

Porsche 356 Registry Magazine
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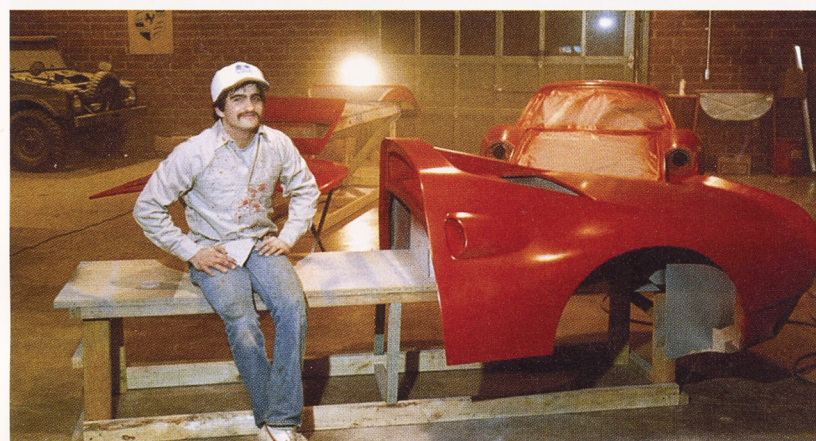
Cover: Chuck House and Roland Löwisch on the California coast during the California Mille in April.

This page: Paul Raben's C Cabriolet at Pompano Beach Air Park at the Goodyear blimp hanger.

Carolina Coach Crafters

With talent and drive, this young man was bound to be a success. Meeting the right people in the automotive world sealed the deal.

Story and photos by Sean Cridland



- How many young body men are entrusted with a Porsche 904?
- Tim Lingerfelt was honored with a national vocational award as a high school student.
- Today Tim (center) works with seasoned veterans Ralph "Mutt" Brawley (left) and Martin Steger.



Visiting with Tim Lingerfelt, you're immediately aware of his appreciation for teamwork, experience, and having the right tools for the job.

Like most kids of his generation, Lingerfelt loved riding his bike around the neighborhood, dreaming of bigger things. Unlike most kids, he started implementing that plan very early, moving quickly from painting his bicycles to working in his neighbor's body shop by age thirteen. By the time he got to high school he was already a talented body worker and painter with a passion for the business. He made pocket money from teachers who would bring their cars to him during his shop classes for dent and ding repair. Recognized as a "talent," his shop teacher suggested that he join the local chapter of the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (now called SkillsUSA) to compete in their United States Skills Olympics. Lingerfelt won at both the state and national level. Not long after, he found himself working professionally on a series of classic Porsches including a 550 Spyder, a 1957 Carrera Sunroof Coupe with Rudge knock-off wheels, a 904 and a RSK... all at the same time.

Dream cars to us now, nineteen-year-old Lingerfelt didn't have quite the same reverence at the time. He remembers, "At 19 years old, these things did not look cool to me. They were just old cars with funny shapes. But I wasn't intimidated. Because of my work at the neighbor's shop, I learned about drying and curing times and how to rotate vehicles so you could work on three or four vehicles at once."

Jackson's influence

Soon after, he met Denver-based Porsche enthusiast Dr. Bill Jackson who provided a nurturing influence, introducing Lingerfelt to a whole range of other Porsche experiences and people, often bringing the young Lingerfelt to Denver to work on his cars. Lingerfelt fondly remembers going on rides up into the mountains with Jackson driving cars that had been upgraded by Grady Clay with bigger brakes, turbos and intercoolers. "Bill would fly me out to Denver and put me up in a nice hotel and I would work around all the amazing cars in his collection. I learned so much more than I would have back in Hickory, North Carolina. As a young guy just getting my professional life started, to get on a big jet and fly to Denver, I was in a fantasy world."

