

Project 911S

Part 6: Paint and interior

by Mitchell Sam Rossi

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



It's Not Easy Being Green

In 1995, when a Porsche ad showed a factory mechanic finding inspiration in his bright yellow socks for a new exterior color for the 993, the satire wasn't far from the truth. The German automaker has long prided itself on offering its clientele a vast palette with which to stylize its high-performance cars.

In 1970, when this project car was little more than a naked chassis rolling along the assembly line, there were nearly 30 exterior colors in which it could be dressed. Three decades later, and unlike many of its siblings, this particular 911S has kept the original Conda Green coat it wore the day it left Stuttgart.



Using a wooden bat to roll the inner lip of the front fender.

But the once brilliant finish has suffered. After years of trying to evade the sun and rain beneath aging car covers and makeshift lean-tos, the thinning enamel paint finally succumbed to the elements. What had been a dazzling color the day I purchased the car in 1978 now looked sick and blotchy, like a laboratory frog left too long in a jar of formaldehyde.

Yet it wasn't simply abandonment that reduced the car's luster to its uneven veil. The fact that the front right fender was duller than the left, the hood a bit darker than either and the right door faded to a greenish-white, were the telltale signs of mid-life repairs and unprofessional touch-ups.

The right door's ailment of repair was the result of naively using a set of compe-

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tition numbers made from contact paper. Peeling them off after a long day at the track proceeded to strip the underlying paint as well. The newer coat on the fenders and hood was the consequence of an impromptu destruction derby where I stabbed my S inside the left rear wheel of a 1967 Chevy Impala. As expected, the Impala came out of the collision with only a nick or two.

But whether the S needed new paint or not, after 30 years, its cheery, luminescent green was a bit flashy for my current tastes. Other Porsche greens might have traveled the decades better, such as Irish or Turquoise. Perhaps Leaf or Signal green, or maybe even metallic.

As the project car was being prepared for competition and not the scrutiny of concourse events, there was little concern about matching the new paint to the original color. At the same time, I was also not ready for the expense or intense labor needed to do a complete color change.

Working with Ignacio Gutierrez, owner of Coachwerks, an automotive paint shop in Long Beach, Calif., we came up with a shade that fell in between Conda Green and one of my favorite colors, British Racing Green.

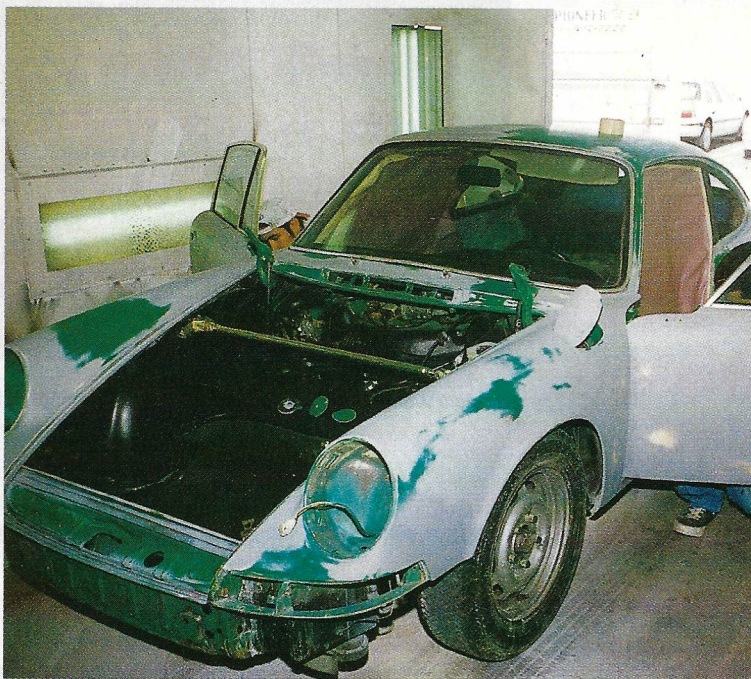
Unlike painting your living room, deciding on the color is not the hardest part of the job. Dismantling and preparation is a daunting task and should not be undertaken by anyone with limited time or patience. To keep costs to a minimum, however, I set upon removing the interior and exterior components myself. I also wanted the painters to be able to coat the door jams, window pillars and the seams around the trunk and rear deck without having to mask the car's interior or rubber seals.

