

Project 911S

Part 14: Body & paint = heart & soul

by Mitchell Sam Rossi
PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



First fitting of hood and fenders.

For most of its life, the 911S project car kept its original color, Conda Green—paint code 2626. Only in the last few years, when the car was saved from neglect, did it wear a slightly darker hue. This time around, however, the S was not simply being restored, it was being reborn.

Throughout the series I have considered the changes and upgrades performed on the S not as impious acts, as some Porsche fans may, but as fate correction. It is conceivable, after all, that a simple blunder or a twist of fate cheated the S of its rightful calling.

Perhaps, when the Weissach engineers were perusing the assembly line to seize chassis around which to build race cars, the selecting engineer made an innocent mistake. Without thinking of the consequences, he might have knelt to tie a shoelace, snuck outside for a cigarette or, at the moment of decision, held a lingering eye on a passing *fräulein* long enough to let my soon-to-be S pass him by.

A detour in history, a bobble in the space-time continuum, and instead of propelling Waldegaard to victory in the 1970 Monte Carlo Rally or running 1,000 kilometers at the Osterreichring, my 911S ended up in Southern California. Not a bad sanctuary, but hardly a legendary venue.

In an effort to correct the annals of time, it seemed appropriate to choose a color the car might have worn battling Ferraris and Corvettes. The cast, of course, had to be silver, Porsche's legendary suit of armor.

With the undercoating removed and the chassis and suspension points reinforced, the project car was nearly ready for the skillful hand of an auto-



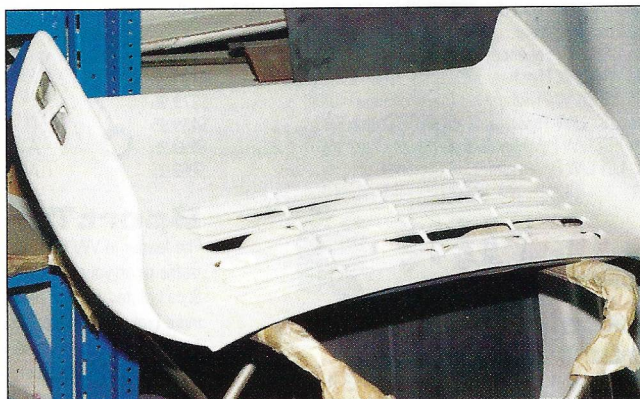
First fitting of the RSR 3.8-style bi-wing tail.

otive spray painter. But before the initial layers of primer could be applied, there were still a few modifications to address.

In 1973, Porsche introduced the 911 Carrera RS 2.7, one of the first icons of the modern automotive world. The car was vastly improved over the 911S in a number of ways. The most conspicuous was the car's extended haunches and the sharp angular growth on the rear deck, the famous "duck tail" spoiler.

While the tail improved aerodynamic downforce at high speeds, the roomier fenders allowed for wider Fuchs wheels and bigger tires—a needed benefit on a car whose brethren had a reputation for horrifying drivers by swapping ends in the middle of high-speed corners.

To continue the project car's evolution, the S's rear fenders were flared in a similar manner and size as the RS. Yet, while the Carrera wrapped Pirelli rubber around 7x15-in. Fuchs, the S was being readied for 9x16-in. wheels. It is not that the project car's fenders were sculpted differently. An RS fender can easily accommodate larger rollers, but in 1973 equipping a road car with 7-in. rear wheels was already a radical concept.



RSR 3.8-style bi-wing tail with a coat of Valspar primer.

The competition version of the RS, the Carrera RSR, boasted even brawnier front and rear fenders, swallowing 9x15 and 11x15-in. wheels, respectively. This bulldog of a 911, however, was a pure race car straddling a 300-bhp, 2.8-liter flat-six engine. While the huskier wings increased the car's coefficient of drag, it was offset by the RSR's grunt and its improved handling via more rubber against the pavement.

As the power output of the project car's 2.7-liter motor would be closer to that of the stock RS 2.7, it was decided that high straightaway speeds would best be reached if the car's body contours remained narrow. That said, the



