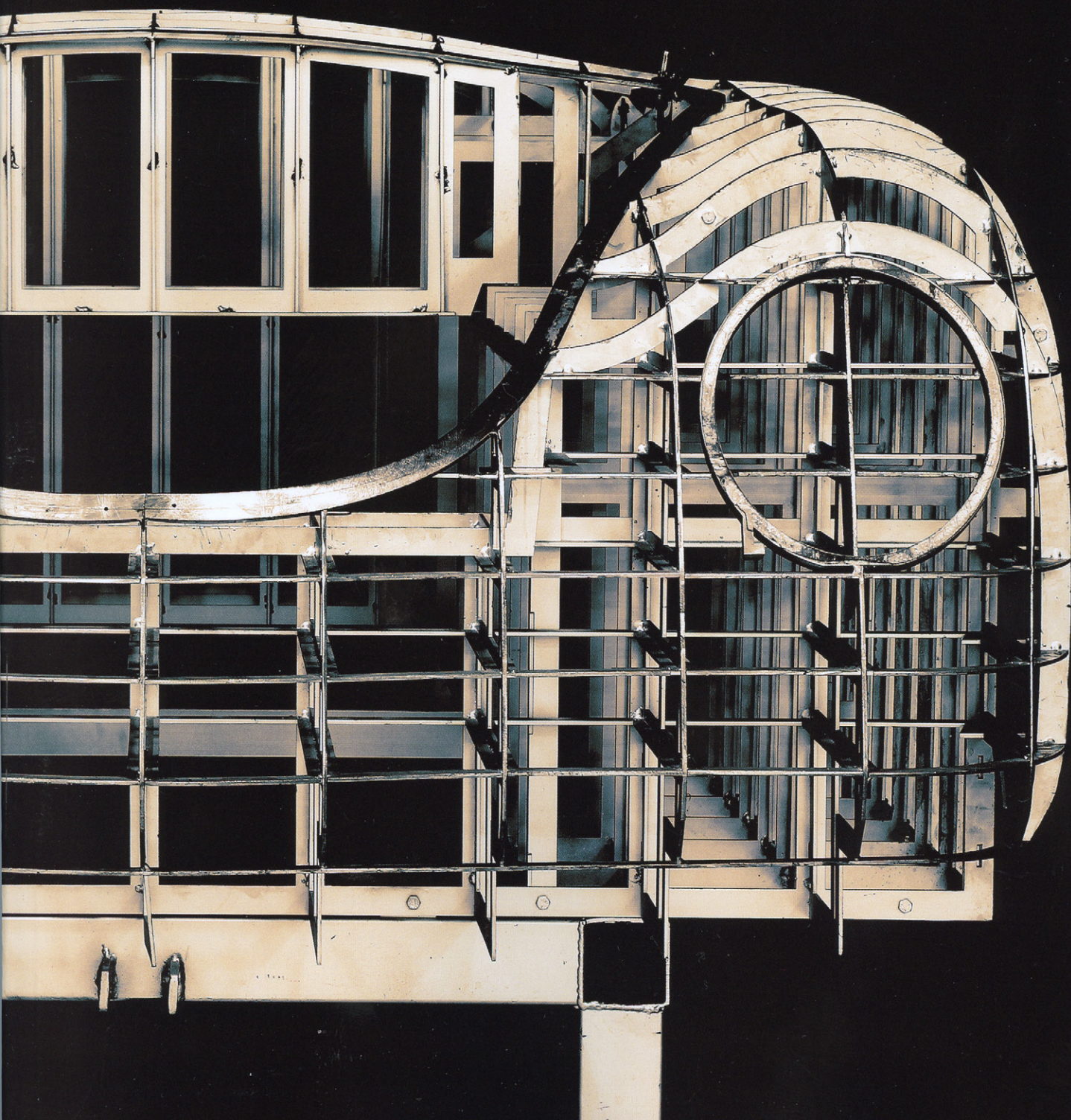


Porsche Panorama

Volume 710

May 2016





THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE PORSCHE CLUB OF AMERICA



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PORSCHE PANORAMA (ISSN 0147-3565) is published monthly by the Porsche Club of America, Inc., 9689 Gerwig Lane, Suite 4C/D, Columbia, MD 21046. Periodicals postage paid at Columbia, MD, and additional offices. PCA membership dues are \$46.00 for one year, \$90.00 for two years or \$132.00 for three years. Dues include \$12.00 per year for an annual subscription to Porsche Panorama. Postmaster: Send address change to Porsche Panorama, PCA Executive Office, PO Box 6400, Columbia, MD 21045. Copyright ©2016 by the Porsche Club of America, Inc., all rights reserved. www.pca.org

