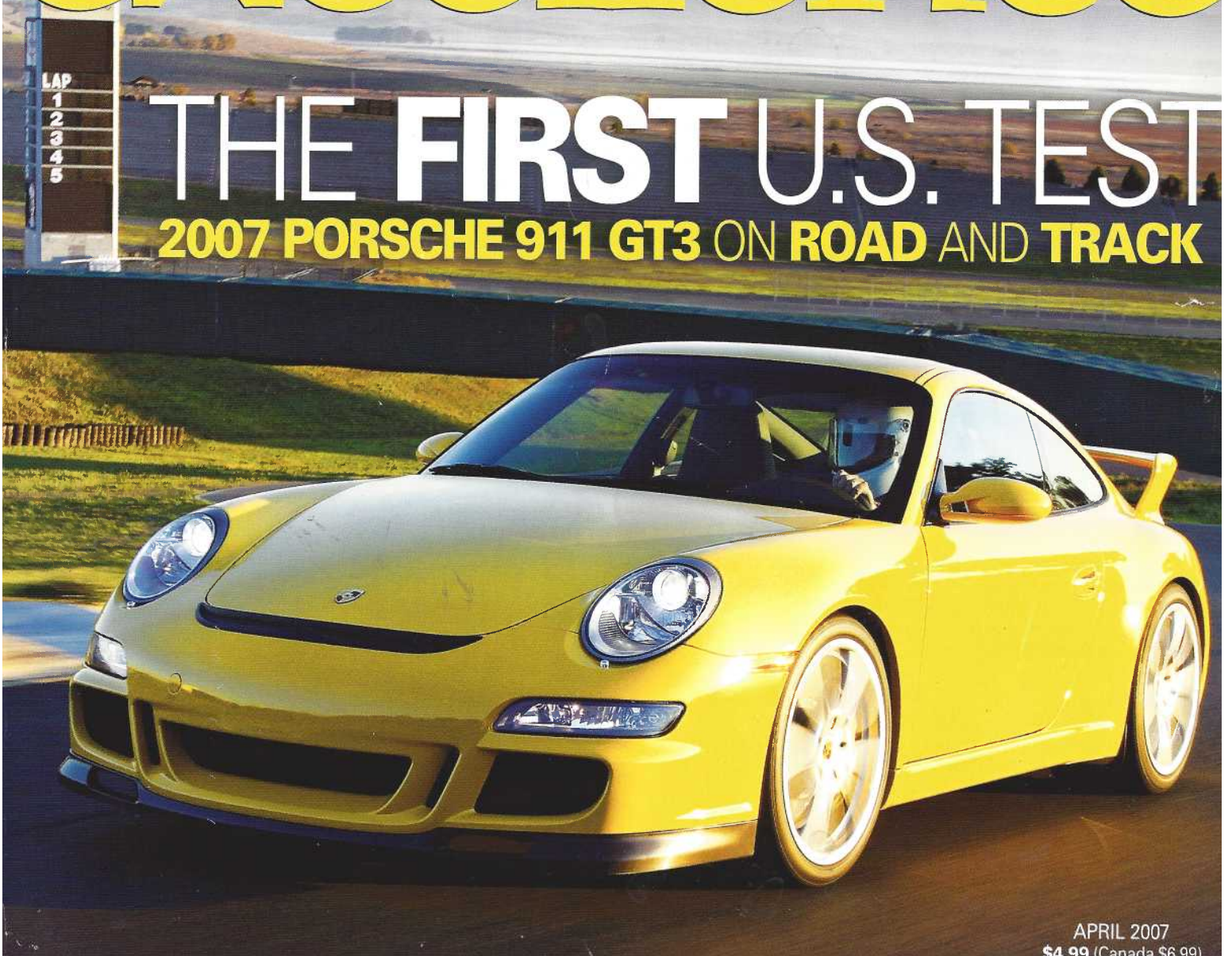




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# Into the Esses

DRIVING THE EX-BRUCE JENNINGS 911S

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN FLOW

As the garage door rises on a cold fall morning, the unmistakable lines of an early 911 are slowly revealed. Sitting down in the surprisingly comfortable factory sport seat, you know you're in for a special experience. This isn't just any early 911, though. It's an achingly beautiful short-wheelbase 1967 911S. And it belonged to the late Bruce Jennings, a famous 356 and 911 racer they called "King Carrera."

