

# Porsche 356 Registry







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Cover: Ken Bowles takes his 1961 356B D'leteren Roadster down to Seattle's Fisherman's Terminal to welcome the Pacific fishing fleet home.  
 This page: A drive along Highway 1 toward Big Sur, California. George and Alexis Selland.

# The Anti-918



## Smooth over everything, an open 356 "street rod"

### Story and photos by Sean Cridland



Al Lager at the Santa Fe West Coast Holiday, 2013

If you've known Lakewood, Colorado's Al Lager for long, you know that he can be full of surprises. Fresh out of the Army after a stint in Viet Nam, he started racing 356s at Aspen's Woody Creek Raceway in the late '60s and then went on to be IMSA and Trans-Am Crew Chief for Bob Hagestad's racing efforts from 1973 through 1976. The team hosted a series of legendary drivers including Al Holbert, Skip Barber, Bobby Allison, Jerry Jolly, and none other than Hurley Haywood, who paired with Hagestad for a class win at 1975's six-hour race at Watkins Glen. Eventually, Lager gave up the cross-country racing life, returning to Denver to work for Denver-area Porsche collector Dr. Bill Jackson. It was then that his creative side took over, turning the same RSR that Hagestad had campaigned in IMSA and Trans-Am into the legendary "Greased Lightning" car that swamped the competition in both the speed event and the concours during the 1978 Parade at Snowmass. Shortly after, Lager turned his attention to 356s of various models – for racing and street – and settled into a steady business.

It wasn't long before Lager combined his imagination for racing development with his passion for American street-rods. Eventually he turned his eye toward a 356C coupe with severe rear body damage. It wasn't salvageable as a coupe, but maybe it could be the basis for a fun roadster concept? His first idea was to pair it with a Speedster he had with comparable damage to its front clip. But one

of his assistants asked if he could try making an aluminum rear-end for the car.

After a couple years, lot of dollars spent, and not much progress, Lager scrapped the decidedly un-prettly body pieces, but not the idea. He then turned to local metal workers Tin Element of nearby Loveland, Colorado, who were able to transform the basic elements into something both lightweight and beautiful. The finished product was a one-off roadster with the front third still in steel and most of the rear two-thirds in aluminum, helping balance the car considerably. As Lager says, "You're either Michelangelo or you're not." Later, Tin Element went on to work with Lager to create the Abarth Carrera tribute seen in some of the photos here (see *356 Registry*, January / February 2013).

Looking over the details of the car, you first notice the flawless polar silver paint that accentuates its smooth lines from nose to tail. Gazing at the car from the front, you see the headlights are covered by competition-style wire-mesh headlight grilles and there is the smallest of Porsche badges on the front hood-lid, the only identifying marking. Then, there's the low, wrap-around plexiglass wind-screen. In keeping with its competition theme, there are no turn-signals. Tires are Yokohama 195/60R mounted on 356B wheels accommodating finned drum brakes - because Lager sees this wheel and brake combination as the coolest looking of the 356 line.





Moving to the doors, you immediately notice there are no handles or pulls. Since there will be no top for this car, it doesn't really matter and it keeps the car's line incredibly smooth, as if it could stealthily hide from the air passing over it. The doors are formed of aluminum with the 550 Spyder in mind and with no paint finish inside. One must reach inside to pull the opening strap which is connected to a mechanism from an MGB. A simple leather strap keeps the hinges from over-extending and letting the door bang on the body. At the rear, Lager fabricated the hinges for the engine compartment as tributes to those on the lightweight 911R, but the latch is from a 1961 VW glovebox door, offering the smallest possible button. The shape of the tail is an obvious tribute to 356A Speedster, but with rounded, tapered undersides to complete the roadster look and feel.

Opening the very small and lightweight driver's side door, you immediately notice the floor-mounted Recaro seats that were originally designed for use in a 914, but look perfectly racy in the Lager Roadster. For a tall person like this writer, it's a bit of work to make it down into the cockpit, but even with the very low wind-screen, you're low enough that wind won't be a problem. Besides, I keep a set of goggles with me for such occasions. Eventually, Schroth belts will hold the occupants in place as it devours the canyons of the Colorado foothills. On the floor, it's simple, lightweight naugahyde for carpeting and no sound deadening, like Porsche did in many of its GT cars. For cleaning, simply peel it away from the Velcro fasteners and wave it over the lawn sprinklers.

The presentation of the interior dash is as clean, elegant and featureless as its exterior. No glovebox or extraneous buttons clutter the view. The gauges maintain their retro trim, but have all been rebuilt with contemporary inner workings. There is an oil pressure and oil temp

gauge. The tachometer is originally for a Carrera 4-cam engine, going up to 8000 rpm and with a red-line of 6500. And the speedometer reads up to 250kph, though that might be a bit optimistic even with its Lager-tuned hot rod 1720cc engine. Keeping with the competition motif, there is no fuel gauge.

The glittering gold and black of the Petri pre-A wheel, complete with Christophorus horn button, grabs one's attention as one of the few trim pieces on the car. Though it's long been a fixture on early Porsches, it's a wheel that has recently been seen on a variety of custom hot-rods, most notably on Metallica guitarist James Hetfield's Iron Fist 1936 Ford coupe. Still, the wheel seems to take on a special significance in Lager's roadster, seeing that St. Christopher is



Left: Sans trim or handles, the Roadster is even more lozenge-like than a standard 356. In the background is the aluminum Abarth tribute built a few years ago. The larger garage at Al's holds an ever-changing lineup of street rods, wild customs and even trucks, to which the Lager touch is applied.

Right: Inside Al's 356 shop the Roadster has good company - with cars, engines, parts and much memorabilia literally dripping from the rafters.

the patron saint of travel and the signs of Zodiac encircling him seem prescient of what may lay ahead. Of course we all know that *Christophorus* is the name of Porsche's official magazine.

Placement of the 550 inspired shifting lever is easy and convenient, though once again it's connection to the C-transmission has received the minimalist Lager treatment, removing the rubber boot to reveal a purposeful, almost pretty, shifting mechanism.

Under the rear lid is a Lager built hot-rod 1720cc C-engine housed in an engine compartment of bare aluminum. All engine housings are done in matching paint to give the car a finished look suitable for any custom car

show and its Weber carburetor velocity stack and chromed exhaust tips are at the same time shiny and subtle.

Surely this 356-based car isn't one that will appeal to all tastes and may raise more than a few eyebrows among the more traditional-minded. Lager had envisioned a roadster perfectly suited for racing, with smooth lines, Porsche roots, but with American hot-rod flair. And that's what he's achieved. With its clean shape with a low Plexiglas windshield and absence of any exterior handles or pulls, it's reminiscent of the famous So-Cal hotrods that have barnstormed Bonneville for decades, almost as if it's the Anti-918, pushing the almost 70 year old 356 theme toward the future with a dash of aplomb and a hint of gall.

