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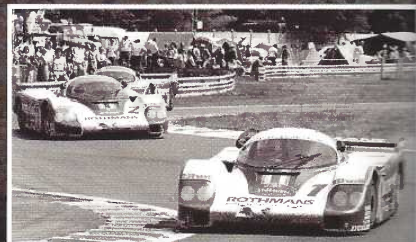
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TICKING THE BOXES

Don Ahearn's Polo Red 911 is a survivor from an era when anyone could walk into his local Porsche dealer and order a track-ready 911. Despite its rarity, the '67 coupé is still raced today...

Words: David Conklin

Photos: David Conklin and Bob Heathcote



1967 911 RACE CAR

It's difficult to imagine today, but there was a time when Porsche didn't approve of their 911 being used as a racing car. Likely they had long term goals to eventually develop the 911 into a racing GT, but it took pressure from independents like Jack Ryan in the USA and Vic Elford in the UK to tug Porsche towards that development. Of course the 911 is now considered the most significant GT racing car of all time, but it wasn't always that way.

As early as 1967, just about anyone with the most rudimentary connection at Porsche could, by simply ticking a few boxes on the order form, purchase a car designed specifically for GT racing – and it wasn't that much more costly than a well-equipped 911S! But this was still something of a poorly-kept secret. However, one year later in 1968, Porsche threw the doors open to 911 competition by printing a racing instruction manual entitled 'Information regarding Porsche Vehicles used for Sports Purposes'. This allowed the sporting-minded enthusiast to build a racing 911 in a simple à la carte manner.

Sadly, economics and today's litigious society have banished the 'over-the-counter race car' to the same fate

as lawn-darts and toystore BB rifles. Werks GT cars are still available, but to obtain one, you need to be seriously connected with a significant racing team and arrive with a briefcase full of money. The days of buying a factory-built race car, throwing it on a trailer behind an old station wagon after work on Friday and showing up at the track are long gone.

Yet, for a period of time, high-level sports car racing was affordable and Porsche would build you a car that could immediately compete on a national level. The '67 Trans-Am racing car on these pages was one of the first seeds of factory-created GT racers that sprouted into the R, ST and RSR programs, grew into the dominant turbo-era 934 and 935 and then on to the towering forest of today's GT3 Cup and RSR cars.

During the 1960s, the most popular sports racing series in the USA was probably the Sports Car Club of America's 'Trans-Am' series. Trans-Am was a sedan class that was often run in conjunction with the ground shaking Can-Am cars. Most people's image of the Trans-Am series is of Mustangs, Camaros and Dodge Challengers with big 5.0-

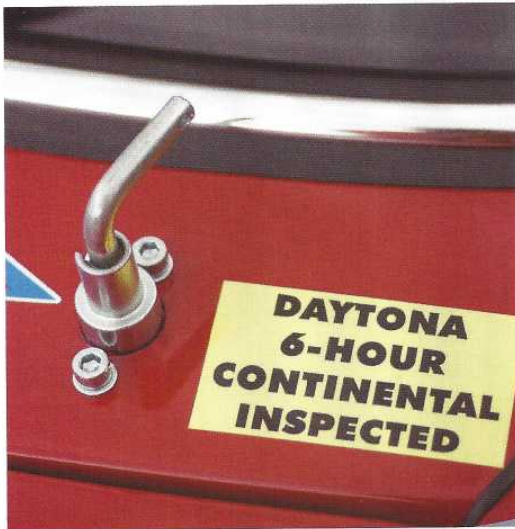




Engine was built by Klub Sport Racing and is a single-plug 2.5-litre running on 46mm PMO carbs. Interior is stripped-out apart from two seats, harnesses and period-design roll-bar



“ Understandably, factory Trans-Am-spec racing 911s are incredibly rare today. Many of them met their early demise on the race tracks of America. ”



1967 911 RACE CAR

litre V8s, banging fenders on the road circuits of the USA. However, mixed in with those V8 pony-cars was the under 2.0-litre class. Somehow, Porsche convinced the sanctioning body that the 911 was indeed a sedan and for about three years they dominated the 'Uz' class, racing against Alfa Romeos, Volvos and even Mini Coopers.

When not competing in official Trans-Am races, these versatile 2.0-litre 911s could also race in the SCCA C-Production races, meaning that if you wanted to, you could probably find an event in which to race nearly every weekend. If you wanted to compete in Trans-Am in 1967, the process was quite easy. Distributors were instructed to place the order and mark it 'Wettbewerbsfahrzeug für Trans-Am Rennen' (Competition car for Trans-Am race). In doing so, you were specifying that your car would be equipped with all the bits necessary to compete in the Trans-Am series (and C Production).

