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Cover: Chicago photo by Walden Wright.
This page: My BT5 61 with my son on the road to
Crans-Montana, Switzerland. Alain Buchert.

Bata, Branden and the Blue Baby



By Sean Cridland

Branden Mataja represents the next generation to carry the Porsche flame, ensuring the cars won't end up as dormant museum pieces or dusty portfolio-stuffers.



If you attended *Luftgekühlt III* in April of 2016, you were no doubt astounded by the fervor of the air-cooled Porsche community. There were the factory perfect examples of restoration, dozens of tribute cars, and several historic race-cars. But sitting right in the middle of them all was a glittering gem of color and imagination writ large across a 1956 European coupe that Bata and Branden Mataja call their "Blue Baby".

Just a glance at the car made attendees do a double-take, slow and stop to talk to the young man wearing the Dr. Zogg's Sex Wax hat, sporting multiple tattoos and adorned in pounds of Travis Walker and Stanley Guess goth-inspired jewelry. That was Branden Mataja, son of Bata Mataja. Branden and Bata are a couple of the Porsche world's more colorful—and creative—characters.

The story of Bata making it to the United States is something of a post-modern Horatio Alger novel. His Italian grandfather met his American wife in Marceline, Missouri, home of the Walt Disney Dreaming Tree - where the father of Mickey Mouse conceived his empire of the fantastic. Bata's father was born there. But, instead of staying in the Show-Me state, the family moved back to Europe. Along came World War II and by its end, the younger Mataja was a displaced person with no documents proving he was a U.S. citizen. He found himself in England, where he met Bata's mother. Bata was born in Yorkshire, but not long after, the family emigrated to Toronto, Canada, where he saw—and fell in love with—his first Porsche 356.

At about the age of fourteen, his family came into the U.S. over the Windsor/Detroit bridge, and made their way

to Las Vegas and eventually Los Angeles, where Bata graduated from Hollywood High and soon thereafter earned an Associates of Arts degree in film. Not surprisingly, his first cars were all air-cooled: two "poor-man's Porsche" Karmann Ghias, then a Corvair. He met his wife Rose while they were both ushers during a showing of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. As Mataja says, "For me it was love at first sight... though she needed some convincing."

A few years later, Bata was working as a production assistant and got hired by some Detroit photographers who were in town to shoot promotional material for Chevrolet. For the grand sum of \$50/day plus meals and lodging, Bata cleaned and prepped the cars for dawn shoots, running the film from Monterey to San Francisco, then driving back to prep the cars for sunset shoots. It was roughly sixteen to eighteen hours a day, but he thought he'd died and gone to heaven. A year or two later, the Japanese car manufacturers entered the U.S. market and hired the same photography unit to build their image. Bata then got even busier, building upon his reputation as the primary commercial car-prep guy in California and eventually founding the B.A.D. (Big American Dream) Company.

During that period, Bata acquired a couple of new cars for his young family; a Datsun 210 Station Wagon for himself and a Toyota Corona for Rose. Soon after, however, he sold Rose's car to buy his first Porsche 356.

"Rose and her mother were out in the back yard of our little house in Pasadena rolling their eyes as I was going through every inch of that car, polishing and cleaning and vacuuming," Mataja says. "Then I accidentally put the vacuum-cleaner head through the floor of the car!"

