

**356 Registry Magazine**  
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# Porsche 356 Registry



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## Porsche 356 Registry



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Cover: Gregg Blue on the road during The Great Race.

This page: "Out for an evening drive with my family in our 1960 coupe, in the hills above Edwards, Colorado." Doug Altrick





# Steve Klein's Soul



By Sean Cridland

Steve Klein and his son Samuel at the "Snake", a series of cool turns on Mulholland Highway above Agoura. The 550 wears the number 12 from Eldon Beagle's days of racing in SCCA F Modified class. The red and green stripes are, Steve says with a smile, "Port and starboard, of course. That way people can tell if it's coming or going!"

Everyone has their heart, their love, and their soul. For Steve Klein, his Porsche 1956 550 Spyder is family. And, has been...for close to fifty years.

As a Klein kid, growing up in the Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles, Klein says his dad was always a car and motorcycle enthusiast. Dad started his sports-car habit with an MG before moving on to a pre-owned 1955 normal Speedster in 1957. Dad would attend all the California races and knew several of the racers of the day, including Jack McAfee and D.D. Micheltore, both of whom often raced Speedsters and Spydors during their careers. As the Spyder became his dad's favorite race car, it became Steve's, too.

Though Dad never raced, there was a route around the reservoir near their home in Silverlake that became a family favorite for "spirited" driving. It was around that same reservoir that Klein had some of his first driving lessons in the family's VW Squareback and their 1968 BMW 1600.

Live every teen, Klein yearned for the day he would buy his first car. Because Dad's fantasy car was a Porsche 550 Spyder, that was Steve's too. How could it not? Nearing the age of eighteen, Klein started looking through the ads in *Road & Track*, eventually finding Spyder #25 in Florida. Serious negotiations ensued and he and Dad made plans to go by Greyhound to get the car and do an epic drive cross-country back to Los Angeles. Then, a family friend suggested they check with their insurance agent before committing. Somehow, an 18-year-old buying a lightweight, high-performance vintage sports car in Florida, sight unseen, then driving it all the way back across the country



The Klein family in their 1955 Speedster in 1959.

didn't sound especially appealing to their local Allstate agency. So much for that idea.

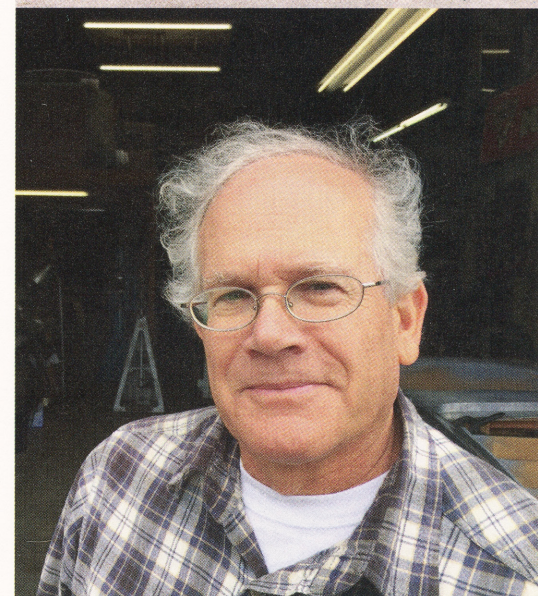
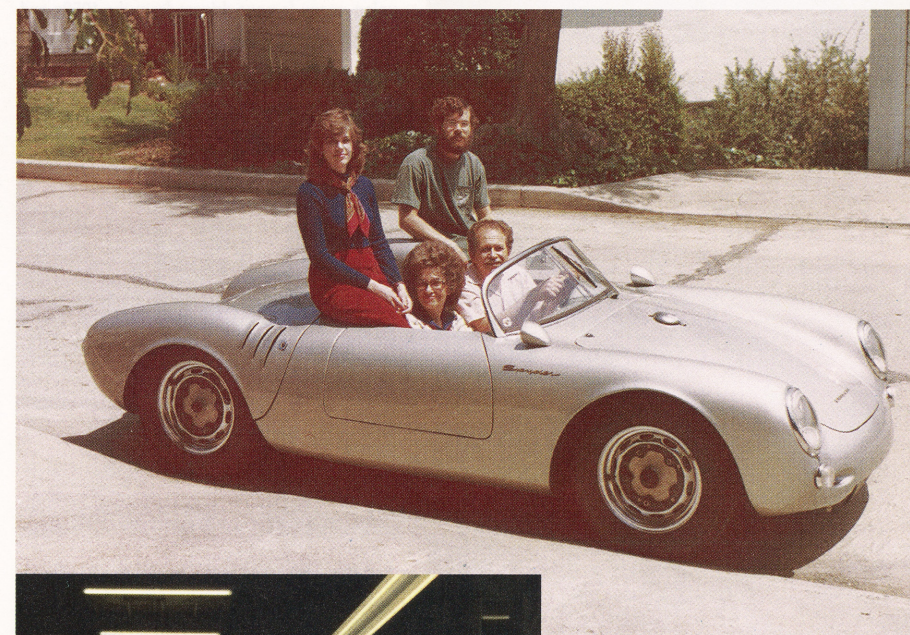
Not to be deterred, Klein kept looking. In 1974, he found Spyder #88 advertised in the LA Times for \$5000. Though it had a roller-crank Super motor in place of its original Carrera four-cam, at the age of 21, there was nothing the insurance agent could say. Still there was a little bump. When they met to purchase the car, the owner wanted an extra \$500. After bargaining down to \$400, Klein handed over the cash and drove home in his and Dad's dream-car. It has remained his dream-car for the last 43 years.