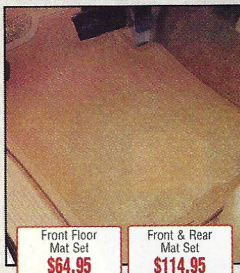
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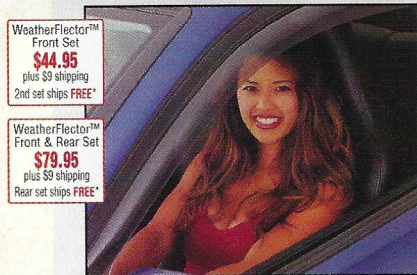
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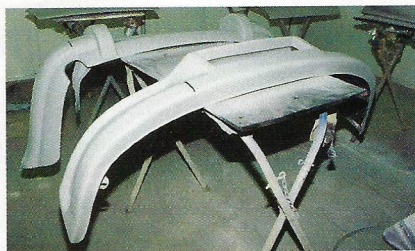
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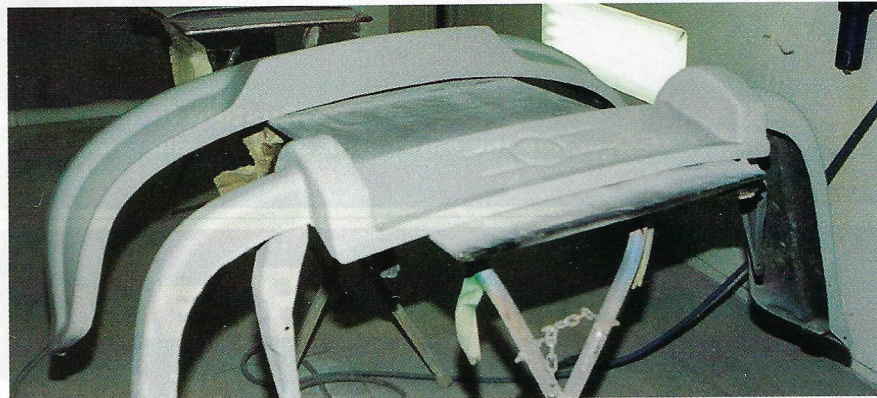
Project 911S

front fenders of the S still needed a slight flare, but the reasons are particular to the car.

The wheels that will eventually be bolted under the nose are 8x16-in. Fuchs. These, however, are not the alloys found on the 1984-88 911 Carrera but rather on the 944. The 944's 8x16-in. Fuchs were built with an additional 12.7mm offset, thus moving the rim and tire closer to the



RS-style front spoiler receives Valspar primer.



Performance Products' fiberglass rear bumper under a coat of primer.

chassis by about a half inch. These wheels will fit under the stock fender of an early 911 if enough negative camber is added to the front struts and the metal lip inside the arch is rolled flat. Of course, tire size has to be kept within reason.

The reason for stretching out the project car's fenders is to accommodate the combination of wide alloys and the updated coilover suspension system. To keep the tire from coming in contact with the springs, 21mm Weltmeister Star Spacers from Performance Products would be needed. Relocating the wheel by this distance, however, requires the stock wheel studs to be replaced with 72mm studs.

Along with a slight swell in the front fender, the project car moved closer to a dedicated racer by exchanging its hood, doors, rear bumper and front spoiler with lightweight fiberglass pieces from Performance Products Motorsports' division.

The front hood was an exact replica of the

original and was a simple bolt-on unit. The doors required a bit more work. The inner structure was identical to the standard metal door, but to mount the latch mechanisms, hinges and window frames, all the holes and access openings had to be cut or drilled. While this work is not impossible, it is demanding.

Like the hood, the one-piece rear bumper used the same bolt locations as the original three-piece assembly and was an easy fit. For the engine deck, two tails were acquired from Performance Products—a reproduction "duck tail" for short-track events and a RSR 3.8-style bi-wing tail for high-speed cup racing.

Up front, the RS-style spoiler would normally use the car's original bumper brackets and mounting points, but the S's trunk box was modified to help channel airflow through its new center-mounted oil cooler. This large, highly efficient cooler from B&B Performance Exhaust does not require these changes to the 911, but as regulating the flat-six's temperature is para-

mount against engine failure, improvements were tried wherever possible.

Initially I thought the brackets for the spoiler would be troublesome to design and make, but the fabricators at Vision Motorsports were able to produce a set in a matter of hours. If any lessons are learned, projects such as this offer the humbling fact that obtaining professional help and advice often eliminates time wasted reinventing the wheel.

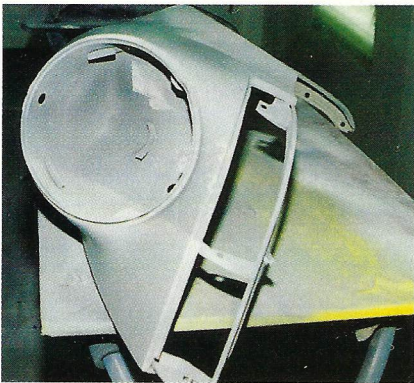
Once the car's final modifications were complete, it was time for the paint booth. Next to choosing a trustworthy doctor, an honest broker and the perfect spouse, finding a good paint person is a considerable undertaking. "What you see is what you get," is an appropriate adage when choosing a shop. Whenever you can, scrutinize the work it has completed and talk with the cars' owners. Waiting until your own car is finished is too late. There are no money-back

guarantees on paint work.

