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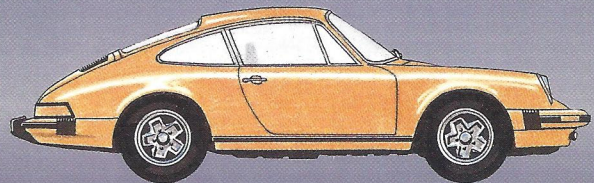
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That Was Then

Michael Hammond has been successfully racing the same 1967 911S for more

Twenty-five years before I met Michael Hammond, I bumped into his legend. The year was 1976, and the location was Sears Point Raceway. The Golden Gate Region of the Porsche Club of America had organized its first-ever time-trial event, and all the local hot shoes assembled at the Sonoma track to have a go.

When the dust settled, only one driver had come close to breaking the magical two-minute barrier at the 2.5-mile track, and this in a 2.0-liter 911! Word spread among the deflated Northern California contingent that the exceptional lap — a 2.02:65 — belonged to some guy from Southern California who'd never even seen the track before! Not only that, but he'd set his Class G-winning time in a box-stock 1967 911S 2.0-liter with no flares and weenie tires — a seriously outdated car.

Back then, the factory was still racing the 911 Carrera RSR and everyone in the Porsche Club of America was try-

ing to duplicate the RSR's look with flares that would accommodate 15x10- and 15x12-inch alloys, front to rear. The idea of some *outsider* posting that kind of time — on skinny tires no less — was anathema to all of us. Thus the legend of Michael Hammond was born.

What we didn't know then was that Hammond had already been racing Porsches for two decades and was about to embark on a 14-year career as an IMSA racer. Within a year, he would be finishing third in GTU and 13th overall at Sebring. Hammond, who is now 66, started competing in the glory days of California club racing. A love for the sport had been genetically encoded in him by his father, who sponsored midget drivers in the Chicago area before the family moved to Los Angeles in the early fifties.

The younger Hammond was naturally attracted to the gang of enthusiasts who gathered at Johnny von Neumann's little import car store,

Competition Motors in Hollywood. There, he met Richie Ginther and the Dolan Brothers. They told him about a diminutive car from Germany called the Porsche. If Hammond was interested in racing, they said, then Porsche was the way to go. "I'd never heard of Porsche," says Hammond, "but I took the advice and decided to buy one."

After selling some stock in his family's corporation, he bought a white 1500 Super Speedster adorned with an orange and black racing stripe and the number "55" on both doors. He drove the Porsche out to the Palm Springs airport for his first track event.

"I think I spun out every lap," recalls Hammond. "The thing had so much weight over the rear wheels, but I learned very quickly." Soon, he was a regular competitor at Palm Springs, Paramount Ranch, Pomona, Santa Barbara, Torrey Pines, and Willow Springs. In those days, a full race weekend would cost about \$35 and



This Is Now

than three decades, often beating far "faster" Porsches. Story by David Colman.

■ Mike Hammond's early, short-wheelbase 911S has served him well in club racing for 31 years. From its early days (left) to now (right), the car has changed little.

that figure included the cost of the Gardner Rentals recap tires that were the hot rubber back then.

Hammond joined the Porsche Owners Club (POC) in 1956, and has been a member ever since. He campaigned the Speedster into the early sixties and sold it in 1965 to facilitate a move from California to his mother's home in Scottsdale, Arizona. For a couple of years, Hammond's competition side was dormant. But in 1968, he took consignment of a 356 which he promised to sell for a friend in California. Driving the bathtub Porsche west reminded Hammond how much he liked and missed the eccentric German convertible. So he became a salesman at Circle Porsche/Audi in

Long Beach, taking up residence in nearby Manhattan Beach.

Eventually, Hammond left Circle to take over management of Westwood Porsche/Audi with his friend Bob Chamberlain. As you might expect, Porsche sales in Westwood involved catering to the glitterati. But the transaction that would change Hammond's racing future began when Dinah Shore's daughter told Hammond that a country singer needed to trade his Porsche for cash. "He came into the agency with the car running really poorly," says Hammond, who was not terribly surprised to find a finicky 1967 911S performing less than optimally.