"The Spyder had a POC decal on the windshield when I bought it," Steve recalls. "Dad was also a POC member with his Speedster. He was also a nuclear physicist and WWII submarine radar officer. His favorite movie was 'On the Beach' with Gregory Peck as a sub skipper and Fred Astaire as a nuclear physicist who races sports cars. Dad was all of those."

Though he still used his parents' BMW or VW as daily drivers, on the weekend, Klein remembers he and his buddies had a lot of fun with the car. One story involves Klein and three of his friends, all of whom were large in stature, packed in like sardines and driving around Whittier, drawing lots of stares.

"Nobody could quite figure out how we could fit," Klein remembers, "and everyone wanted to see how we could get in and out. Believe it or not, we figured it out and managed it quite gracefully." It made a trip up to San Francisco for a fraternity gathering. "Going up was fine," says Klein, "But we came back down on Highway 1 and froze our butts off!" Another time they got caught in a horrendous rain-storm, so used the car's removable bucket seats as rain hats. Other times, the "rain hats" were used as beach chairs. There were several Christmases when young Klein would take off early Christmas morning for long solo drives to the Mojave airport and back.

"With the push-rod engine, it didn't have neck-snap-



Photos courtesy of The Andrew Hosking Archive, The Beagle Family Archive, Klein Family Archive, Ruth Levy Archive, Thomas Falkenberg, Sean Cridland.

The 550 came to Steve with the set of chrome 1962 KPZ 15" wheels with Continental Record tires. The original wheels were 16s and long gone. The blue California license plate "5 FIFTY" was ordered by Klein shortly after he bought the car.

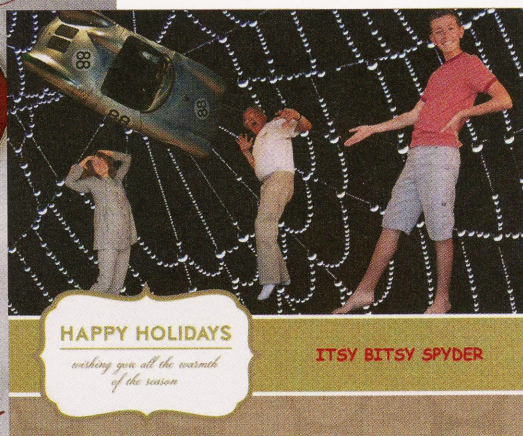
Left: Steve today, still enthusiastic about a car he's owned for almost five decades.





John Goriup photo

550-0088 took part in the 2011 Race Car Classic in Carmel Valley, California, where it was among possibly the largest group of Spyders ever assembled. There and at Rennsport Reunion, many famous drivers from the 1950s and '60s signed the hood and the cowl behind the seats.



Just like a member of the family, the Spyder appears in Holiday greeting cards. Below: Roy Lock's hurried shot on Highway 101 as Steve was returning from Monterey and Rennsport Reunion, 2011.



Roy Lock photo

ping acceleration, as light as it was. With such a low center of gravity, it was really fun, easy to drive, nicely balanced. And, with the swing axles, you really had to keep your foot in it through the corners to keep it squatted down. That's what was so fun; you had to really *drive* it. I regularly drove it up to Laguna Seca to watch the races. We'd go up 101 at night. Driving that thing on 101 with the stars over your head...it was like a dream."

