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# PANORAMA

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE PORSCHE CLUB OF AMERICA

PORSCHE

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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE PORSCHE CLUB OF AMERICA



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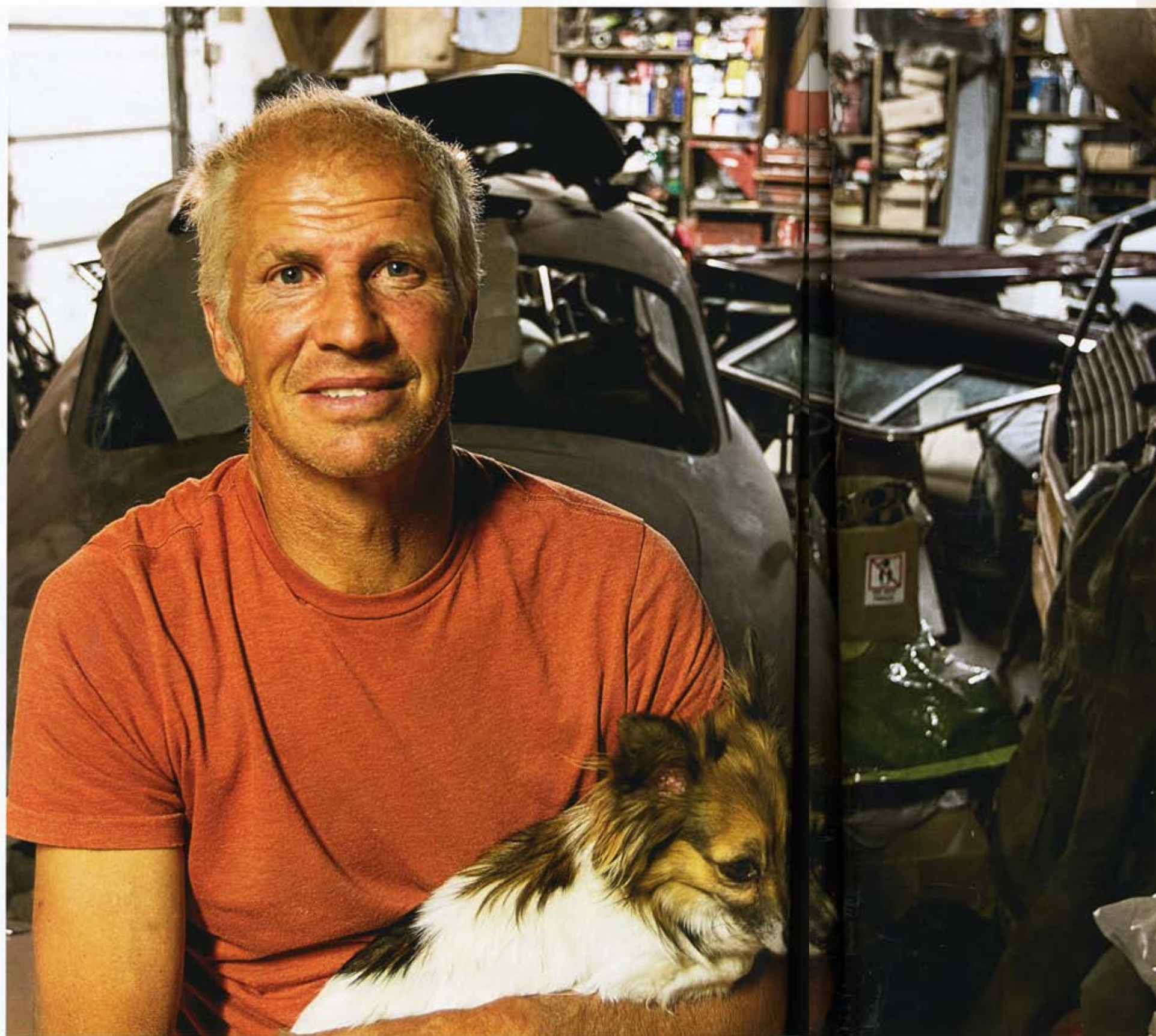
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# Salt

## OF THE EARTH

MEET GARY SMITH, A PCA MEMBER WHO SEES EACH PORSCHE AS A STEPPING STONE ALONG HIS UNPREDICTABLE JOURNEY THROUGH THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **SEAN CRIDLAND**





## His love for rehabilitating old cars is true to the PCA tradition of *Upfixin' der Porsche*.

**GARY DOESN'T HOBNOB** with Jerry, Jay, or Jeff. He doesn't own a climate-controlled warehouse. Non-matching numbers aren't a deal-breaker. His last build didn't set a record at Barrett-Jackson or drive across the stage at Pebble Beach.

