on Auratium Green, the perfect complement to the red rocks surrounding his and wife Betty's Sedona home. Says Gill, "I wasn't sure why I was drawn to this color, but I studied Latin and if something has the letters "aur" in it, chances are it has something to do with gold... When the Schlabaughs delivered the, it took my breath away."

He's always had an affinity for the dark mahogany and tan of Biedermeier furniture, so after consulting with his designer daughter, they settled on darker fawn-leather with tan courduroy seat inserts. Unwilling to cut the original GT seats saved from his Super 90, Gill had Stalltek make new GT-style seats, only slightly wider—or as Lee calls them, "relaxed fit". Upholstery work was done by Autos International. Driver and passenger are held firm by custom air-craft style seat belts. Floor and trunk are covered by honey-brown square-weave carpeting. The rear has a custom seat/storage compartment. The steering wheel is a classic Nardi.

No matter how you encounter the car, just sitting amongst the deep red rocks azure blue skies of the Arizona landscape or screaming by on your morning walk, the GT is a stunner from the inside out. A moving treasure in the wild, wild West. 🚗