Later, when Lingerfelt was getting ready to start his own business – Vintage Motorsports – Jackson was his first client. Jackson had Lingerfelt do the bodywork and paint on a 1960 GT Coupe, painted in Continental Orange, or, as Jackson preferred to call it: Denver Bronco orange. Still, as interested as Lingerfelt had become in Porsches, Hickory, NC was not exactly at the center of the Porsche universe. That led to Lingerfelt diversifying his customer base and skill-set to keep the doors open and the lights on. He and his crew worked on anything they could to stay busy: construction vehicles, cranes, dents and dings for used-car dealers, collector cars of other marques; Camaros, Chevelles, hot-rods, muscle-cars, whatever it took to keep the young entrepreneur financially afloat. Through all that time, Lingerfelt maintained his passion for Porsches and—because of his time with Jackson—developed a strong liking for 930s and began collecting them. It's a passion he still has.

Along the way, Lingerfelt took on another project which, though it had nothing to do with Porsches, brought him a good amount of respect and recognition in the classic car and concours world: a full restoration of one of the few remaining 1936 Stout Scarabs. No relation to the Lance Reventlow racing project of the same name, aviation engineer William B. Stout's Scarab was technologically unique for its time, using an aluminum unibody construction similar to those found on airplanes of the time and a rear engine layout, powered by a flathead Ford V8. In shape and function, it was a precursor to any of the modern minivans for roominess and interior layout. Considered extremely modern for its day, its shape now reminds viewers of the art deco-esque Flash Gordon space ships. Lingerfelt's restoration proved to be a huge success, winning awards everywhere it was shown. Better yet, the doors it opened would lead him back to his Porsche passion.

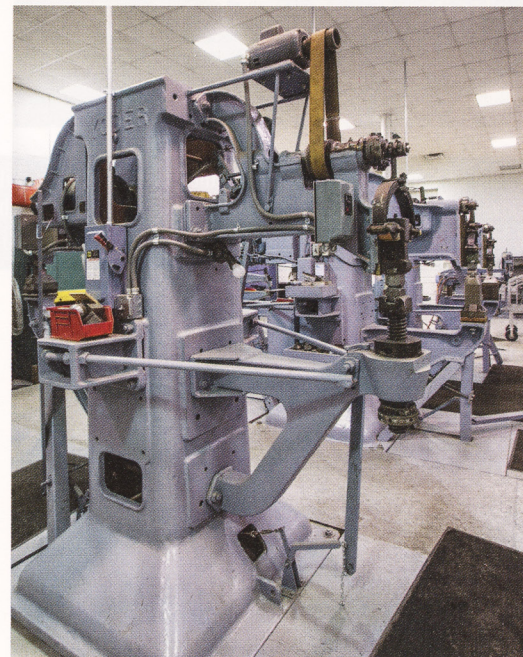
Though Lingerfelt had met legendary metal-shaper Ralph "Mutt" Brawley through Weldon Scroggum some years before, it was during the Stout project that Lingerfelt started doing some work with Brawley. He was immediately impressed by Brawley's drive for perfection and his "no bondo" approach. They stayed in touch and a few years ago Brawley mentioned that he would soon be going into retirement. Lingerfelt asked, "What are you going to do?" Brawley responded, "It's not what I'm going to do, it's what you're going to do. You're going to buy my entire shop and hire me to train some young guys to run it." And that's what he did. The problem was, where would he put it all?

Not long after, another door opened. Lingerfelt was driving around Mooresville looking for a suitable building into which he could fit his boat repair business, "The Boat Body Shop", his collection of Porsche 930s and muscle cars, and his next generation Porsche restoration business. Mooresville seemed a better fit than Hickory because, as an outlier to Charlotte, it would have a larger Porsche community. Plus, as one of the main hubs of NASCAR shop activity, it would have a larger talent pool to draw upon for young craftspeople.