Gary Smith buys, works on, drives, and sells Porsches that many of today's car aficionados wouldn't even glance at. He loves to rescue whole cars and parts from scrap heaps and make them run. Look at some of his cars, though, and you'd never know they were reconstructed from bits and pieces recovered in salvage yards or found rotting in the forests and deserts of rural New Mexico. Gary is happy to tell you he's already made close to \$4,000 on his current driver, a 1968 911, despite the fact that it still looks and runs great.

There are a lot of cars on his property near Taos, and dozens more have passed through his little garage next to Embudo Creek. His love for

rehabilitating old cars is true to the PCA tradition of *Upfixin' der Porsche*, and prompted him to leave his native upstate New York for the volcanic mountains and canyons of New Mexico. He's turned a small profit on many of the cars he's bought and sold over the last three decades, allowing him to enjoy a lifestyle instigated by his father, whose thrift and craftiness put Gary on a mechanical path to the Land of Enchantment.

"I credit my dad for buying me the crappiest little VW Bug he could find," he explains. "I was always having to work on it to keep it running, so I learned all about those air-cooled engines before getting my first Porsche in 1973, a rusted-out 1965 356C I got from a local dealer for \$400."

Gary drove that '65 356 for years, learning one lesson after the next. Eventually, the car rusted into the ground, but not before he stripped and parted it out, bringing him a total of \$5,000. Gary didn't sell every-

thing, though: He still has the interior and a few bits! His second Porsche, a 1961 356 "Notchback," was purchased in 1975 for \$700. It's still sitting in his shop.

**AS A KID, GARY LEARNED** he could make money and see the country by buying VW Beetle convertibles in the Northeast and driving them across the country to sell in Los Angeles—usually with one towing another to make the trip profitable.

In 1980, he bought a 1973 914 2.0, a car he describes as the newest car he has ever purchased. It became—and still is—his wife Deborah's daily driver. Thirty-three years later, it has accrued more than 600,000 miles on the way to and from her job at Los Alamos National Laboratory, located 60 twisty miles away.

Gary met Deborah on one of his cross-country car-sale jaunts, fell in love, and moved west. He was one more eastern boy who, as John Denver put it, came home to a place he'd never been. Once ensconced in the small mountain community, he continued his ways as a fixer-upper of both cars and houses.

Gary, Deborah, daughter Audrey,

six dogs, four cats, and a pond full of goldfish live in a beautiful adobe home they built themselves. They furnished it from local thrift shops, antique stores, and salvage yards much the way Gary creates the cars he does. Their way of living provides an eclectic ambience with an air of elegance and rustic charm.

Gary's second 914 led him on an adventure that ended up paying the house off. In the early 1980s, he sold a convertible VW to a customer who had a neighbor with a 356 Speedster. Conversations ensued, and the neighbor wanted a 914. Gary traded his 914 for the Speedster, which was driveable but not much more.

Gary fixed the Speedster up, held onto it for a couple of years, advertised it, and then sold it off to Europe in 1984 or 1985. While he didn't make the kind of profit he might in today's market conditions, he did very well. What's more, he eventually got his 914 back—as a trade-in for another 914.

**PAYING OFF THE HOUSE MEANT** the Smiths could build a small cottage near a stream, which they rent out as a bed and breakfast. It's a charming spot, one surrounded by quaint

gardens and a stream that acts as Mother Nature's lullaby.

They say life goes in circles, and the little adobe cottage has, in a way, led to Gary's current daily driver. It began when a couple came to look at an Irish Green 1969 912 Gary was selling. They didn't buy the car, but they took notice of the cottage. Sev-

eral months later, they called about trading time in the cottage for their 1968 911, which hadn't run for years. They were looking to spend more time out of the city, and the 911 was one of those project cars with no end in sight. The couple agreed on a weekend in the cottage every month for a year in exchange for the 911.

**Above:** Smith makes use of every square inch for his never-ending list of projects. **Below:** Smith's green 911 is often seen at local eateries.







Gary saw parts on the 1968 coupe he could sell while turning the car into a nice driver for himself. He immediately reached into his parts bin for a set of 14x5.5-inch Fuchs alloy wheels to replace the 15x5.5s on the car. The Fuchs 15x5.5 is highly desirable to owners of late-model 356s, as it is one of the largest wheels they can fit. Gary knew he could have waited and made more—as much as \$3,000 for the set—but was happy to make a quick \$1,500.

Always on the lookout for an interesting deal, Gary answered an ad posted by Brian Minson, the original owner/publisher of *9 Magazine*, for a 1968 aluminum engine core out in western New Mexico, near the Navajo reservation. Asking price: \$200. Planning carefully, Gary arranged to pick it up on a return trip from Phoenix,

where he was participating in a DE event in one of his 914s.

The 914 he was driving is known to Southwestern PCA members for its matching “half-914” trailer for track tires and tools. Thanks to the 914’s legendary trunk space, he loaded the 911 engine—still with cylinders and cylinder heads on it—in the front trunk! Gary reckons that adventure made him the owner of the world’s only six-wheel, ten-cylinder 914.