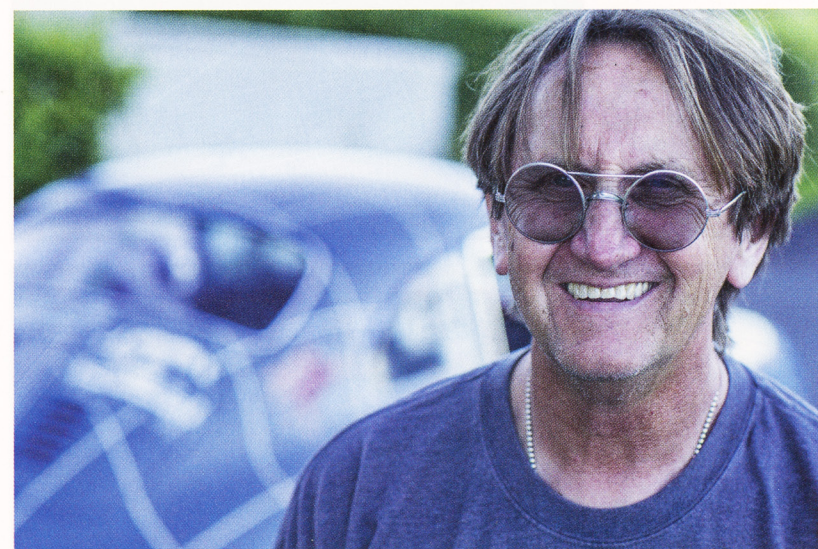
Unsatisfied with his considerable \$4500 purchase of a rusty car, he took it back and got a refund, slept on it, then went back the next day and offered the guy \$4000.

"He had it chained to a telephone pole because he thought I was pulling some kind of scam."

Still early in his Porsche learning curve, instead of searching out an authentic Porsche floor-pan, he drove it over to a local body shop and had them weld in a couple of steel plates.



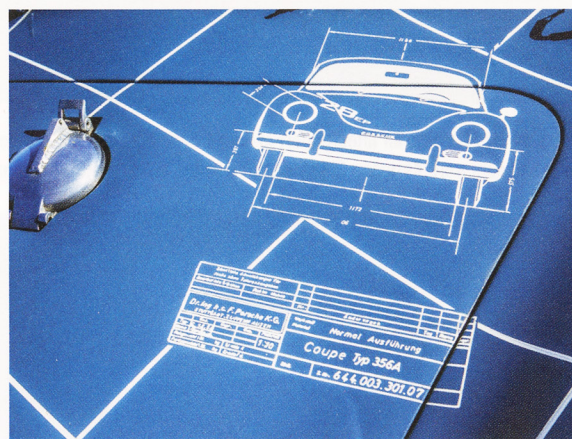
Cars were to become an integral part of young Bata's life and the business he would later create. His first two cars were Karmann Ghias, or as he called them, "poor-man's Porsches."



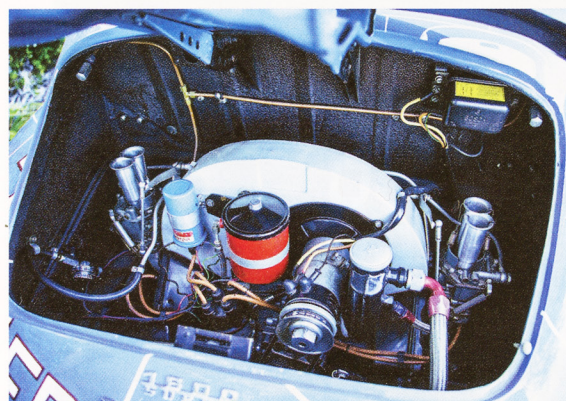
Bata today, still overflowing with energetic creativity.

Blue Baby, in all her glory, basks in the sun overlooking the Malibu coastline.





With her blueprint-inspired paint scheme and racing-equipped full interior—along with a competition motor—Blue Baby was an eye-catcher at Luftgekühlt III.



While restoring the 356, he met Gary Emory at Parts Obsolete in Costa Mesa. "Talking with Gary about the outlaw concept gave me a kind of permission to start doing different things with color," says Mataja. "From the time I was a kid, I always liked to play with different colors. My English step-mother would give me a hard time about putting gray and brown together. She said 'only the Italians do that,' but I thought it was cool. I never had enough money to go to design school, so I didn't know it was wrong."