Finding a space, and a partner

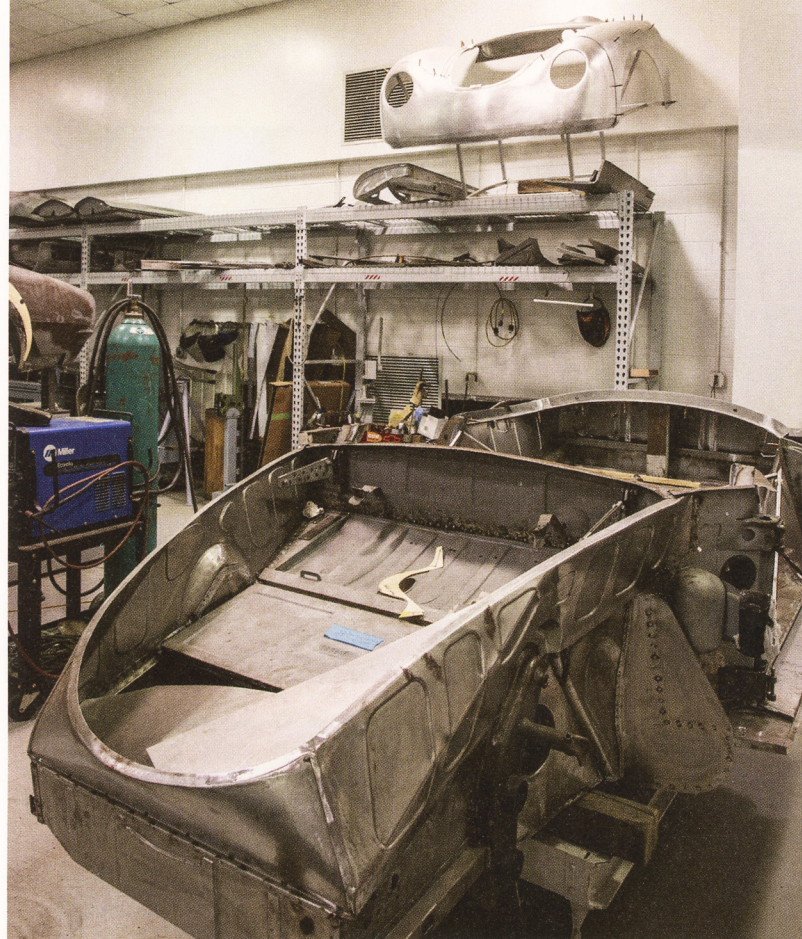
It didn't take long to notice the large, sprawling building on Rolling Hill Road. It had obviously been a race shop, though it was now vacant and had just one car parked in the lot, a Porsche 996 Cabriolet. That had to be a sign. Lingerfelt knocked on the door... no answer but the door was open. So he went exploring, eventually to find Martin Steger.

Steger came with his own unique background. As Lingerfelt likes to say with a sly North Carolina grin, "Martin doesn't mess around. He quit school because they have recess..." Having grown up in Germany and graduated from the prestigious Porsche apprentice program in the 1960s, Steger had training in virtually every area of Porsche factory activity. He had come to the United States on an invitation from Porsche Club of America founder Bill Sholar, had run his own independent dealership in upstate New York, after which he worked as a manager and competition coordinator for Kevin Buckler's The Racers Group. When TRG left NASCAR racing and downsized its East Coast racing operations, Steger was left to close down the shop in Mooresville and oversee the sale of the building. His chance meeting with Lingerfelt was meant to be.



Ralph Brawley's old school heavy machinery, many of which are older than the cars restored. Also, old school "hand machinery", just as important to the process.





The two had lunch, talked about their backgrounds and interests and not long after, Steger proposed that Lingerfelt should buy the building and hire him on to oversee the mechanical side of the business. At first Lingerfelt wondered if he could afford Steger. "Eventually I came to realize that I couldn't afford *not* to hire him, such was his knowledge of all things Porsche and his connections in the Porsche world," says Lingerfelt.