The mere sound of this 911S's door closing — well known to every air-cooled 911 driver — speaks volumes about the

build quality of this old car. Precision *and* strength are voiced by the *clic-ching* of the door hitting striker and frame. Better sounds are yet to come. Lifting the hand throttle, pumping the gas pedal, and twisting the key brings the peaky two-liter "S" engine to life. At first, the engine stumbles. Without chokes and accompanied by large 46-mm Weber carbs along with high-lift, long-duration camshafts, this little flat six was built for life at high rpm. Even so, it soon settles into a cooperative idle.

Listening to the flat six's whine, a smile is inevitable. The starting sequence and





accompanying sounds alone are a thrill — and this 911 hasn't even left the garage yet. After backing out of the driveway, slotting the shift lever over to the left and back calls up the 901 transmission's lowest forward ratio. This "dogleg" pattern is a racing remnant Porsche abandoned over 30 years ago. The change was made to satisfy daily drivers who valued an easier shift from first to second in stop-and-go traffic over quicker shifts from third to second and back again on fast back roads. Dogleg or no, rowing this five-speed 901 shifter is a satisfying process despite the long, long shift throws.

Lowering the fast-idle lever between the seats and easing the clutch out while gently revving the engine, the old Porsche pulls away effortlessly. The ease with which it does so only highlights the lightweight nature of the early 911s, which weigh 2,300 pounds or so. Accelerating slowly and grabbing second by pushing

the shift lever up and to the right, the cabin begins to resonate. There's an edginess to the feel and sound of this flat six as it warms through. Like a prizefighter taking practice swings on the walk to the ring, this car can't wait to get to the fight.

Driving past fading remnants of fall-colored leaves provides a cold reminder of winter's approach. The late-season sun, low on the horizon, highlights the sensuous lines of Ferdinand "Butzi" Porsche's legendary creation. Without big fender flares, large wheels with low-profile tires, or a tail adorning its decklid, there's real purity here — a seamless integration of function and flow that's faded during the 911's evolution. It's easy to become lost in wonder, admiring how the early morning light accentuates the flowing lines of the front fenders and the first Porsche hood that *really* dropped away.

As engine-oil temperatures reach the operational range on the VDO gauge, the

first breaths of real heat enter the cabin from the stamped steel hot-air collectors wrapped around the exhaust manifolds. Cracking a window lets more of the magnificent wail of the S motor in. Use of the short factory "airport" gears takes advantage of the 2.0-liter's appetite for revs. The tachometer's needle sweeps towards its 7300-rpm limit with alacrity. Between drivetrain noise, accelerative forces pushing you back into your seat gently, and the adrenaline pulsing through your veins, the stimuli is overwhelming. Concentration is required to shift up before the redline.

The early 911S motor produces one of the most beautiful sounds ever created by an automobile. The aural sensations and the small-bore six's appetite for revs are simply mind-boggling, leaving you to relish the way in which myriad mechanical elements can combine to create something that sounds so glorious. The combination of fan, carburetor, valvetrain, and exhaust noise provides a magical bit of *je ne sais quoi*. A deep, guttural growl at 3500 rpm quickly turns into an outright shriek by 5500 rpm, and the sprint from there to redline is indescribable. The engine has such deep lungs that, were it not for the rev limiter at 7300 rpm, the six would gleefully rev to eight grand with reckless abandon.

**THERE'S AN EDGINESS TO THE FEEL OF THIS FLAT SIX AS IT WARMS THROUGH, LIKE A PRIZEFIGHTER TAKING PRACTICE SWINGS ON THE WALK TO THE RING...**

The result is a 911 that's greater than the sum of its parts. You find yourself downshifting in anticipation of approaching tunnels or underpasses in order to engulf the surrounding environment with the engine's angry scream. While modern cars are typically engineered to isolate passengers from the driving experience, the early 911 recognizes that such antiseptic conditions are in contrast to relishing the glory of a sports car — power steering and sound-deadening be damned!