With the help of a friend, the front windshield and rear window were removed, being ever careful not to bend the aluminum window molding. We masked the chrome frames and side windows on the doors. The rear quarter windows were easily removed, being held in place by four Allen bolts in the B-pillar and three screws on the hinge base.

The seats and rails were taken out, as well as all the carpeting and the vinyl-covered interior pieces that are molded to the inner rear fender wells. The large compartment wall, the vinyl-



Cleaning the surface rust from the rear seat buckets.



Primer and preparation at Coachwerks.

covered fiberboard piece which lays beneath the rear window, can be lifted out of its retaining clips once the "shelf lip" is removed.

The slab of sound-deadening material positioned beneath the compartment wall seems to have the weight and density of bullet-proof armor. I was hesitant about discarding this piece, fearing the increased interior noise would make the car undrivable on the street.

Later, when the S was back to life and a stab at the throttle delivered a joyous howl through the thin sheetmetal, it was clear its removal treated the passengers to the true, unmuffled music of the car's 2.2-liter powerplant.

In the rear bucket area beneath the seat pads, a small amount of rust was discovered. Moisture had seeped in from the rear window seal, but the corrosion had only tarnished the surface and was easily cleaned with 60-grit sandpaper and a coat of Rustoleum primer.

The door panels were removed along with the armrests and the storage pockets. While the original basket weave panels were in excellent condition, I decided to replace them with aftermarket RS panels from Better Bodies Motorsport Design in San Diego, Calif.

The reproductions are modeled after the interior pieces that were first used on the famed 1973 Carrera RS with the optional M471 package. The minimalist panels have no pockets or armrests. They incorporate an upholstered aluminum handle to close the door and a nylon strap to activate the latch mechanism.

Hoping to reuse the rubber seals around the doors, I removed them as carefully as possible. Although my intentions were good, the rubber was simply too old and the factory adhesive too diligent to keep them from tearing. It was the same for the rubber in the trunk area. In the engine bay, the seals had become stiff and were not worth saving.

Luckily, the admiration garnered on the German marque has created a huge aftermarket industry and, unlike say, a Gatsco roadster, nearly anything can be purchased for the 911. Performance Products in Van Nuys, Calif., offers a full array of restoration rubber along with complete door and window seal kits.

The headlamps, blinker assemblies and rear taillights were removed. So were the rear bumpers, chrome bumper guards and the center license plate panel. All of the wide aluminum S-trim was removed and, as it was not going to be

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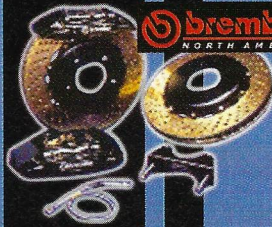
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reattached, relegated to storage.

In addition to having the stock rear deck lid painted, Coachwerks also painted an aftermarket ducktail spoiler for the car. Like the door panels, the original "duck's tail" was offered on the Carrera RS. The spoiler was designed to diminish the 911's rear-end lift that is induced by the car's shape while running at high speeds. While not large enough to generate downforce, the ducktail's effect can certainly be felt from the driver's seat.

At the front of the car, the previous owner had fitted a split S bumper. This slight chin spoiler was introduced on the 1972 911S. For the car's new incarnation, I opted for an aggressive RSR-style front bumper. This aftermarket, carbon-fiber unit allowed for a front oil cooler and inlets for channeling air to the front brake rotors. At the suggestion of friends who had already seen the paint stripped from their bumpers by unintended off-track excursions, I decided to forgo having the bumper painted.

In 1969, when the 911's wheelbase was

extended by 57mm, Porsche designers added a small flare to the car's fender arches. This increased the clearance for the new 6-in.-wide Fuchs alloy wheels that became standard equipment on the S and an option for the E when equipped with standard struts.