Full Circle

JIM MILLER FIRST LAID EYES ON THIS 356 IN 1965 AND, THANKS TO ONE PCA FAMILY, GOT TO DRIVE IT AGAIN 50 YEARS LATER.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **SEAN CRIDLAND**



The Ruby Red 1965 356C

rolls to a stop. Its driver hesitates for a minute or two, listening carefully to sounds deep in the engine before switching it off. Quietly, he rubs his hand across the dashboard. ♦ The door opens with deliberate care, and his lanky six-foot-three frame unfolds. He closes the door and hears its simultaneous “thunk” and “click.” Satisfied that it’s a Porsche sound, he slowly walks around the car, examining every complex curve and running his fingers along the seam gaps. Gradually, he looks up and smiles. ♦ “That’s the first time I’ve driven this car in 47 years...”

This story begins more than 50 years ago in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Jim Miller was about to graduate from Oklahoma State University in 1965 with a degree in architecture. One of the local banks was offering what Miller refers to as “a real swinging deal,” a low-interest car loan with six months before the first payment was due.

Jim was minutes away from signing papers to buy a new Pontiac GTO, but something told him to go by the Porsche dealer one more time, just in case. As he pulled in, he was followed by a months-old 356C. It was a repo with only 6,000 miles.

“Is it for sale?” asked Jim.

“Yes,” replied the salesman. Sorry, Pontiac.

Jim always loved cars. His first ride was a 1957 Volkswagen Beetle he bought with his dad. During the day, his father used the car to commute back and forth from work. Jim drove the VW in the evenings and on weekends,



with one proviso: Don't break it.

Jim hung around the local foreign car shop and Porsche outlet whenever he had the time. They let him work on some stuff, and he could go on test-rides with the mechanics. He got rides in a Jaguar XK150, an Alfa Giulietta Veloce, and even a Devin-Triumph special. But

riding in a Carrera coupe and experiencing its performance, feel, and appearance sealed his passion for Porsches. Like so many who remember their first Porsche ride, it stuck with him.

In the meantime, a VW with a Judson supercharger had come in on trade, and the dealer gave Jim

the supercharger for \$50. He installed it in his 1957 Beetle, and that started him on the road to competitive driving. Every weekend, Jim's high school buddies would chip in a dollar for gas and they'd go off to the drag strips in Liberal, Kansas or Stillwater and Muskogee in Oklahoma to trounce every car in their class, including an MG TC that had been winning for years.