After establishing some history on the black-on-black coupe, serial #308-436S, Hammond took it into his inventory. The 911 had originally been sold to the Howard family, the owners of Seabiscuit, the famous race horse. By the time the 911S had been entrusted to the impecunious singer, it had not

seen its share of proper maintenance for quite some time.

The first 2.0-liter 911S was not an easy car to drive. With its minuscule torque output, the S was pesky getting away from stoplights. But Hammond quickly fell in love with the sporting characteristics of the car. Its first generation short-wheelbase chassis (87 inches) was only 4 inches longer than that of the 356 which he had already mastered on the track. He decided to make the black 911S his own. As he puts it, "I started campaigning the 911S in November of 1969, and it's been on the track continuously ever since."

Though Porsche upgraded the wheels of the 911S in 1967 from 4.5 inches wide to 5.5 inches, Hammond's car was running on 15x7-inch 911R wheels when it hit the track, which allowed the use of wider-than-stock tires under stock fender openings. These specially-offset wheels, originally designed for the lightweight 911R of

1968, were one of the few tricks Hammond used to make his narrow-bodied 911 competitive with ostensibly better set-up 911s. Today, Hammond owns no less than 12 of these special rims, and estimates their worth at about \$800 each! There was a time in the early seventies when you couldn't give them away for \$100 a piece.

Unlike so many other self-professed mechanics and tuners, Michael Hammond readily admits he is no chassis or engine guru. He doesn't know or care what anti-roll bars, torsion bars, pistons, or camshafts he's using — so long as they're legal for his class (HP) in POC racing. He leaves all that up to his mechanic, Don Kravig, who runs Precision Motion in Riverside, California.

When I asked Kravig whether Hammond helps on the setup of the 911S, he laughed and said, "I don't let him!" There really isn't a lot of the usual super-tuner hocus-pocus going on here. Just a good, solid preparation job by Kravig on a basically stock Porsche and a great job of driving by someone who has been working with the same chassis for the last 31 years. If you want the kind of lap times Hammond posts, then spend a couple of decades figuring out your car as well as he has.

What Kravig finds most unusual about this 911S is its unadulterated originality. As he puts it, "Most guys have to change everything all the time. I know I did with my own 1967 911S. I flared the fenders, redid the suspension, went to huge wheels and tires, and, pretty soon, I had a thundering monster. But Michael is different. It's just amazing that his car is still as original as it is."

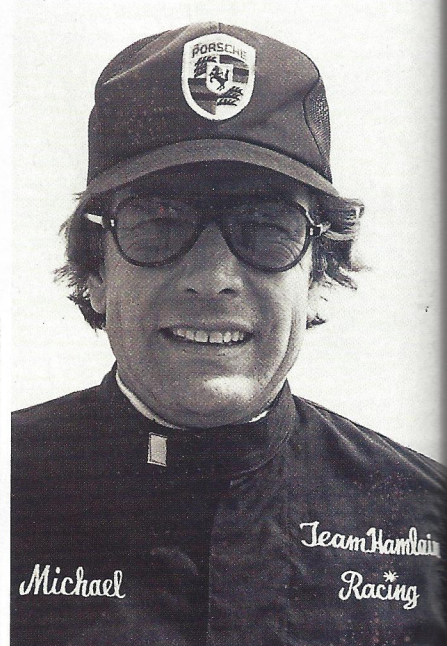
Says Hammond about his setup philosophy: "I do nothing to prepare it. I think it's really important to leave a car alone and learn how to *drive* it. I don't believe in changing things all the time just for the sake of change. The most important thing is to figure out what the car's limits are and drive to them." Says Kravig of Hammond's driving ability: "I think he's an excellent driver — one of the best in the POC. Even at his age, he's extremely smooth and really competent."

Kravig and Hammond have been at it together for a long time. They first hooked up with each other at POC events in the early seventies when both were running identical 1967 911Ss. Says Kravig: "After I figured out how to make my car go, it was nip and tuck. You could flip a coin to see who would win." From Riverside to Willow Springs to Ontario

■ **Right—Racer Michael Hammond stresses car control and driver improvement over modifying a car.**

■ **Below—Hammond's 1967 911S at Riverside in the 1969-70 season.**

■ **Bottom—Mixing it up with another 911 at a Porsche Owners Club race at Pomona in 1970.**



to Holtville, the pair battled each other, usually posting times that would have vanquished much better-prepared classes.