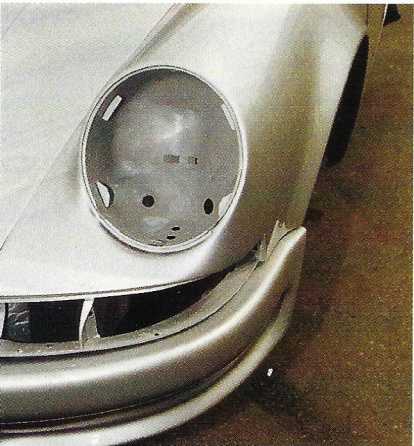
Luckily, Dwain Dement of Vision Motorsports had allowed me to tuck the S into his racing fold where, as mentioned earlier, his crew provided the project car with extensive fabrication and much-needed expertise. A secondary bonus was Vision's joint venture with Hukill Motorsports Paint and Graphics.

Taking residence inside Dement's race shop, owner-operator Chris Hukill is no novice when it comes to decorating competition cars. For 20 years he managed the paint and design segment of PPI Motorsports, the Toyota-sponsored \$150-million Indy and off-road racing dynasty. Having seen his work on several of Vision's racers, not to mention in magazines, on posters and in automotive books about PPI's winning teams, I had no concerns of turning the S over to Hukill.

"We'll use a two-part polyurethane enamel system," Hukill said, knowing the project car was headed for the track. Choosing Valspar primer and paint from California Auto Body Shop Supplies, Hukill explained that the base-coat/clear-coat system was not only strong enough to endure a continuous onslaught of tire rubber and debris, it was also resistant to the



Customized front fender receives its first coat of Valspar primer.



The front fender finished and re-installed.

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Standing again at the bottom of a steep learning curve, I tried to keep up with Hukill's explanation of the painting process. First, the primer



Wearing Porsche's battle color, Project 911S is starting to take on a competitive look.

coat that was initially applied to protect the car's sheetmetal after sandblasting was removed. A two-part urethane primer was then sprayed onto the chassis in three sections—the underbody, interior and outer shell.

Once the primer was cured, the chassis was "blocked," a painter's term for smoothing out the coating with a medium-grit sandpaper. Next, the

primer was prepared by wet sanding, a method of working the surface under a steady stream of water. Not only does this help limit airborne particles, it also removes excess material from the sandpaper, extending its effectiveness.

The next step was the application of Valspar's non-sanding epoxy sealer. "A good sealer ensures adhesion to the primed surface," Hukill explained. "It also covers the very smallest imperfections that even ultra-fine sandpaper won't remove."

After allowing a short curing time for sealer, Hukill applied four coats of the primary color. Stepping from the booth, the painter warned me at this stage the silver paint was not going to be as brilliant as I might expect. The glistening wet-look would not emerge until the urethane coat was laid down and polished.

Hukill then coated the chassis with three coats of the clear urethane and once again put his crew to work, this time with 800-grit sandpaper in hand. He then applied the final three coats and left the car to cure completely.

When I was originally planning to clothe the car in silver, friends and associates were quick to warn me of the difficulties applying metallic paints. The car had to be painted on the same

A close-up photograph of three different ETX alloy wheel designs. The wheels are silver and highly reflective. The background is a dark blue surface with some scratches.

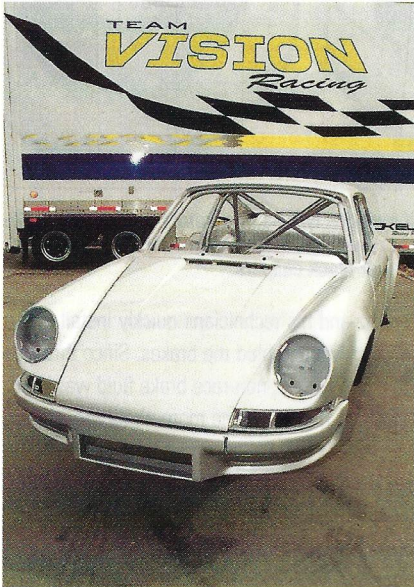
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day and within close tolerances of temperature and humidity. There was also the view that the S had to be completely assembled so the sweep of the painter's hand was consistent across the car's entire surface.

Hukill, however, gave little thought to shooting the chassis and the body pieces separately. "We create a batch of paint for each car by thor-



oughly mixing together the 2 or 3 gallons of base color needed for that job. The material is then labeled and coded for the customer and for only his/her car," he said. While metallic pigmentations have a tendency to settle out of solution, all that is required to renew the material is adequate churning.

Temperature and humidity were controlled inside Hukill's 500 sq-ft spray booth, while color uniformity across the sheet metal was maintained by Hukill's years of experience wielding a spray gun. Thus, the unassembled pieces were shot separately.

Once the clear coat had hardened sufficiently, Hukill's crew reassembled the body and made a last strike across the paint with ultra-fine sandpaper and water. Finally, the entire car was buffed and polished by hand.

Perhaps I am biased, like a first-time parent beaming over his newborn, but when the S was wheeled out of the shop and into sunlight wearing the battle color of Porsche, the world seemed right. Undaunted by heavy undercoating, stout in structure and with wings ready to envelop broad racing rubber, the S looked as though it were finally taking the shape of the competitor it certainly should have been. ❧

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