### And life goes on

In the meantime, Klein kept himself busy applying his math and engineering degrees working on various projects such as the J2X rocket engine, the Mars Science Lab flight program, the Space Shuttle Main Engine program and as a structural analyst for the International Space Station. In his down-time from being a rocket scientist, he's worked on modernizing Iowa-Class battleships, and providing R&D technical support at the Odense Steel Shipyard in Denmark. If you ask Klein what he does for work, there's a strong chance you won't understand much of what he tells you.

Though he's spent most of his life in Los Angeles basin, he met his Danish wife, Ruth, while living on a kibbutz in Israel. As if it would be possible to have a paragraph without the Spyder, Klein did propose to Ruth in the car. "I asked her into the garage," he says, "And she wanted to know why. When I asked her to sit in the car, she still wanted to know why. 'So I can propose to you. Now, shut up and get in the car!'" Quite the romantic, that Steve Klein!

They also moved to Ruth's homeland for several years, taking all Klein's cars and motorcycles with them. They needed her entire family to help drive them all to their new domicile.

Over the years, Steven and Ruth have had a lot of fun with the car, including more "spirited" drives up the coast to Monterey Car Week or Rennsport Reunion. And many drives closer to home. "When my son was about a year old he had his first driving lesson in the Spyder," Steve says. "I wanted to take him for a ride but the kiddie seat interfered with the gearshift (the cockpit is only 1.5 people wide). So I did the unthinkable (to say nothing of the illegal) and drove up to Mulholland with him on my lap. We putted along Mulholland at 20 mph and I let him put his hands on the wheel. Afterwards, on the way home, we hit a red light next to a fire truck. He waved, grinned and giggled at the firemen and they waved back. I think he got a bigger charge out of the fire truck than the Spyder." And the firemen apparently didn't radio to the police!

The car has starred in several family Christmas cards and sparks tons of waves and questions every time he drives it. A high-point was displaying the car at the Quail Lodge for the Race Car Classic, held concurrently with Rennsport Reunion IV in 2011. There, its front lid was signed by many of the great Porsche racing drivers who attended, including Jochen Maas, Hans Hermann, Denise McCluggage and Ruth Levy.

Steven was surely unique among the many Spyder owners displaying at the Quail that year who drove his rare racer 300 miles to the event - and back. "We were the only race car in that show (I think) that met the theme poster of the show: a 550 driving up Hwy 1 with the Bixby Bridge in the background." He also recalls of that drive, "We blew past a line of Porsches on the way up who were stuck be-

hind a garbage truck and were too chicken to pass."

The late Roy Lock sent an email to his friends after seeing Steve on Highway 101 heading home to L.A.

"After a long weekend where Frank and I ran from one event to the next, we could barely hold our heads up on the long drive home," Roy wrote. "We came across many Porsches on the drive south, then just north of San Luis Obispo, we saw what looked like a plastic Spyder in the right lane. As we got closer, we realized it was the real thing. My camera was in the trunk! I grabbed my cell phone and took this picture. That precious moment refreshed us and gave us another memory to reflect on."

Such is the effect this car has on appreciative enthusiasts: an unrestored, mostly original car with a long time owner - who actually drives it!

### Research and archeology

Over the years he had gotten to know the 550 pretty well physically. "I had torn the whole car down to the bare frame and body back in '80 and rebuilt it," he explains. "Busch built me a 912 engine. I had the gearbox rebuilt but it failed just after Ruth Levy's memorial (we drove it up to Solvang for that), with only 15K miles after 30 years. That's why the whole car is apart now."

"I had stripped the front half of the car when I took it to Laguna Seca in 2009," he continues, "and finished stripping the outside for Rennsport IV and the Quail Race Car Classic show. I discovered that it got a few good smacks and some re-straightening, but it's still all the original sheet metal."

"I've been through the whole car twice now. We uncovered some boogered bodywork along the back edge and left rear fender, but only straightened it. I didn't want to replace any metal. Fortunately some of my buddies are sheet metal wizards. One of them is Greg Bates, who helps work on Seinfeld's cars for Joe Caviglieri."