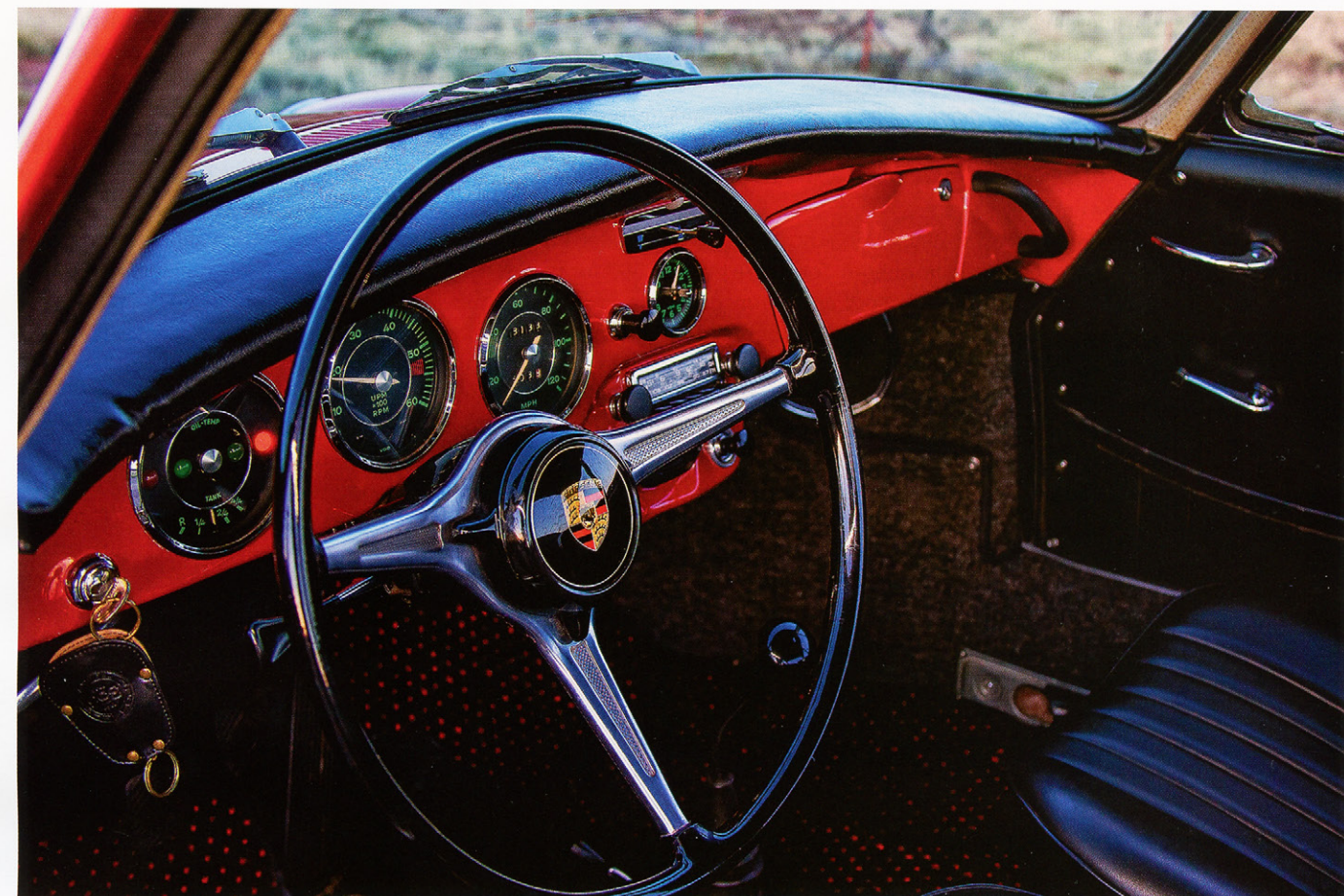
Jim and his friends had a lot of fun with cars, but school always came first. In his final year of college, rather than wafting off to Ensenada or Acapulco for spring break like his classmates were doing, Miller and his fiancé, Kay, drove the Porsche on a job prospect tour to Dallas, Denver, and Albuquerque. Dallas didn't offer much. Denver might work. But he had two very solid job offers in Albuquerque.

Soon after graduation, the young couple moved to New Mexico, where they still live. In those early days, Kay put as many miles on the 356C as Jim did. She would drop him off at work, drive to her own job, and then pick him up at the end of the day. She loved the red Porsche.

THERE WAS NO PCA REGION in New Mexico until 1967. So, early on, Jim and Kay participated in SCCA and Albuquerque Sports Car Club events, mostly helping out with timing and scoring at races in such far-flung locales as Bottomless Lakes, Socorro, and Alamogordo. In the mid-to-late 1960s, it wasn't rare for a Chaparral, an RSK, or even a 910 to mix it up with 356s, 911s, Corvettes, Cobras, and Mustangs. Carroll Shelby and the famous Old Yeller might be there. It was a vibrant era for New Mexico sports car racing.

Eventually, Jim and a few others decided it was time to form a local PCA region. They did the groundwork, and the Roadrunner Region was born in October 1967. Jim was its second president, in 1969.

Along the way, he found a 356 Speedster, though it was without an engine. It didn't take long to find a



Carrera four-cam engine to put in it, though Jim confesses he never did get the car running properly. By then, he and Kay owned three cars: the 356C, the Carrera-ized Speedster, and a Karmann Ghia.

When they decided to start a family, the 356C was sacrificed, but it stayed in Albuquerque. Miller sold the car to an engineer named Ray Reynolds who worked at Sandia Labs. At this point, you might think you know the "rest of the story," but it's not quite that simple.

ALSO WORKING AT SANDIA LABS was an engineer named Jim Phillips. The two Jims—Miller and Phillips—knew each other through rallying. Jim and Kay Miller sometimes helped out by manning checkpoints, and Jim Phillips was a rally regular with his young son, Bruce. One time, when Phillips' regular rally partner was off at a road race, he asked Jim Miller to drive with him in his Dol-

phin Blue 356B. Jim remembers young Bruce—who was about ten years old at the time—coming to sports car meetings and riding with them on the rally.

Like many engineers, Jim Phillips loved cars. At first, he was interested in the Ford Model A. Son Bruce remembers spending many family vacations trolling the barns and junkyards of southeastern Nebraska for Model A parts. Then it was British sports cars. As a tot, Bruce spent lots of time trying to see over the door of Triumph TR2s and TR3s.