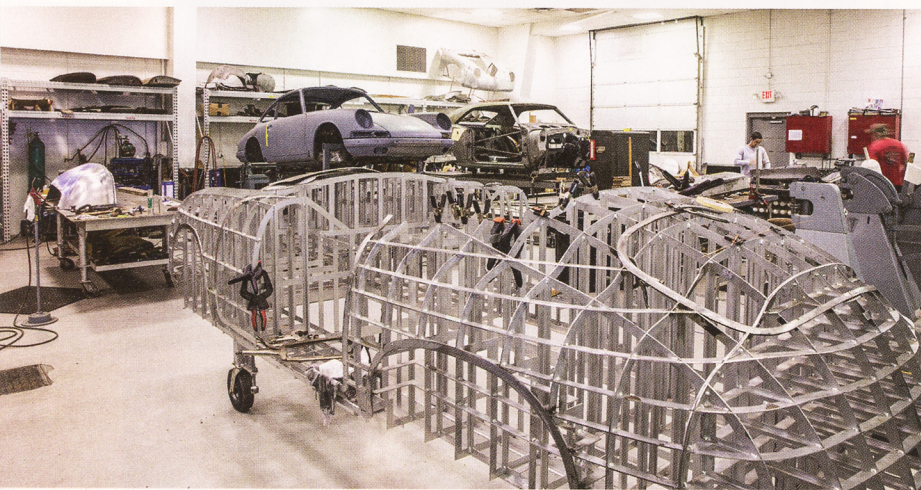
Not long after, Brawley and his tools were moved into one portion of the building. The paint shop was still there from the TRG NASCAR adventure and there was still room for Lingerfelt's boat repair business and his car collection. With the triumvirate of Lingerfelt, Brawley and Steger, Carolina Coach Crafters was born.

Brawley set to work training several young men on his various Yoder power hammers, Eckold and PULLMAX sheering and forming machines, wooden body-bucks and all the various hammers, mallets, and other tools used to create the compound curves found in classic Porsche automobiles. His approach was to train them with the same precision and care for perfect body shaping and bondo-free paint surfaces he prided himself on throughout his career, an approach that Lingerfelt wants to be the hallmark of his shop.

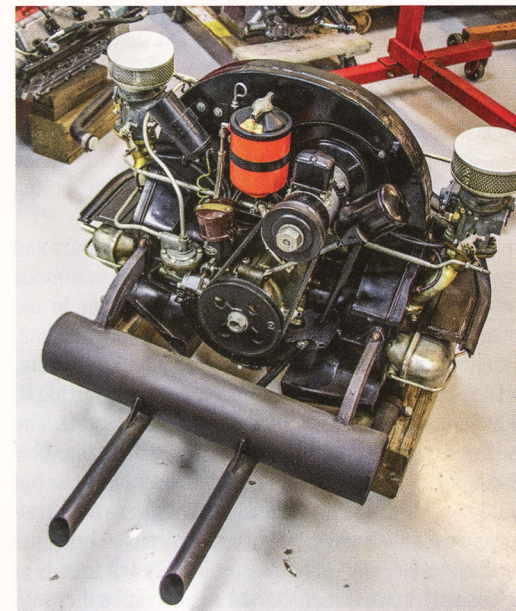
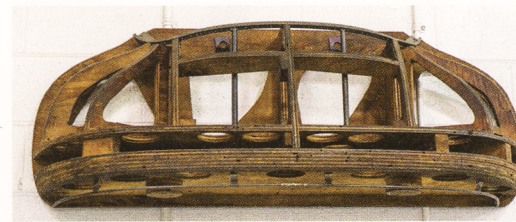
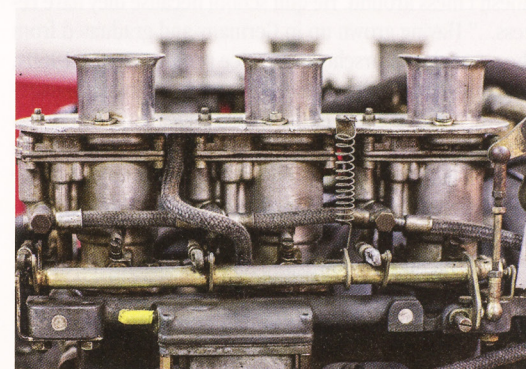
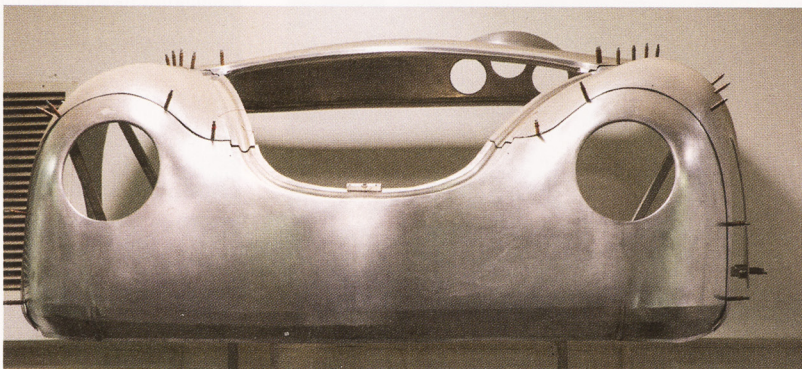
The perfect Speedster