Kravig and Hammond waged their own private war on race tires — Goodyear "gumball" slicks that allowed even modest-displacement production Porsches like the 2.0-liter 911S to post unthinkable lap times at most circuits. But the pounding these cars took from the tires' excessive G-force loadings eventually took its toll on the tubs and suspension components.

When Kravig took over the care of Hammond's car, he found a number of cracks and fissures in the sheetmetal surrounding the suspension pickup points. These were no surprise because the chassis had never been reinforced for racing, nor had a cage ever been added to the cockpit. Rather, Hammond's 911S sports only a simple, hoop-style roll bar.

Likewise, constantly wicking the little engine to 7000 rpm finally culminated in rod fatigue. Five years ago, a connecting rod let go and sawed the case in half. When Hammond went looking for a replacement engine, he settled on a 2.2-liter 911S engine, which makes 180 hp at 6500 rpm versus the 160 hp at 6600 rpm for his car's destroyed original engine.

Kravig massaged the "new" engine to "factory tolerances" by blueprinting and balancing the stock parts. He then assembled them very carefully. His

attention to detail might produce a few more ponies than Porsche advertised, but he hasn't bothered to dyno-test the finished product. He used all factory components when buttoning it up. The pistons, for example, are factory 2.2-liter 911S Mahles, the rods are stock pieces, and the induction system remains Bosch mechanical injection, which was introduced to the 911S in 1968 for the

"In low-speed turns, he's not the smoothest driver, but he always drives to the max," says Kravig about Hammond. "In the high-speed turns, he's really smooth because he just keeps his foot in it."

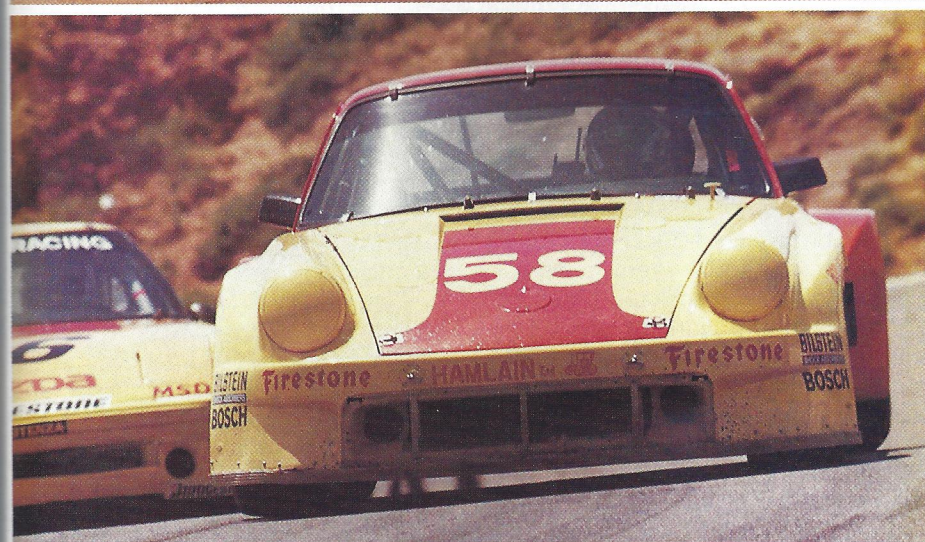
Even after 30 years on the circuit, Hammond's 911S remains "amazingly stock" according to Kravig, who has stiffened the suspension with 23-mm

ca whale tail which has been on the S ever since. A slackening of the rules for HP allowed him to remove the two 24.5-pound weights Porsche fitted inside of the front bumper edges in early 911s to compensate for the car's rearward weight bias. He also added a deeper IROC-style front air dam, which compensates for the added downforce of the huge RSR-style tail.

Kravig modified the front struts to allow the use of later 911S brakes and did the same to the rear suspension arms to permit the addition of 1975 911S brakes. Otherwise, the struts, control arms, and trailing arms remain stock. In fact, the black 911 still has its original undercoating, carpets, seats, and radio. Hammond has been using DOT-legal BF Goodrich tires for his track outings. Last year, he made the switch from R1 tires to Ground Force rubber, and has helped BFG revise their air-pressure recommendations for the new tires from the 39 psi cold/42 psi hot range to 28 psi cold/30 psi hot. Hammond still uses 7-inch wide 911R wheels to support the 225/50ZR15 Ground Force R1s at each corner. In order to fit the 225-mm rubber, the fender lips were rolled using a baseball bat.