It wasn't until about a year after Rennsport IV that Klein really took interest in the car's history, however. In the fall of 2012, Klein was reading an article in *356 Registry* magazine on "Spyders versus Oscars" by Phil Carney and saw a familiar looking car, being raced by Eldon Beagle. Just like his car, it had the gill-slits in the rear fender and the odd-shaped aerodynamic head-rest, though it was painted white and running number 12. Besides the similar body features, Klein had always wondered why various portions of his car's underbody were painted white.

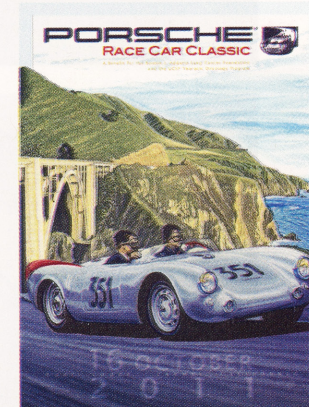
Once his interest was piqued, Klein started digging. He contacted the article's author, Phil Carney. From there, he got in touch with Andrew Hosking, who runs the website [www.type550.com](http://www.type550.com), which functions as a sort of community center for 550 history. Hosking knew the Beagle family and put Klein touch with them.

Their personal connection to Ruth Levy also played a role. "My wife Ruth met Ruth Levy at the Quail and said 'you have to meet her!' so I did," Steve recalls. "We got along famously and eventually visited her home and studio. When we did, we saw a photo there of Ruth at Nassau, with my car in the background, as Eldon Beagle raced it! She made us a copy and we stayed in touch with her all the way to her passing. She was an amazing woman."

It turns out that Spyder 0088 was Beagle's second Spyder, having previously bought, raced, and sold Spyder 0053. Both cars had been purchased from John von Neu-



Left: Ruth Levy at the Race Car Classic, signing the rear firewall. Below: The photo she gave to the Kleins, from a race at Nassau in December, 1957. She was to drive Stan Sugarman's 550 but its engine was blown in practice. Her dog had chewed her shoelaces, so in this photo she was taping her shoe. In the background, Eldon Beagle's #112 which had mid-pack finishes in each of the five races during that week.

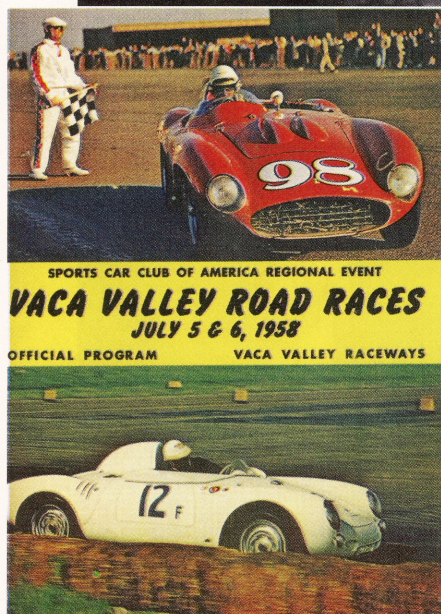
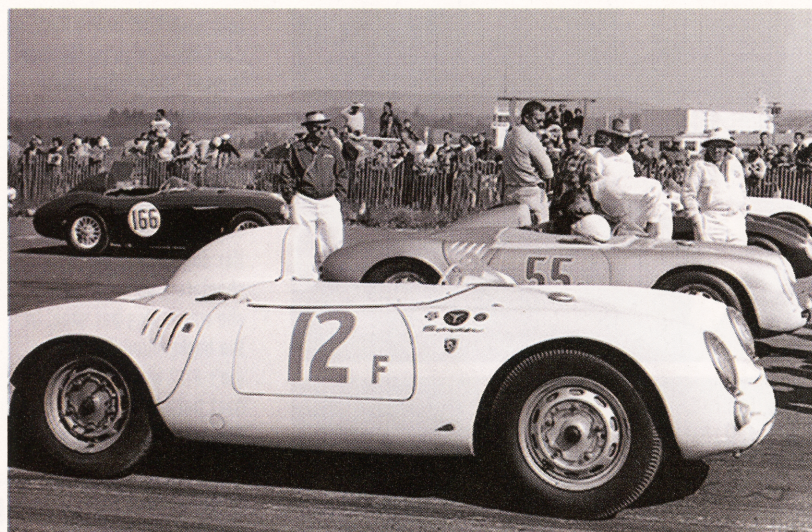


The Porsche Race Car Classic's whimsical poster showing a 550 on Highway 1. Klein's Spyder is the only one that actually drove that route.