He continues, "The Italians would wear a gray suit with brown shoes, something the English would never do in those days. But as I looked around at rocks and animals and other things in nature I thought, 'look, it's not like I came up with something that's not there. Those are organic colors found together all through nature...' You see all these wild color combinations in nature, so after a while I just said, 'I'm going to do what I want to do!'"

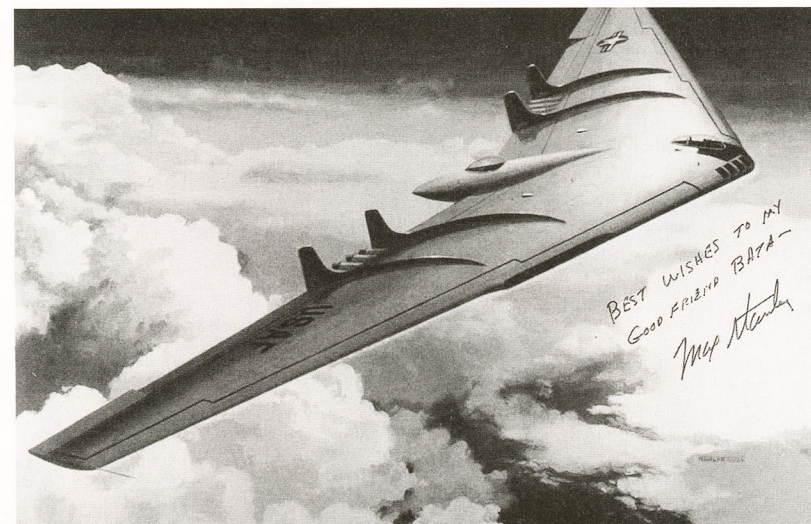
Because Mataja was working with a lot of people in film and advertising, he was often shocked at how safe they played it when it came to design and color, thinking so-called visionary people would be more adventurous. "There were a few who were fantastic," he says, "but most of them just followed along, very safely. I couldn't figure that out." Instead, Mataja started taking it further and further and further. He says "I'd like to think I did it tastefully, but I've managed to upset quite a few people along the way and that started to become something I enjoyed. I don't think I've ever done anything radical, but I've always had fun with it."

As a result, Bata became known for his "screwy ideas" about color and always pushing the envelope with non-traditional designs and color combinations. That first 356 restoration eventually was painted burgundy and with a blue interior. It had Rudge knock-off wheels and a bench seat. Apparently it was an attention getter. Famous collector Sandy Sigoloff bought it. Not long after that came Blue Baby.

In those days, Bata drove through Burbank on his way to work and saw the 356 in the same driveway for years. Every day, he'd glance at it, until one day it was gone. True to his ever-curious nature, he pulled over, went to the door and asked the owner about it. What had happened? Where did it go? Did you sell it? No, the car hadn't been sold. No he wasn't the original owner; he'd bought it from a former Northrop test-pilot of the flying wing – the precursor of the today's B2 stealth bomber – a guy named Max Stanley. As the owner took him around the side of the house and removed the car cover, Mataja's eyes lit up when he saw the European script on the fenders. If he was interested, it was for sale. Mataja bought it the next day.

That was about the same time Gary Emory was creating outrageous variations on the 356 theme, putting together the original Outlaw logo and badges which Bata thought, "I didn't really like the idea of cutting up the bodywork. I couldn't go that far, but I had some ideas of my own to make the car look unique; like an outlaw, but with color." As he was stripping the car down he found it was perfect, all except for a bend in the front hood.

Mataja always liked blueprints, so he came up with a design concept that would display the route "from the drawing board to the track." By using the dark aquamarine of the surface, he recreated the pattern of drafting



Top: Blue Baby's original owner was legendary test pilot Max Stanley, who autographed a dramatic photo of the YB-35 "Flying Wing".

Above: Bata, wife Rose, son Branden, and daughter Bree accept the Phil Hill trophy at the 1998 Monterey Historics.