After Kravig and Hammond butted heads in POC for so many years, they decided to bury the hatchet and go racing in IMSA together. From 1974 to 1987, Kravig and Hammond teamed with Rick Borlase, who fielded his operation under the name, "Coin-Operated Racing." The title referred to the fact that the team had no sponsorship, so everyone paid for their own share of the fun out of their pockets.

But poverty in backing did not mean poor finishes because, in those early days of IMSA, talent proved nearly as important as money. To prove the point, just take a look at Hammond's race resume. In 1977, he teamed with fellow POCers Bobbee and Gary Nylander to drive a 911S to 3rd in GTU and 13th overall at Sebring. In 1980, he came back to Sebring in a 911 with Kravig and Borlase to place 6th in GTO and 19th overall. By 1984, Borlase had bought a 934, but he and Hammond dropped out of Sebring after only 12 laps. The next year, 1985, saw Borlase and Hammond team with Jim Torres in the 934 to place 8th in GTO and 20th overall. In Hammond's last run at Sebring in 1986, the Hammond/Borlase/Torres team posted its best-ever result in the 12-hour race with a 4th in GTO and an 11th overall.



■ **Top**—Hammond's 911S was a familiar sight at Southern California tracks in the early seventies, here seen at Willow Springs circa 1972.

■ **Above**—Hammond also spent some years racing professionally, here seen behind the wheel of a 934.

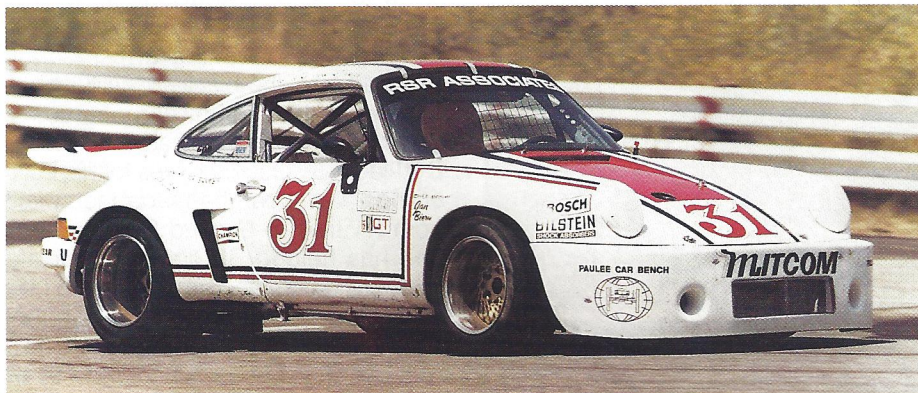
■ **Left**—Firebird Raceway, 1990.

front torsion bars and 26-mm rear torsion bars. Early in the game, Hammond added an Alan Johnson Racing (AJR) 22-mm front anti-roll bar and an AJR 19-mm rear anti-roll bar.

Without doubt, the most noticeable change to the 911S came in 1973, when John Thomas of Bozzani Porsche sold Hammond an RSR repli-

1969 model year. The increase in displacement from 2.0- to 2.2-liters does not alter the classification of Hammond's car in POC events because HP covers early 911S models ranging in size from 2.0 to 2.4 liters. Kravig sets up the chassis to cope with the added power and to suit Hammond's driving style, which he calls "throttle oversteer."

Since racing was an out-of-pocket affair for Hammond, he couldn't afford to compete at most distant venues aside from Sebring. But when the circus came to Riverside, Coin-Operated Racing was usually a factor in the results. In 1983, for example, Borlase and Hammond teamed for a 5th place finish in GTO and 14th overall in the Los Angeles Times Grand Prix. That was the year Rolf Stommelen was killed when his Fitzpatrick/JDavid 935 crashed in Turn 9.



Hammond caught the end of the Stommelen accident, though he couldn't tell which car had crashed: "I could make out that it was a Fitzpatrick car, but didn't know who was in it. There wasn't much left except the tub. Everyone started pitting because of it, but I kept going. I figured I was a professional driver, so it was my job to keep driving."