The car was loaned to the Beagle family for the wedding of Eldon's granddaughter. She had hoped for a VW bus for the wedding party and asked if Steve could help find one. He couldn't, but he offered 0088 instead and they were flabbergasted.





**Above:** Eldon Beagle at some of the typical airfield races in northern California. **Left:** Beagle's 550 was used on the cover of the Vacaville 1958 program even though it was now driven by Erv Lehr. Vacaville was a flat track built as an oval in 1958 but with a road course option partly outside the oval. **Below:** Leon Robertson, probably at Pomona just after buying the Spyder. He also raced at Vaca Valley, Stockton and Palm Springs.



mann, the Porsche West Coast distributor. Then, Klein started chasing down anomalies in Spyder history. Many accounts had Beagle racing chassis 0033. When Klein started researching that car, he found that 0033 had spent its active racing years in Europe, not California. So why was Beagle associated with 0033? As best as he can figure, someone who was writing about it was using a typewriter with a bad 8 key, making 88 look like 33. As time went by, the wrong number became a matter of record. Once Klein got verification from the Beagle family that – in fact – Eldon Beagle's car was 550-0088, not 33, he was sure: his was the car in the picture. Though he had painted the number 88 on his car as a tribute to its chassis number and to his dad's friend Jack McAfee, he repainted the numbers to the more Beagle-period-correct number 12. The circle closed a few years later when Klein lent the car to the Beagle family to use in a wedding. "A real nice bunch, the Beagles," says Steve. "I met Eldon's wife Virginia, and had them all autograph the firewall behind the driver's seat."

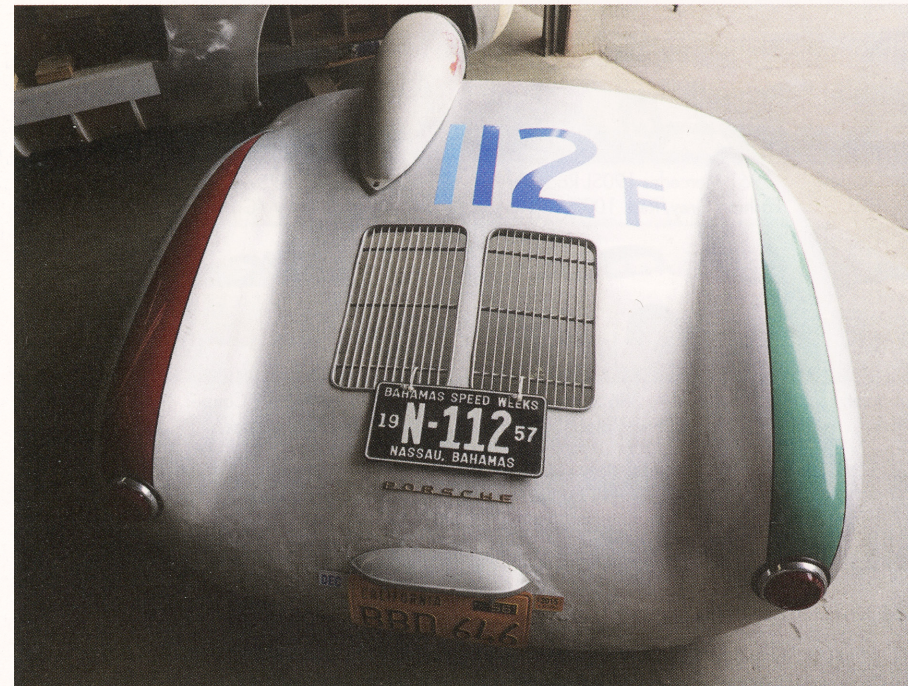
More digging revealed almost all of the car's California history. Eldon Beagle raced Spydres beginning in October of 1955, graduating from a Hillman Special. In 1956 he raced at least 17 times, with 8 of those being podium finishes, although there were no wins. Carrying the number 12, two of his races that year were in Salt Lake City, with the most being in northern California, plus three in Nassau in December. In 1957 he campaigned the car in nine California races and again at the Nassau Speed Weeks. The Nassau racers were ferried from the mainland to the island, but the Beagles drove the car across country from California to Florida on top of a pickup truck bed.