Understandably, factory Trans-Am-spec racing 911s are incredibly rare today. Many of them met their early demise on the race tracks of America. Those that didn't get wadded up, were often updated and converted to compete in more modern classes until they were unrecognisable worn-out shells. Very few survived

repeated battles on the race track, which is exactly the motivation people like Don Ahearn need to keep beating the bushes until each one is found and saved.

When it comes to the short-wheelbase (pre-'69) Sports-Purposes cars, Don has become a true specialist. Tot up all the rare 'sport kit', 'rallye kit' and, yes, even Trans-Am spec Werks hot-rods that Don has discovered and returned to the hobby over the past ten years, and you will arrive at a number nearing 10.

A couple of years ago, Don unearthed a spectacular numbers-matching Aga Blue factory '67 Trans-Am car, thinking it perhaps the only undiscovered example remaining. (Subsequent research indicates that likely only three of these cars were imported into the USA in 1967.)

As the restoration of the blue car was ongoing, Don remembered a lead on a similar car that had been given to him by his late friend Barry Williams nearly five years earlier. Digging into the dark recesses of his desk, Don located the scribbled note with the serial number of the car and phone number of its owner.

A few calls later and the Polo Red 1967 911, chassis number 308107, was headed to his friends at Klub Sport Racing in Florida, where Phil Bagley and his experienced

Don has accrued a great selection of period race memorabilia relating to the car's early life in competition at Daytona and various IMSA events

Momo Prototipo steering wheel was - and remains - the racer's favourite. Nicely patinated, it hints at the use the red coupé has enjoyed over the years

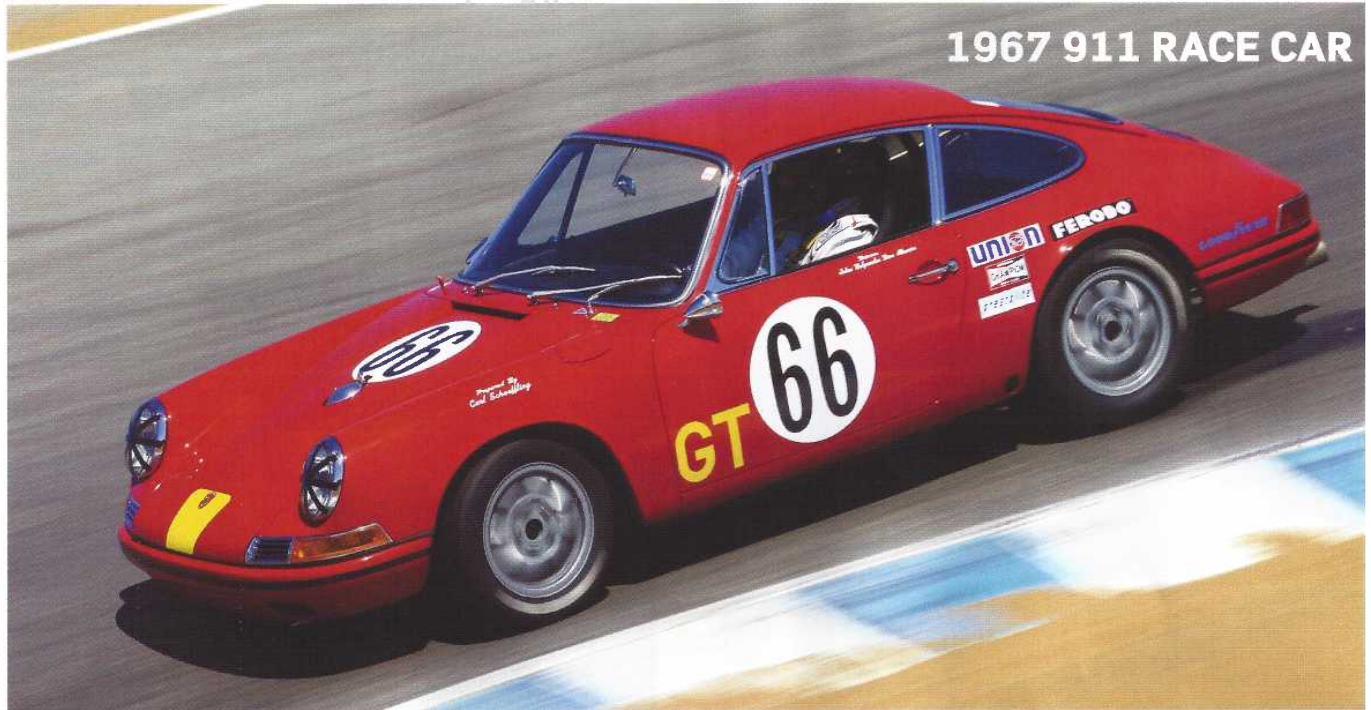




“ The factory Kardex confirms this was indeed a Trans-Am specification car, with many noteworthy options... ”