Early 911s do have their vices, though. Downshifting two gears approaching a decreasing-radius bend, you're reminded that early 911s don't suffer fools gladly. This pre-1969 short-wheelbase chassis — wearing still-cold treaded racing tires — dances gingerly back and forth in the corner as you counter the car's desire to swap ends. While a SWB 911 hardly inspires confidence, the thrill it provides more than makes up for that. You're left with the goal of mastering this special Porsche one day, which only adds to its appeal.

It takes little time behind the wheel to realize that a 911 like this one is wasted on the Interstate. It's in its element on twisty back roads, unfettered by traffic and other distractions. While it cruises easily, driving on straight highways at a constant rpm is a complete waste. The engine makes such wonderful music as it

climbs through the revs that forcing it to hold one note for more than a few minutes is a bit like listening to an orchestra play one bar of a great score. The 2.0-liter 911S was bred for narrow, twisty roads and wide-open spaces. Subjecting it to anything less misses the point.

### The 911, Plus Speed

Porsche had a remarkable racing season with its 911 in 1966, despite the fact it was a relatively new production car. The 911 won the SCCA D-Production National Championship, the European GT Hillclimb and Rally Championships, the Austrian GT Championship, and the German GT Race Championship. Building on this success as well as a tradition of track technology filtering down to its street cars, Porsche introduced the first of its now-legendary S-optioned 911s for the 1967 model year. Stuttgart recognized that some drivers wanted something more. As it had a decade earlier with the "four-cam" 356

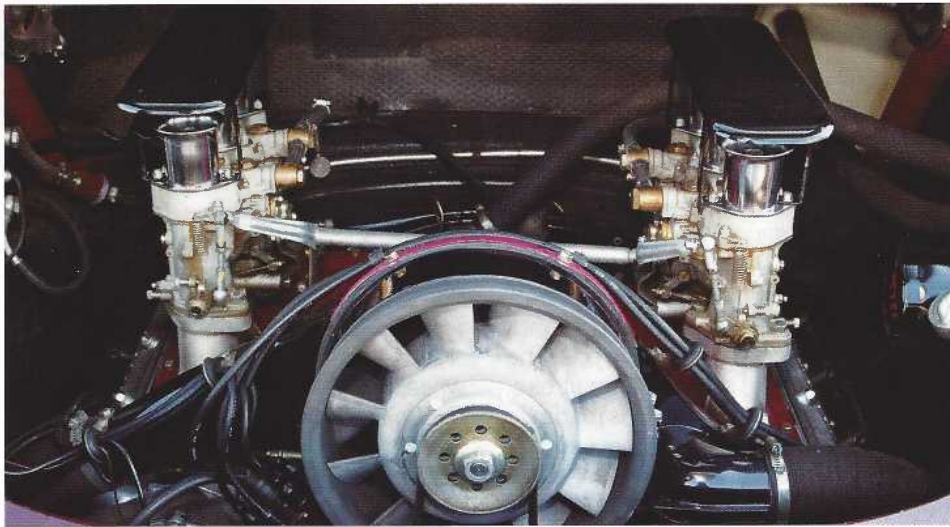
**The green leather works better in person than you'd think it would, while the tiny 2.0-liter flat six breathes through large 46-mm Weber carburetors. The Blaupunkt Frankfurt radio was on this 911S's original list of options, but the 15x6-inch Fuchs "deep six" alloys and Talbot racing mirrors were added by Bruce Jennings himself.**

Carrera, Porsche set out to build a 911 that was both faster and more fun to drive. For approximately \$7,000, Porsche delivered.

Starting with the suspension, the Fuchs forged alloy lightweight wheel appeared for the first time. Sized 15x4.5 inches, it mounted Dunlop SP 165 tires. Porsche also added vented disc brakes, a rear anti-roll bar, a larger front anti-roll bar, and Koni shocks. Interior additions included "velour" carpets, a leather-wrapped steering wheel, a "basket weave" insert on the front of the dashboard, extra gauges, and (optional) Recaro sport seats.

The S engine got high-crown pistons to increase the compression ratio, aluminum cylinders, larger valves, larger camshafts, new heat exchangers, and 40-mm Weber carburetors. The changes moved the redline to 7200 rpm, while power went from 130 to 160 bhp. Porsche quoted a curb weight of 2,250 pounds and automotive journalists of the day were able to reach 60 mph in under seven seconds — an impressive time for its day — by rowing through the new five-speed transmission. Quarter-mile times in the low teens were achieved at slightly over 90 mph. The top speed? An estimated 140 mph.