The next year, 1984, the team recorded its best finish in any IMSA event at Riverside. Hammond teamed with Kravig in Borlase's GTO 934 to earn 2nd in class and 14th overall. This was the fastest Porsche Hammond had ever driven. It helped him set an outright lap record at Willow Springs of 1:28 that stood for nine years without being broken. At Riverside, the car was a terror on the mile-long backstretch.

"A cop I knew with a radar gun at Riverside clocked me in that car at 191 mph on the back straight," recalls Hammond. "It was awful rough, so rough you couldn't even see, and yet I was still getting passed on the outside at those kind of speeds by other cars entering Turn 9!"

The record says the team won \$3,900 for their class finish, but Hammond recalls with some rancor that the winning Mazda RX-7 of Roger Mandeville and Amos Johnson, which earned \$7,000, was caught cheating

but not disqualified. "IMSA officials felt so bad about what happened that they gave us the trophy for GTO as we were leaving the track. We really should have won that day."

The team's swan-song at Riverside came in 1986, when they completed only 20 laps in the Borlase 934 before fading out of pro racing for good. All in all, Hammond figures he did eight runs at Sebring, two at Daytona, and visited Portland, Riverside, Laguna Seca, Mid-Ohio, Road Atlanta, and Road America

■ **By 1978, Mike Hammond had bought into this 911 RSR, which was previously raced by Paul Newman.**

at least once with IMSA. Even during those intense IMSA years, however, Hammond never forsook his 911S.

"When things weren't conflicting with professional racing, I continued to race my own 911, both in POC and with Zone 8 of PCA," says Hammond.

By 1978, Hammond had also become part-owner of a genuine RSR. He quickly found his biggest problem to be remembering which car had which shift pattern. The 911S had the early 901 gearbox with fifth gear down and back. The RSR had the 915 gearbox with fifth gear up and away in a slot of its own. The 934 had a straight H-pattern four-speed. "I had a lot of trouble remembering which shift pattern was in which car," he remarks.

Hammond and his partners had bought the RSR from Paul Newman and their first race with it was the Racing Drivers Club (RDC) four-hour enduro at Sears Point. It was a rude introduction because the track turned sopping wet 30 minutes into the race. Hammond found himself sliding all over the 2.5-mile circuit when the skies opened, spinning off two or three times per lap. Over the radio, he told his teammates "I'm coming in. My luck's not going to last much longer, so

put someone else in."

On the next lap, Hammond pitted and turned the car over to one of his teammates. The race was promptly red-flagged. Afterwards, they found that the tires they had assumed to be rain tires were actually dirt track tires that looked like racing rains but acted completely differently. Says Hammond of the RSR, "That car was a bad deal, because I knew those guys were going to wreck it. Every time they got in the car, something broke." Hammond eventually dropped out of the RSR enterprise.

Since quitting professional racing, Hammond has been entering the 911S in a variety of unusual events. He ran it in the first Silver State Challenge (1988) in Nevada, where he won his class by posting an average speed of 145 mph. His co-driver for the event was long-time POC friend Jim Korpiel. The pair finished 12th overall in a car that placed higher than it deserved to finish on the basis of displacement — a recurring theme in the story of Michael Hammond.

Rick Borlase, who Hammond stationed on a hill overlooking the tricky Silver State esses called "The Narrows," told Hammond after the event that he was the only driver who didn't lift through the canyon. Hammond has also run his old 911S in five years' worth of La Carrera, the retro Mexican road race run from Ensenada to San Felipe and back. He finished in the top five every time, and did especially well on the 3.0-mile hill-climb special stage near Ensenada.

Hammond smirks when he points out that La Carrera was a testier event than the Silver State Challenge because they don't close the road in Mexico like they do in Nevada.

Thanks to 30 years of metal fatigue, the 911S has spent the last few months in the shop, getting repaired, refreshed, and repainted. Precision Motion is going through the chassis in Riverside while Jack's Auto Body in Cathedral City will refinish the black paint job. You're probably thinking now that Hammond has reached the ripe age of 66, he's going to put the 911S out to pasture when its makeover is complete.

But Hammond has no room in his life for a trailer queen. His plan for the future of his trusted 911S is the same as his plan in the past: "I'm goin' to go right back and keep doin' what I've been doin'. After all, I've been breaking more track records now than when I was younger." ■