Unlike the earlier, narrow-fendered 911s, the sheetmetal inside the new flared wheel arch forms a small horizontal lip. While the fenders offer abundant room for 6x15-in. Fuchs, at the track I was planning to run 7x15-in. cast-aluminum ATS rims commandeered from an early 944. These cookie-cutter wheels came standard on the 1973 911E but at that time only in a 6-in. width.

Admittedly, there is still an inch or so gap even with the 7-in. wheels under the car, but add an aggressive tire width, a lowered ride height and the inescapable body roll induced by tight slalom courses, and you have the potential for damage to both the tire and the fender.

While the local body shop can make the needed modifications, there is a simple procedure you can do yourself. Surprisingly, the tool for reforming the inner fender was designed in 1839 for a completely different sport. It is the timeless wooden baseball bat. Hardly a high-tech instrument, it is, nevertheless, perfect for the job.



911S readied to be reassembled.

Purchasing a bat from the local thrift store and borrowing an 8x16-in. Fuchs alloy shod with a massive 225/50ZR-16 Hoosier tire, I set to "rolling" the fender. Before making this adjustment, beware that it will most likely crack the paint along the edge of the fender and will have to be repaired.

Once the bat is inserted between the tire and bottom of the fender, slowly roll it along the fender arch. At the same time, press the bat handle slightly toward the center of the wheel. It is better to make several passes, progressively bending the lip until the metal is folded tightly against the flare.

If you find the gap between the fender and tire too wide or the body is lifting, try jacking up the opposite side of the car. This will shift the car's weight toward the fender you are working on.

Unfortunately, the car's rear fenders do not lend themselves to this modification, yet they also have a tendency to rub against wide tires during hard cornering. There are two ways to diminish this problem without adding larger fenders. The first is to limit your tire size, but this also limits rear-end adhesion needed for quick track times. The better modification is to have the rear suspension set with as much negative camber as possible.

After several weekends of removing everything I could put a wrench to, I mounted a set of steel wheels to the car and towed it to Gutierrez's shop. While I occasionally dropped by to take photographs of the progress, waiting for the car to be completed was agonizing. After years of letting it sit alongside the house, I was now marking the days on the calendar. But finally, the car received its last color-sanding and was ready to return home.

Perhaps it was the new color or the mere fact I had never seen it with brand-new paint, but even in its dismantled state, it was stunning. For a moment, I pondered restoring it to concourse condition and let it compete in front of judges instead of grandstands. Of course, I attribute those fleeting thoughts to excessive paint fumes and quickly set to the task of putting the German jigsaw puzzle back together.

While disassembling the car had been difficult, reassembling it was overwhelming. I immediately learned the importance of keeping every nut, bolt and washer in close proximity with their original part. Labeling is also a necessity, as cleaned components mysteri-