You had to really rev the engine to get that performance, however. With a modest 1991-cc displacement, the aforementioned larger valves, and high-lift, long-





duration camshafts, the 911S made peak horsepower at 6600 rpm. In fact, drivers accustomed to low-revving, big displacement American iron were often disappointed when they sampled a 911S. Until, that is, they learned how to drive one. The small 80-mm bore, short 66-mm stroke, 9.8:1 CR, and free-flowing heads made life near the redline a foregone conclusion.

Auto journalists of the time recognized that the S required something more of its driver, too. In September, 1966, *Autosport* magazine observed, "all the niceties of control and stability that are features of the modern rear-engined racing single-seater appear to be built into the 911S and that means that the car itself expects the pilot to possess a reasonable amount of intelligence, and a modicum of skill." January, 1967's *Motor Trend* noted, "It is obvious, since the 911 and 912 Porsche models are suited for the street, that the 911S's future lies in being a competition car."

That's probably what made the car so

**Jackie Stewart Momo wheel and racing belts were clearly favored by Jennings, while the stock 911S sport seat remained.**

appealing to Bruce Jennings. Nicknamed "King Carrera" for his success behind the wheel of 356 Carreras throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, Jennings' many accomplishments included winning the 1960 SCCA C-Production National Championship, his division's 1963 SCCA B-P and Washington's SCCA E-P Championships, and the 1964 SCCA C-P National Points Championship. By no means "limited" to 356s, Jennings raced 911s — including an extremely rare 911R. His abilities were recognized outside of Porsche circles, as he raced Chaparrals, Ford GT40s, Plymouth Barracudas, and Dodge Darts, too — with extensive experience at legendary tracks like Sebring, Daytona, and Le Mans.

In 1966, Jennings decided he wanted to buy something special for the street, but no "ordinary" 911S would do. Intimately

familiar with Porsche's cars and the performance options the factory was happy to provide for its favored sons, Jennings set out to build a brand-new 911S. His order for a 911S to be built in December, 1966 filed the following basic requests:

- Green-tinted Sekurit glass (option #9481)
- Front Recaro sport seats raised by 0.8-inch (option #9427) in leather (option #9428)
- Color-to-sample green interior
- Limited-slip differential (option #9574)
- Antenna (option #9303)
- Loud speaker (option #9307)
- Blaupunkt Frankfurt radio with speaker (option #9322)

Those were the basics, to which Bruce Jennings would add one more unique request. At the time, he had a friend who owned a 1966 Cadillac painted in a factory color called Autumn Rust Metallic, which is best described as a metallic burgundy with a touch of brown. Jennings was



so enamored with the color that he ordered his 911S in the same shade (option #9403), which Porsche described as “Bronze Metallic/color to sample.”

Possessing a tremendous stash of factory racing parts, Jennings wasn’t done modifying his new 911S. In addition to the options above, Jennings added five 15x6-inch “deep six” Fuchs forged alloy wheels (which had just been introduced for the 1968 model year) with longer studs and spacers and wider tires. The latter replaced the Dunlop SPs with what the car’s current owner, Don Ahearn, believes were Good-year 5.50 Blue Streaks. The addition of the wider tires necessitated “rolling” the fender lips in order to accommodate the larger rubber. The inner fender lips still show how crudely the modification was made, and one can envision Jennings adding clearance with a wooden baseball bat.

Additional modifications included lightweight rubber floor mats, two Talbot racing mirrors (Porsche option #9131 and

9132), an aftermarket adjustable front anti-roll bar, a Jackie Stewart Momo steering wheel, Koni racing shocks, racing belts, and shortened “airport” gear ratios (option #9592). Jennings also adjusted the ride height to get the famous “Jennings’ rake,” as he felt putting the front end higher than the rear improved the car’s capability in corners. The car has no carpeting in the front trunk, and Bridgers notes that no one recalls seeing the car with front carpeting, so it’s assumed Jennings removed it early on in order to reduce weight.

