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An American Dream

This rare 1967 911 factory-equipped Rally Kit car is almost as remarkable as its original owner.

STORY BY PETER LINSKY
PHOTOS BY DENNIS GRAY, THE NIEDERER COLLECTION AND JOE CALI

Born into an impoverished Swiss family, Hans Niederer wanted nothing more than to seek a better life in America. He came to the United States in 1956 as a 17-year-old, not speaking a word of English. Inspired by the Western movies that were so popular in Europe during that period, his childhood ambition had been to become a cowboy, but it didn't take long for Niederer to figure out that his dream career was just that, a movie fantasy.

When life with his host family became untenable, he packed his meager possessions and walked out, having no clue as what to do next. Fortunately, a neighbor intervened and took the unhappy teenager in. That gentleman was the father of the woman who would become Niederer's first wife. After he moved in with her family, she patiently taught him enough English that he was able to secure a better job, and eventually become a skilled electrician. He would marry the daughter, whose name was Joyce, have two children, and settle into a comfortable American life.

Since his childhood, Niederer had dreamed of owning a Porsche. A ride in the back of an acquaintance's 356 as a youth compelled him to promise himself that he would one day own one of his own. Shortly after getting settled into married life, he bought his first Porsche, a Stone Gray 356 1500 coupe. Unfortunately, that car was destroyed when another driver rearranged the front end of the car back to the windshield.

A used white Super 90 found on a used

car lot in Binghamton, New York, was his next acquisition. Despite the ministrations of Jiri Nechleba, a skilled mechanic who operated an imported car dealership and service shop in Vestal, New York, that car had some major issues, so Niederer sold it.

Then, he found another 1500 coupe in New Berlin that needed engine work. He'd previously met a German mechanic named Willhelm Schek, from the nearby town of Oneonta. Schek helped get that car in proper running order, but when the engine finally gave up the ghost, Schek told him: "You buy the parts, and I'll show you how to rebuild the motor." Then, says Niederer, he did exactly what he'd been cautioned *not* to do with one of the wrist pins, tapping it into a piston with a bit more force than was appropriate. He crossed his fingers that everything would stay together. Unfortunately, it didn't; the abused piston cracked.

After selling that 356, Niederer began thinking about what he wanted next and began putting money aside for a new car. Nechleba's shop had by then become something of a Friday night gathering spot. When Niederer shared his plans with Nechleba, the Czech shop owner told him that he knew of something that might be of interest. Niederer's ears perked up since Nechleba held a Porsche dealership franchise.

Sports Purpose

The "something" was a new 130-hp 1967 911 coupe that had been ordered from the factory under the "Sports

Purpose Program" and would soon arrive at Porsche of America's east coast distributorship in Teaneck, New Jersey. The price of the new 911, however, was considerably more than Niederer had available, so he scrambled to get the extra thousand or so dollars together for the cash purchase. "I worked many long weekends," he recalls, and after making sure his family responsibilities were covered, he placed whatever extra money he'd earned carefully in the glovebox of his work truck.

When the 911 arrived at Nechleba's dealership on June 22, 1967, Niederer discovered the car was quite special. The distributor's invoice for chassis number 308.299, engine number 911.849, showed a base price of \$5,999.90, plus \$80.00 extra for a five-speed transmission—Option 9590—and another \$288.00 for the factory "Rally Kit," Option 9552. Total price: \$6,358.00, a lot of money for the day. Strangely, the typed invoice listed the 911 as a "four-cylinder." Niederer was delighted; soon declaring that his new externally-plain-Jane-with-steel-wheels Sand Beige coupe "was almost as fast as a 911S!"

In 1966, the then-still-new 911 had run roughshod over its D-Production competition, so the following year, the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) bumped the car up a class, where it faced tougher opposition. 911 coupes fitted with that optional "Rally Kit" for 1967 had an advantage. The carefully-selected package included a pair of weight-saving Recaro bucket seats or 911 R racing seats, rubber floor mats, and gas heater delete.

Rally Kit-equipped cars also got a “dead pedal” for the driver’s left foot, 15-mm anti-roll bars front and rear, Koni adjustable shock absorbers, Dunlop 165 x 15 sports tires, racing brake pads, a special alternator, and deletion of both the gas heater and the infamous “front bumper supports,” as the factory euphemistically described them. Those were in actuality the 50.6 pounds of lead weights stuffed into the bumper bar to help tame the car’s tendency to wander in side winds.

The drivetrain had been massaged by Porsche’s Competition Department as well, with carefully polished and matched manifolds and cylinder heads, the inclusion of a competition clutch and flywheel, a special alternator, full 911S instrumentation, and reinforced engine mounts. All these items had been homologated by the factory and accepted by the SCCA as production options. Fewer than 10 1967 911s left Zuffenhausen with the full factory Rally Kit, and just 30 were so equipped in 1968.

With this potent weapon in hand, Niederer and his wife Joyce spent a year autocrossing, winning almost every event they entered. Then, Niederer decided to go road racing. He’d joined the Southern New York region of SCCA in the early 1960s and had served as a flag marshal for a dozen years before the racing bug bit. He enlisted the help of his friend Robert Geers, a shop instructor at a nearby high school. Together, they studied the rule-book, and prepared the car for SCCA competition. That included a roll bar and lowering the car about two inches, an exercise that involved string and a protractor to set up the rear suspension. The front was slightly decambered.