The Spyder was then sold to Erv Lehr, who raced the car from March to November 1958 with the numbers 212, 2 and 21. Lehr sold it to Leon Robertson, who raced during the 1959 season and in March of 1960 in California. His numbers were 227 for two races, then 127. From that point, there's a gap of about five years during which Klein can't trace the car, though he knows it was licensed in Sacramento. It's likely its racing career was over by then.

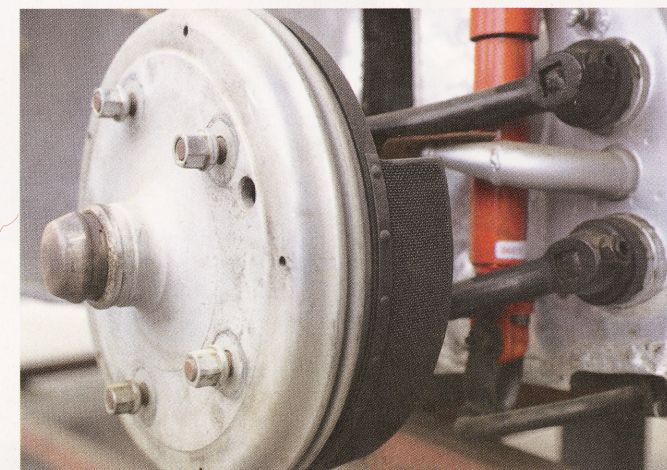
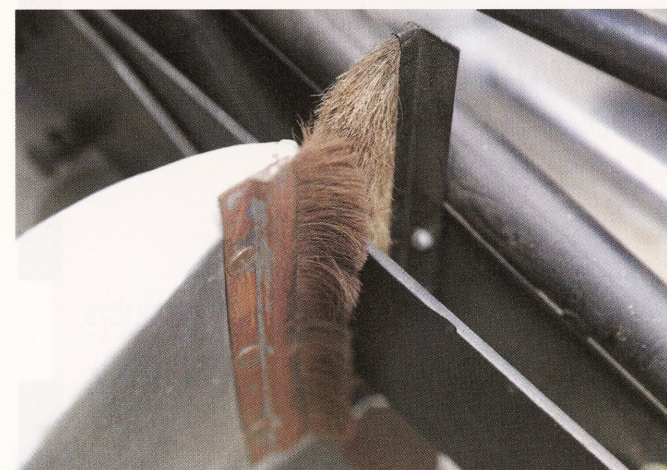
From there, Loren Patrick owned it, followed by Robert Oliver before selling to the O'Hares. From then on, it's been Klein the whole time.

Though he had always appreciated its "cool factor," finally knowing the car's history gave Klein an entirely different appreciation of it and its place in the Porsche world. Because the car carries several of its racing "imperfections," rather than being perfectly restored, Klein says he's endured many turned-up noses. "But, once I learned its history," laughs Klein, "I returned the nose-up attitude back to a few of them." Of course, now, many collectors are more interested in the original cars than they are the restored cars. What's that about "he who laughs last..."

Like everyone who's seen the steep rise of Spyder values in the last couple of decades, Klein is a little shocked. Though his car came with a pushrod engine, he always aspired to putting a 4-cam back in it, but found the prices out of reach. Eventually, he and a friend partnered on a 547/1 Carrera motor, though it has yet to find its way into the car. Along the way, the original roller-cam Super gave up (don't worry, he kept it) and the car has been motivated by a 912 motor for the last several years. Eventually, he bought his partner out, and hopes to rebuild and install the four-cam once he retires.



The battle scars from SCCA racing are real, the decals on its flank are repros that Steve had custom made. The Nassau plate is an original given to Klein by the Beagles in gratitude for loaning the car for their wedding. Under the skin, many of the car's original components are as original; even the trailing arm brushes are intact. The original belly pan wouldn't fit a pushrod engine and was gone when Steve got the car. The early Carrera 547/1 engine that needs a full rebuild. A blocked oil galley to one of the intake cams makes it too risky to try to run. The steering box was replaced with a ZF unit because the original had a tight spot. The original front 60mm drums were also swapped for 40mm because the 60s won't fit inside the 15" rims that were on the car.



Because it's so valuable, people think he's nuts to drive it. Klein has the best answer: "Every drive in the car feels like the good old days. So, I have to drive it."

Despite having several very large offers tendered his way, he has no intention of selling. "It's a family heirloom and was Dad's favorite car. It's my soul. If I sold my soul, what would I replace it with?"

Good point. 🚗