Drawing upon his decades of experience in the metal-shaping business working on several Porsche Parade Manhattan Trophy winners and including almost twenty years working for Rick Hendrick's NASCAR operation, Brawley proposed that they computer scan the best example of a Porsche Speedster they could find and create a perfect, unwarpable buck from which they carry on their shaping. Since retired, Brawley's apprentices have continued on with a project he started, an all aluminum Speedster.

Though wood has been the traditional material for body bucks, with the steel one, says Lingerfelt, "it'll never warp, it won't draw moisture and, properly cared for, it'll last forever." Besides being an innovative and useful tool, it's also been a showcase for their approach to metal-crafting. Tim, Martin and Ralph have shown it at several east-coast shows, including Amelia Island, Pinehurst, and Hilton Head. Some of its admirers saw it for its engineering value, others loved it purely for its aesthetic qualities. Whatever the case, wherever it goes, it's an attention getter.



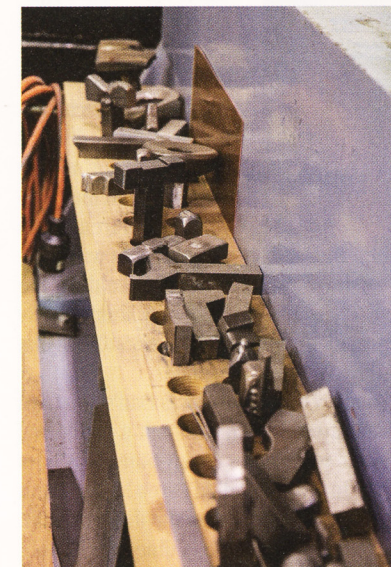
From top: Proper new metal "under the skin" is just as important as the outer layer, even if it means fabricating what is needed. The Speedster buck is not only eminently useful, but a conversation piece all by itself. The product of work on the buck, an all-aluminum Speedster front section. Mechanical work is overseen by Martin Steger, including rebuilding of very early (and often problematic) 911 Solex carburetors.



Non-body work

Meanwhile, Steger has been building the clientele in the engine and transmission side of the business. When the unique Sauter Roadster – the car thought to be the prototype for the America Roadster – changed hands a couple years ago, it was Martin who went through its mechanicals before it went off to its next owner. Since then, other special projects—both whole restorations and partial projects for other restoration shops—have passed through their doors as their reputation spreads and their business builds.

As Lingerfelt sees it, "With the increasing value of some of these vehicles, a company like mine has to do it perfectly. The value of the vehicles means that even for my two year-old son, he'll have a life-long career if he chooses to work on these cars..." 🚗



From top: An older buck for an early 356 is now just a decoration. An aluminum tail section, made on the new steel buck is being worked on by a new generation of workers like Damon Detner. Traditional tools, like the many dies on hand for the metal forming machines, remain important to the process. Below: A raw Speedster and a finished body—officially the only Continental Orange 356C Cabriolet built—await the next steps in their restoration. Left: If Tim's son is inclined to pursue a career working on early Porsches, it won't be a surprise, as there have been many subtle influences in that direction.