Underbonnet area is as nicely finished as the rest of the car. Original 100-litre tank was modified by Klub Sport Racing to include a through the hood centre-fill conversion

1967 911 RACE CAR



crew completely restored the car and prepared it in record time – less than eight months – so that Don could race at the Monterey Historic races!

The history of the car is frustratingly unclear. The factory Kardex confirms that this was indeed a Trans-Am specification car with such noteworthy options as 'rallye equipment' (Rallye-Kit), 'horsepower increase' (Sport Kit), roll-bar, 100-litre fuel tank, hill-climb gears and a limited-slip differential. Sadly, the race-prepared 901/06 engine originally installed was lost sometime during the car's murky past. In its place is a potent 2.5 litre single-plug race motor with 46mm PMO carbs – perfect for sporting around as a vintage racer.

Klub Sport Racing built the engine, not so much with 100 per cent authenticity in mind, but rather to provide reliable horsepower and more up-to-date performance. Continuing with that intent, custom JE pistons from the 901 shop were hung from Pauter connecting rods and a lightweight non-counterweighted crankshaft. Bill at Xtreme Cylinder Heads in Palm City, Florida, machined a set of his trick cylinder heads.

The car was never dyno'd, but Don Ahearn's reaction after his first session at Laguna Seca was very telling. 'I can't believe this is a single-plug 2.5... it's seriously fast!' The short trip that I took in the passenger seat from the track paddock up the hill to the track campground where these photos were taken, gave me no reason to disagree.

Other modern concessions to safety are the driver's seat and the custom fuel tank. Klub Sport Racing started with an original 100-litre tank, but added the replica hood filler along with a safety bladder and a roll-over check ball. Bagley explains: 'It's probably not as safe as a genuine racing fuel cell, but it's a lot better than a gasoline-filled tin can in the front of your car!'

What history has been located helps trace the car back to the 1972 Daytona 24-hour race when it was owned by a racer by the name of John Belperche. Belperche, an amateur driver in Florida, and his co-driver George Rollin failed to finish the 1972 race due to an accident.

One black and white image of the car at this race was located and it was this livery that Ahearn chose to replicate when the car was restored. During this restoration, a fresh coat of Polo Red was applied by Greg Michielan who Bagley has been working with for 35 years. The six-inch magnesium Minilite wheels as seen in that grainy photograph were still with the car.

By the Daytona race in 1973, the car had sprouted ST flares and an S front spoiler/bumper. Further race results

indicate that Belperche and Rollin raced the car through the mid-'70s in various IMSA events and then it appears to have been sold and relegated to amateur competitions in the Northeast USA. The primary frustration surrounds the first five years of the car's life.

It was originally delivered to the distributor in Teaneck, New Jersey, but who ordered and received it? Where did it race? It's unimaginable that anyone would order this specification for street use, and hours have been spent looking at late 1960s racing images trying to find an unknown red '67 that might have been this car. No luck yet, but Bagley is determined to find some answers.

'I'm certain that this car was raced from new but I know that Belperche didn't originally own it, because I knew John back then. My next attempt will be at the SCCA National Archives; maybe they will have records of serial numbers.'

So while we may not know 'who' or 'why', we do know 'what' this 911 was. It was one of the first factory-built racing 911s imported to the USA, and the seed for nearly five decades of Porsche GT racing excellence. What is great about the story is that the car is still being used in anger just as its unknown original owner intended when he ticked the option boxes for his special 911 racer.

And when so many vintage 911s have become arguably 'too valuable to race' it's refreshing to see authentic examples such as this one still out on track. **CP**

Despite its rarity, Don Ahearn's Polo Red '67 still sees regular use on the track. After all, isn't this what 'Sports Purpose' Porsches were built for? (Photo by Bob Heathcote)

The '67 is well-detailed throughout, with great panel gaps for a car which has spent much of its life on the track. Love the Tabbot mirror – is there any other choice?