Jennings wasn’t interested in leaving the engine in its standard state of tune. He installed the following competition options out of Porsche’s Sports Purposes catalog:

- 46-mm Weber 3/3 C 1 carburetors, including larger jets and venturi
- Carburetor “rain shields”
- Larger inlet manifolds feeding ported heads
- Revised camshafts (believed to be 906 cams)
- Different spark plugs

- Oil “collection box” (made by Porsche from a windshield-washer-fluid reservoir)

The larger carburetors, intake manifolds, and rain-shield setup raised the overall intake height, enough so to interfere with the decklid and require modifications to the decklid intake grill screen. But the result of all of Jennings’ efforts was a very special car — one that blended Porsche’s dual-purpose racing and street heritage perfectly. The car’s current owner doesn’t think #306945 was ever used as one of Jennings’ primary race cars, though there *is* evidence that it may have occasionally seen limited competitive use.

Jennings kept #306945 for many years, having last registered it in 1985. Noted Porsche restorer Weldon Scrogam of Waynesboro, Virginia bought the car from Jennings’ estate following his death after a long battle with emphysema in 1997. The 911 subsequently passed through the hands of a few Porsche enthusiasts



before being purchased by Don Ahearn in 2005. Ahearn bought the car from Tom Bridgers without seeing it in person, and wasn't sure if he would like the color. That is understandable, as the car's color combination — metallic burgundy with a green interior — doesn't sound good on paper. Fortunately, it works in person, something that was confirmed when the 911S arrived at Ahearn's house. Says Bridgers: "When Don first saw the car, he called me and said he had fallen in love."

Ahearn has an extensive Porsche collection and has a soft spot for pre-1969 short-wheelbase 911s with original Sports Purposes options. Although his collection is always changing and has spanned everything from a 1968 German *Polizei* Targa to a 2004 GT3, he says the Jennings S is one of his favorites. He loves the car for its "rawness, noise, and multiple inputs constantly bombarding you." Bridgers agrees with Ahearn's assessment, commenting that what he remembers most about the car was its sound.

Jennings' 911S is in remarkable condition today, despite having reached its

40th birthday, with just 33,000 miles on the odometer. Apart from the period modifications performed by Jennings, Ahearn says the car is totally original — including its paint, which is in extraordinary shape with only minor rock chips on its front end. Thankfully, Ahearn has no plans to respray the nose — a move that would destroy the fabulous patina only an original car can possess. Ahearn actually likes the paint chips, for a simple reason: "Jennings was behind the wheel when most of the chips were acquired, so they're part of a significant history." Recognizing the importance of preserved imperfection is refreshing in a hobby that's too often perfection-driven.

Since acquiring #306945, Ahearn has done very little to the car — aside from a thorough detailing. He did, however, have Harvey Weidman restore all five 15x6-inch Fuchs alloy wheels. When Ahearn purchased the car, it came with Goodyear Eagle GT tires, which left ugly gaps in the fender wells. Weidman and Ahearn determined there would have been no need to clearance the lips for anything smaller than a 5.50 tire. Looking at popular tires

during the period in which the car was originally modified by Jennings, the duo determined that Jennings likely ran Goodyear Blue Streak 5.50s, which Weidman mounted on the restored Fuchs. The visual impact of the vintage Goodyears really sets the car apart, significantly contributing to its dual-purpose look.

This is a very special 911S and Ahearn says it's a keeper, admitting that, if he ever had to thin his collection, #306945 would likely be the last one to go. Bridgers recognizes the allure of this car is that it wasn't built with compromises to appeal to a broad audience. Says Bridgers: "The car is very cold-natured — and it takes awhile to get some heat into it. But once you do... The new cars are great, but this car represents what it was all about back then: function. This wasn't a GT car."

Now living a pampered life of semi-retirement in Long Island among a collection of vintage Porsches, Jennings' former steed still sees occasional use on back roads. Get behind its wheel, and it's easy to fantasize you're a famous racer from a bygone era with skilled hands and lightning reflexes, finding your "game face" along twisty back roads on your way to slay giants at a local SCCA race. Jennings probably didn't foresee such ideas when he built his own Sports Purposes 911S, but we're sure he'd be glad to know one of his favorite 911s is still being used as he — and Porsche — intended it to be. ■

HE LOVES THE CAR FOR ITS **"RAWNESS,  
NOISE, AND MULTIPLE INPUTS** CONSTANTLY  
BOMBARDING YOU..."