Eventually the elder Phillips started TSD rallying with his friend Dave Noakes, who had a 356 Cabriolet. Not long after, Jim Phillips had the Dolphin Blue 356B parked in his driveway. Bruce remembers riding many miles in that car as his dad and Noakes laid out various rally courses around the Southwest.

In 1970, Jim Phillips fell prey to the temptation of a later model, sell-

ing the 356B and buying a white 1967 912. He was never quite as happy with the 912 as he had been with the 356. It just didn't feel the same. Yes, it was newer, a little more powerful, and probably a little better in the handling department. It didn't matter—it wasn't the 356. Still, he kept the 912 in the family, even as he moved on to other automotive hobbies and projects.

Bruce continued his dad's love of cars. Even before he qualified for a learner's permit, he was driving around the neighborhood in the go-kart he got one year for Christmas. And then there was the Cushman minibike. In any case, it wasn't long after Bruce turned legal that he had his own car.

Bruce was always a hard worker, but as a teen he couldn't afford a Porsche. Instead he settled for older Corvettes. Then, one Satur-

Opposite: The 356C's former owner, Jim Miller, cruises the back roads of New Mexico. Current owner Bruce Phillips' respect for the car shows in the time capsule-like interior. As his shirt shows, Phillips was an early Porsche enthusiast.

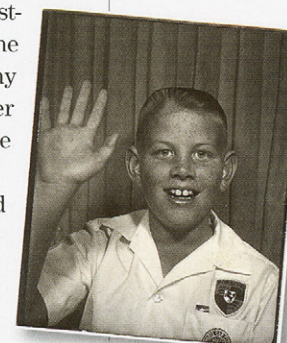


PHOTO COURTESY PHILLIPS FAMILY

day morning, someone pulled out in front of him and his Corvette shattered into hundreds of fiberglass shards. He didn't have collision insurance because it was too expensive, so he had to figure out a way to put his car back together.

What had been a teenage tragedy became a hard-knock school for learning the craft of bodywork and car painting. One result of the lessons learned from that incident was that Bruce became known as a master car painter. He painted many of the road-going sports cars and race cars in the Albuquerque area all through his college days, earning

himself a good living as well as paying for his engineering degree.

Which brings us back to the 1965 356C once owned by Jim Miller. Because its new owner, Ray Reynolds, worked with Bruce's dad, he hired Bruce to paint his Porsche. Both younger and elder Phillips kept an eye on the 356C for two decades as Ray drove the car to and from work every day. Jim occasionally asked Ray if he wanted to sell the car, and eventually, in 1992, he did.

Jim Phillips was thrilled to once more own a 356. Though he had kept the 912, he didn't drive it much. By the time he got the 356C, he was

older and ended up not driving it all that much either, but he was still happy to have it.

IN THE INTERVENING YEARS, Jim and Kay Miller raised a couple of kids, though they never gave up their passion for motor racing. The 356C had been replaced by a Mercedes 220, which did double duty as family car and tow vehicle for a Formula Vee race car.

Jim remembers a summer in the early 1970s, after he had sold the Formula Vee: "We were having a horrible summer, so Kay told me I'd better start racing again." That led to

Jim building a Datsun 510 similar to the Brock Racing Enterprises entries that were so competitive in the SCCA's Trans-Am series. From there, he shifted to the Datsun 710, which he raced for many years.

Jim eventually graduated from the 710 to a 280Z, with which he had great success, taking many SCCA regional championships and placing well at the national run-offs. He often dined with fellow Datsun racer Paul Newman and even had a minor role in a film Nissan made about Newman's racing. That landed him a ride with Charles Morgan in IMSA, at first in the GT categories and later

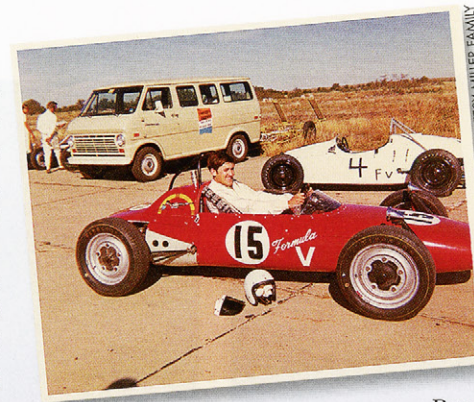


PHOTO COURTESY MILLER FAMILY

AFTER COLLEGE, Bruce used his engineering degree to get a job at Sandia Laboratories, but he continued to paint cars, maintaining a small shop. He eventually started a full-time business called Professional Paint Supply.