Sitting in his racing Speedster, nicknamed Testi Rosa, which he started racing in 1995, making way for Branden to start driving Blue Baby.



graph paper, then including the blue-print design of the front of a 356 on the front of the car, the rear-view on the back, and so on. Then, he thought, why not take it a step further with the graphics of vintage-appropriate sponsors like Bosch, Koni, etc? Finally, rather than putting little tiny numbers on the car, as many of the vintage racers did, why not make them LARGE and colorful, so spectators and competitors could see who was coming. Since his son Branden's birthday was September 28th, that would be the number of the car. As a tribute to its original owner, Mataja painted a 1940s-style pin-up girl – with brown hair like his wife Rose's – on each fender and named the car Blue Baby.

Not long after, on a fluke, Bata ended up meeting Blue Baby's original owner. Bata had a fascination with the Buick Reatta, a two-seater built from 1988 to 1991, and saw one for sale in the paper. Looking over the car, its owner said he had acquired it from Buick, "As a gift to certain celebrities." Mataja had to know just which celebrity he was talking with. The gentleman replied, "I'm Max Stanley, I used to be a test pilot for Northrop." He had been the chief pilot during development of the "Flying Wing" in the late 1940s, retiring in 1972 after four decades of testing aircraft. Stanley was excited to hear that his car was doing well and in good hands and gave Mataja an autographed photo of himself as pilot. He said that he always liked that car because it reminded him of an airplane.

"But what happened to the hood?" Mataja asked.

Stanley blushed and said, "I was driving through Englewood and got distracted by this beautiful blonde walking down the sidewalk - and ran into the back of a truck!" Mystery explained.

Mataja prepped the car for racing and had an engine built by Dick Aubele, who used to work for Jack McAfee. "We were running Solexes," he recalls. "When we went to vintage race with Steve Earle, we had to go down to Zeniths. But then I found Zeniths from a helicopter engine with a wide throat. We had Elgin cams and used Aria pistons for a while." Visually, he had to have some fun with it. "The car has Campagnolo wheels, wire basket headlight covers, Shelby-style filler cap and we used to run Carrera annular brakes all the way around, but Steve Earle made me take them off in favor of period- and model-correct brakes."

Bata and Branden car raced in vintage groups all over the country at Watkins Glen, Lime Rock, Road America, Mid-Ohio and one of the Rennsport Reunions at Daytona. Branden was pit crew until he was old enough to get his competition license, then he drove and was incredibly fast, surprising a lot of the veterans they raced against. Eventually, their interest in vintage racing waned and now the car is more of a driver and conversation piece, as we found it at Luftgekühlt. Bata recently retired from the B.A.D. Company, but has several other projects springing from his ever-fertile imagination. And Branden now works at Emory Motorsport, and is developing his own line of self-designed jewelry. 🏎️

More on page 20.

Big American Dream Company

What started as a job cleaning cars for advertising shoots grew into a full-service logistics company with capabilities ranging from peel-coat coloring, camera rigging, “exploding” display models and full-restorations of rare classic cars. Bata Mataja saw his job as the ultimate form of “stress management” for advertising and film companies.

Early in his career, Bata noticed the problems photographers and cameramen had with shooting various detail features of



To get a message across effectively, a visual had to have some punch. How do you show how strong a Volvo body is? This Lexus TV spot involved cutting a car in sections and suspending hundreds of parts from wires as the camera pans to the side, showing a complete car.