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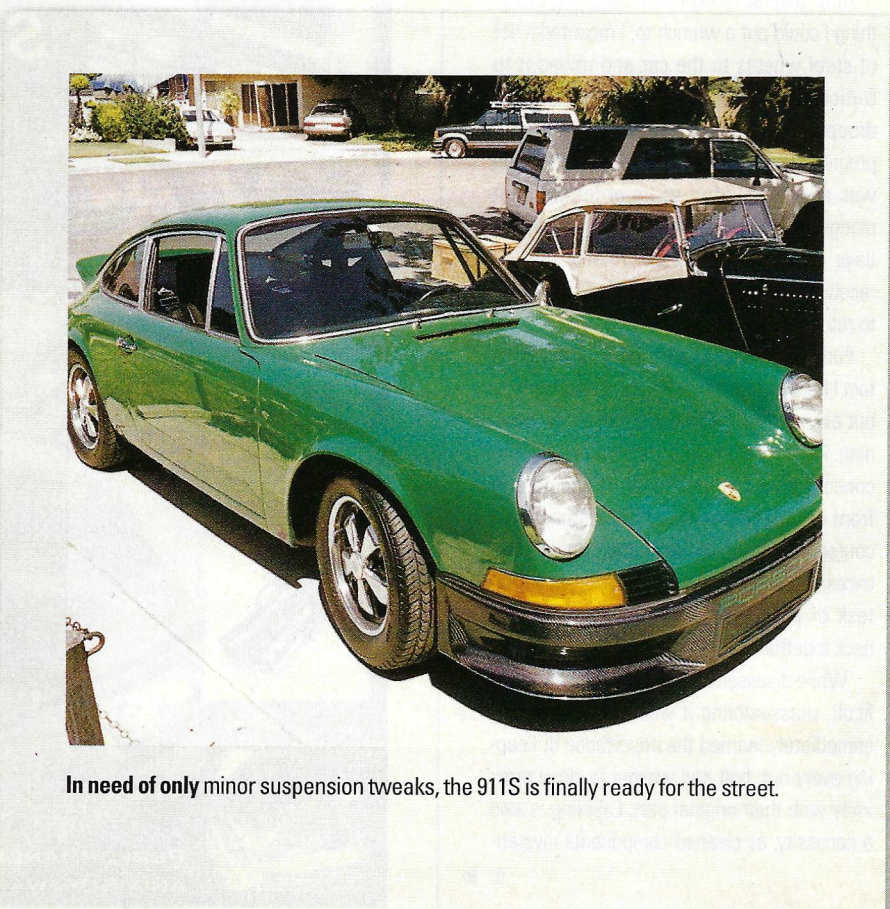
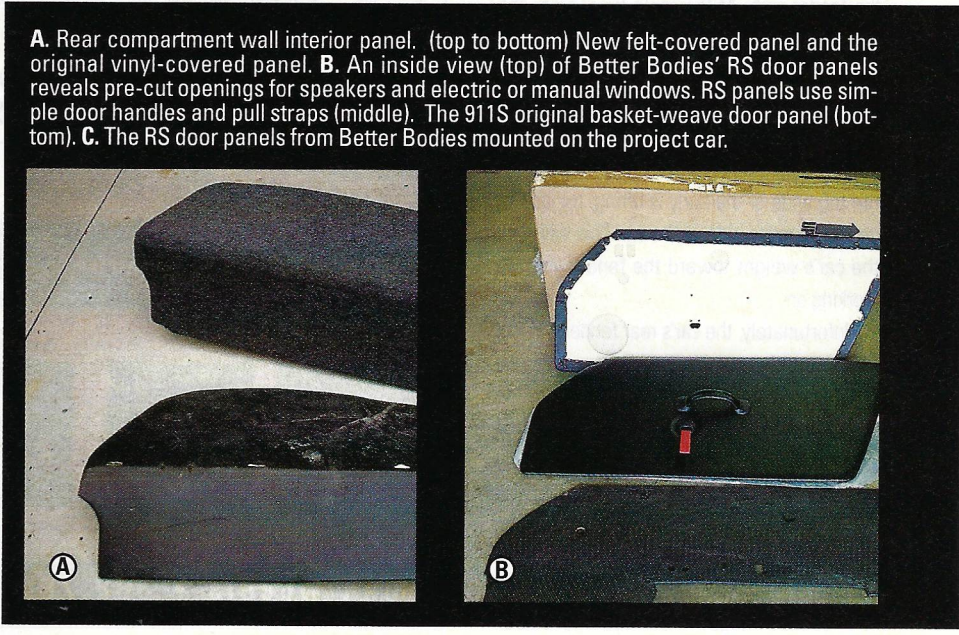
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ously change shape, looking nothing like they did when they were black and greasy.

For the new interior, I purchased a 25-ft roll of

charcoal-colored, lightweight material similar to that used in the RS. Using the original carpet remnants as patterns, I trimmed the felt and attached it with a spray adhesive.

I also used the light material to cover a piece of foam board cut to the same dimensions as the original compartment wall. Although the weight difference between the two interior pieces was negligible, using the gray felt



In need of only minor suspension tweaks, the 911S is finally ready for the street.

throughout the interior tied it nicely to the clean look of the new RS door panels.

Slowly, weekend by weekend, the S regained its form and function. The only tasks left were to have the suspension properly tuned and a few pre-race modifications. Then, the old green machine would finally be ready to take to the track again after a 10-year absence. 🏁



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