Though he still painted cars on a selective basis, Bruce focused on helping body shops in New Mexico transition from a mom-and-pop business model to a more technologically advanced and professional enterprise. To accommodate the changes, many of the businesses needed to remodel or

What goes around comes around. Bruce Phillips leads in the 912 his dad bought in 1970, while Jim Miller follows in the car he bought in 1965. Jim started his racing career in Formula Vee, eventually graduating to IMSA Camel Lights.





The early morning New Mexico sun reflects off the 356C. Below: Jim Phillips enjoyed motorized toys of all kinds, like this minibike he bought for his son.



even rebuild. And that's where Jim Miller comes back into the story, as he often did the architectural work.

In this way, the two men maintained a friendship that had been built on a love for Porsches. Though Bruce has never been an officer in the Roadrunner Region, he's been one of its biggest supporters and sponsors, most notably as a long-time host of the annual Chili Cook-off. In addition, he's had a strong history of PCA Club Racing, taking part in many events around the western U.S.

One of his cars was a purpose-built, single-seat, 993-looking car with a 962 engine, painted in pearlescent purple. When he ran it in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was easily the most recognizable car at any event—and usually the fastest, too. Even so, it eventually became obsolete as its on-track superiority was overwhelmed by the rigidity and

handling of the 911 GT3 Cups. The pearlescent monster was eventually sold to a buyer in South Africa to make room for a GT3 Cup that Bruce drove at Daytona under the Farnbacher banner in 2005.

BRUCE'S DAD HELD ONTO the 356C from 1992 until he passed away in 2007, leaving it and the 912 to Bruce. Because both cars ran well, Bruce saw no reason to do a major rebuild of either engine.

The 912 shows around 47,000 miles on its odometer, and Bruce knows that to be an accurate figure. He attributes the low mileage to the fact that his dad just never warmed up to the car.

As far as fit and finish, there was never any damage to the 912. In 1975, Bruce painted it silver as a present to his dad, but in 1985, he stripped it down to bare metal and returned it to its original white. Other than new carpet and refinished seats, the car is original. In fact, before we took the 912 out to take photos for this story, Phillips replaced the fuel and brake lines to make sure everything was in order.

The mileage on the 356 is more ambiguous. The odometer shows 40,000 miles, though Bruce and Jim know that it's more likely that the car has 140,000—or even 240,000—miles on it. Jim and Kay Miller used it as their daily driver for most of the time they owned it, and its next owner, Ray Reynolds, also drove it daily. When Bruce inherited the

356C from his dad, he dismantled it, took it down to bare metal, fixed a couple of rust spots, and repainted it in its original Ruby Red. He recarpeted the floors and refreshed the seats, and that's about it.

Oddly enough, until recently, neither car held a prominent place in Bruce's collection, other than a connection to Bruce's dad and to family friend Jim Miller. For many years, both were just old cars.

The 356C came at the tail end of production for the 356 line, and it was built in Zuffenhausen alongside early 911s until Porsche ran out of 356 bodies. As the 911 came into vogue, late-issue 356s were seen mostly as placeholders. Similarly, 912s have held "second-tier" status in many Porsche enthusiasts' hearts. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and even 2000s, few thought about them much.

Recent collector markets for both models have everyone rethinking the significance of the 356C and the 912. The fact that these two cars have such intertwined lives, have been so well maintained, and have solid recorded histories has Bruce reconsidering their place in his garage.

LIKE HIS FATHER, Bruce prefers the 356. Power-wise, the two cars are pretty close, though the 912 has a few more horsepower and handles a little more crisply. But the 356 is "like a rock." At 50 years old, it doesn't have a rattle in it. He also admits that he has a sentimental at-

tachment to the 356 because of all the time he spent rallying in one with his dad when he was a kid.

We already know what Jim Miller thinks of the two cars. He'll utter polite niceties about the 912, but his heart is with the car he bought while still in college.

In the last few years, Jim has been showing up at more Roadrunner Region events. His enthusiasm has never waned. As we finished up these photos—which required many miles of driving around the back roads of New Mexico—he wasn't ready for the day to be finished, wondering if there wasn't just one more location that needed to be photographed.

Bruce just smiles, glad to see Jim enjoying the car again. The memories have come full circle—for both of them. ☉



These two Porsche classics are at home on the twistiest of canyon roads. Two lifelong friends, Bruce Phillips and Jim Miller, are all smiles after a great day of driving Porsches.