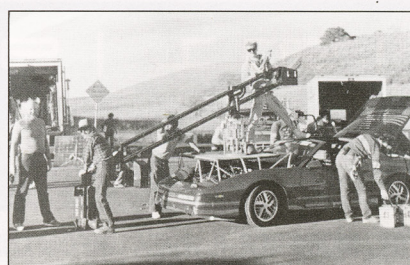
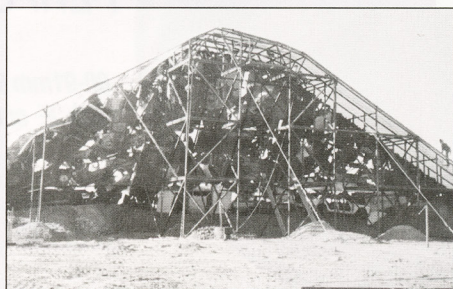
cars. So he worked out ways to seamlessly disassemble and reassemble prototype models for easier shoots with his “Blind Photo Buck.” Another trick was the development of “peel-coat” painting, which involved covering a car in a thin coat of latex then spraying a new color over top. When the shoot was done, the top-coat could simply be peeled away, revealing the original, undamaged, paint. Some shoots required a car to be cut down the middle to reveal its inner workings. In other cases, manufacturers wanted to display how a car came together, but in a dynamic, rolling visual effect. Bata Mataja was the guy to make all that happen.

We often think of car transport as simply getting a car from one locale to another. But in the world of advertising, projects can often require some extraordinary locales, such as the top of a towering butte in Monument Valley, an isolated coast in southern Chile, a high plateau in the Himalayan mountains of Nepal. Whether transport required planes, trains, ships, cranes or helicopters, Bata’s B.A.D. Company had the team of people trained in ensuring everything was just right.

Recently Bata has retired and closed shop on the B.A.D. Company and is working on his own form of stress management. He’ll be moving to Carmel, California and would like to go back to the old days when people could drive their race-cars to and from the track.



Peel coat (above) was a speedy way to change colors and trim. A mountain of wrecks (below) was built to allow a Subaru to drive over it. Elaborate rigs were custom made for all kinds of still and action shots like this tire ad (bottom).



When Branden Mataja was getting close to his tenth birthday, dad Bata planned a special present: an operational half-scale Speedster made from a mold Gary Emory had of the original ½ scale 356 go-karts. True to his creative nature, he got a little carried away. “I like to keep my employees busy,” says Mataja. “So when we’re slower on other things, I have them work on projects like this.”

The more he got into it, the more he started thinking about details. As Mataja says “Hey, what if we do this and what if we do that...” By the time he was finished, he had a half-scale Speedster with opening doors and lids, operational headlights, brake lights, and turn signals, electric starter on the dashboard, to-scale brakes and powered by a five-horsepower Honda lawnmower motor.

But he didn’t stop there. He recreated half-scale hinges, instruments, insignia, trim, tool-kit, owner’s manual and sales literature. Every interior was finished as if it were a Pebble Beach-worthy restoration. Oh, and if you’re going to make one, you might as well make enough parts to make... fifteen!

If you look closely at the red one in the display case at his home, you’ll notice that it has “normal” hubcaps on one side and “pimple” hubcaps on the other side. He went so far as to do Speedster trim packages for both pre-A and A, all the way up to 1959.

As you can imagine, that project stretched well beyond young Branden’s birthday, so instead Bata found him some other interesting toys to play with, including an Indian Papoose, an Indian 50 and a Mantz quarter-midget that Branden used to blast around the driveway of B.A.D. Company in, throwing up 15’ high rooster-tails through rain puddles. So his daughter Bree wouldn’t feel left out, he built her a Devon go-kart for her 16th birthday.

And, then there was the 356 Bata built in honor of the 50th Anniversary of Porsche celebration at Monterey Historics in 1998, which now resides with Gary Emory in Oregon. Mataja’s creativity just goes on and on.



Branden’s racing days started in a Mantz Midget.

Half-Pint Porsche



Bata admits his fascination with detail can get out of hand. A birthday gift for Branden turned into a spot-on half-scale Speedster, including insignias, trim, tool-kit, sales literature, and owner’s manual. One departure from original is the lawn mower engine.

Left: The Speedster Karussell was a huge hit at the 1998 Monterey Historics. Several young Porsche family members took turns on the ride.



Just like a full-size original, the interior is inviting, but all-business. There’s a single seat, nicely trimmed in the style of the original Speedster “bucket”. Below: Molds and frames in storage.