**MANY OF US HAVE** begun mechanical projects that would have lived better lives as boat anchors, but the engine powering Gary’s 1968 911 today had a sad midlife and a better ending.

It ended up serving as the better half of a doorstep to a double-wide house, half-filled with Sonoran desert sand. It was, however, an aluminum

1968 crankcase—and Gary knew it was the right engine for his car because 1968 911s were the first that were forced to conform to air pollution regulations. As a result, they got special Solex camshafts that extended out of the cam covers to drive the emissions air pump.

Fortunately, New Mexico’s dry air had been kind to the unusual engine. The crankcase, cylinders, cylinder heads, pistons, and connecting rods were all salvageable. They now live in Gary’s green 911, and are mated to a crankshaft with a story of its own. It came from a slowly decomposing 1967 911 “soft-window” Targa found in the pine forests of the Sandia Mountains east of Albuquerque.

The Targa gave up several money-making pieces. Its rare and early 911S-correct set of 15x4.5-inch Fuchs

alloys fetched \$1,500 almost immediately, which covered the Targa’s purchase price. The forlorn 911 also yielded a 2.0-liter, magnesium-case 1969 911 engine and an aluminum 901 four-speed transmission. Gary dismantled the engine to retrieve its 66-mm, non-counter-balanced crank, setting it aside for his daily driver.

Eventually, he sold the 1967 Targa’s bones to Jack Heavy of Colorado Springs for another \$1,500. The latter would eventually build it into the race car driven by Dan Rose at 2013’s Pikes Peak International Hill Climb. Gary says he has sold several short-wheelbase 911 and 912 tubs to Heavy, who keeps them all.

**WHILE GARY HAS BUILT** track and autocross cars himself, he’s built his 1968 911 up as a comfortable touring car for the American southwest. It’s an early 911 suitable for local jaunts to the market or longer trips to Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Colorado Springs, or even Denver.

He drove the car with its original transmission for a time, but found his engine speeds were too high for long cruises. To tone things down a bit, Gary reached into his parts bin as well as his imagination. He used the aluminum-case 901 with a set of taller 914 ratios. The 901 transaxle used in the 914 was highly similar to the 901 used in 911s, so it was an easy conversion. Gary installed a 914 intermediate plate and says that everything fit into place nicely.

His never-ending shelves of salvaged parts supplied oil-pressure-fed Carrera cam-chain tensioners to add reliability and 911T camshafts to improve low-end torque. So equipped, Gary was confident the engine could push the taller 914 gears. And, in doing so, he reduced his engine speeds at 75 mph by some 1200-1500 rpm.

Gary likes the way the combination performs, reducing stress on the engine and on his wallet at the fuel pump. He figures the car makes about 140-150 horsepower, but it has good low-end torque. The first three gears are spaced closely enough to yield



Left: The Targa salvage that Smith rescued from a forest found its way to the top of Pikes Peak as a racer.

Center: Smith’s custom six-wheel 914 hauler is a favorite with locals. Bottom: Gary’s models and PCA trophies occupy a special place in his garage.







**Above:** Living in rural New Mexico means frequently traveling on dirt or going the long way around; Smith doesn't mind. **Center:** Though not perfect, the interior of the '68 is original, yet still remarkably fresh and free of today's techno-clutter. **Bottom:** Just one of the many usable parts awaiting a special project.

decent acceleration, while fourth and fifth are nice touring gears. As for the non-counter-balanced crankshaft? Gary says that it's fine with the 911T cams, and selling off the more mar-



ket-desirable parts helped him reap another \$1,500.

The rest of Gary's green 911 is as practical as the man who drives it. It has front and rear anti-roll bars with original-equipment shocks and torsion bars. In other words, this 911's chassis makes do with what Porsche intended. The brakes are stock, and they're adequate if not exceptional.

The heat and the fresh-air systems work well enough, and you can use the rear vent windows to moderate the temperature, provided it's not too hot or cold. Luckily, northern

New Mexico weather is quite temperate and makes the car usable for a good portion of the year.

Gary figures the body has probably had two or three resprays, but the Irish Green paint still looks nice enough to prompt passersby to make positive comments all the time. Gary figures that the odometer reading indicates 125,000 miles, and says the car's interior is mostly original, save the stereo and speakers. The seats, belts, and gauges are all original, and it's remarkable how cleanly elegant the interior looks and feels compared to the techno-clutter of today's mobile media centers. This truly is a car for driving—and it is driven.

Gary can often be seen cruising down dirt and gravel back roads in the shadow of the Sangre de Cristo mountains. Sometimes, he's just visiting friends. Other times, he's scouting for "another man's trash"—the treasure that fuels his imagination, gainfully occupies his time, and earns enough money to keep his adventure rolling. Always thinking, Gary notes that the couple he bought his green 911 from have since purchased another 1968 911 project. What was that about life being circular? ☯