To the Track

Niederer attended his first SCCA driving school at Nelson Ledges in Garrettsville, Ohio on May 1, 1971, and earned his Novice, Regional, and National licenses. As his driving skills developed, Niederer began picking up regular Regional and National podium finishes, running primarily at Watkins Glen, Lime Rock, and Thompson Raceway. The little beige 911 also ran the 1969 Watkins Glen Trans-Am, Can-Am, and Six-Hour Championship weekends.

Niederer soon figured out that his 911 needed wider wheels. Since Porsche lacked Fuchs alloys of the appropriate size, he purchased a set of wider Minilites. Niederer added a center-fill through-hood gas cap,

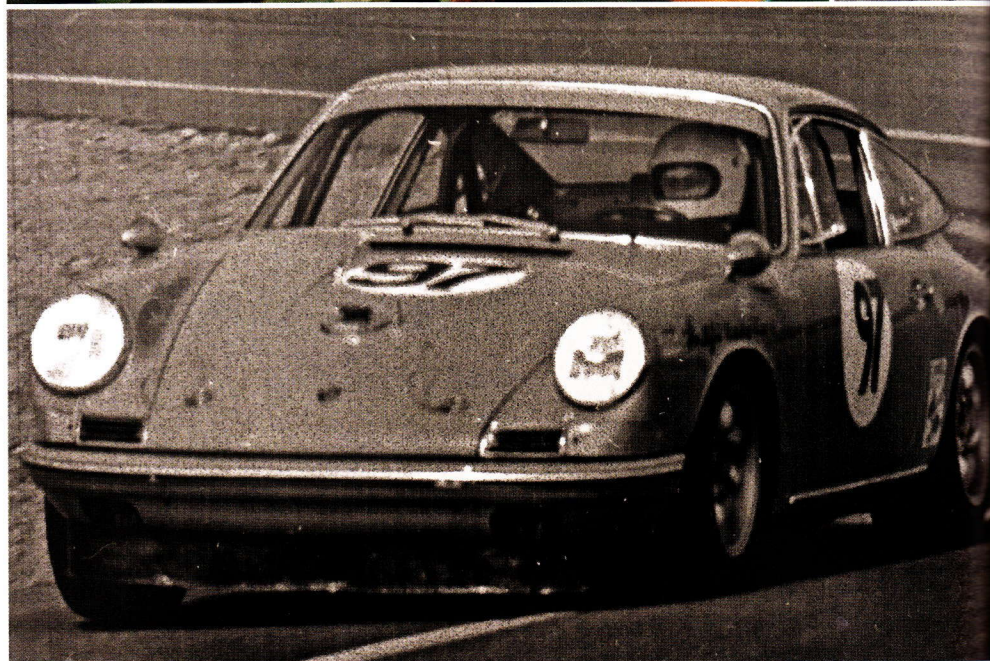
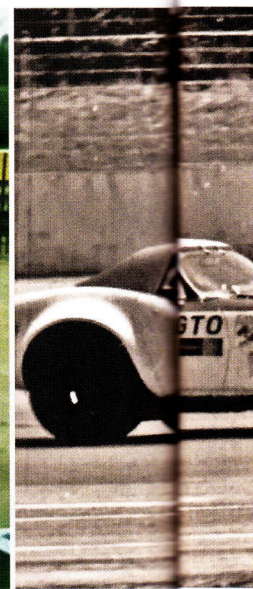
a front spoiler, and hand-painted lettering, “HanJo Racing Team”—signifying the names of the owner and his wife, carefully applied to each front fender.

By the close of the 1971 season, Niederer was claiming class wins at a regular clip. He became the C-Production champion of the Southern New York Region of SCCA, was named his Region’s Driver of The Year, and brought home the 1971 New York State Driving Championship trophy. The following season, Niederer was ready to step up to the professional level.

The International Motor Sports Association (IMSA) had a category for smaller-displacement engines, GTU, or “Grand Touring Under,” the “under” meaning less than 2.5 liters displacement.

Even with the Rally Kit tweaks, the little 2.0-liter that he’d been using so successfully in SCCA contests wouldn’t be strong enough when the competition could have as much as half-a-liter advantage.

In January 1972, Niederer contacted Vasek Polak Porsche in Hermosa Beach, California, looking for some specific racing bits. Polak’s parts manager, Arnold Wagner, let it be known that he had a race-prepared Porsche six-cylinder “short block” available, less the fan, muffler, sheet metal and muffler. The SCCA-approved powerplant would include a lightened competition flywheel and clutch, “forty-over” pistons and cylinders, and 906 camshafts. The price would be \$1,400. Wagner also suggested the use of a pair of



911 R headers and an extractor exhaust. Niederer bought the engine, which he found to be very strong, but he had to keep the revs up; all its power was between 6,000 and 8,000 rpm.

Porsche provided a set of proper Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) homologation papers, and Niederer obtained his required IMSA and FIA racing license, which was issued April 24, 1972. IMSA races found Niederer going up against both professional teams and well-financed amateurs. Although racing on a shoestring budget, Niederer proved quite competitive.

Arriving at Pocono Raceway in Long Pond, Pennsylvania for the IMSA 500-mile Grand Prix of Pocono in June 1973, Niederer went out to practice with well-

used rubber, a pair of dry tires and another pair of intermediates. "They looked like bicycle tires compared to the other cars," he recalls. Grip, as well as handling, was compromised, but when Niederer went to the tire truck to replace his old rubber, the crew laughed, telling him that that size and compound had not been available for years.

Niederer bought a full set of new Goodyear slicks, but when they were mounted on the car, they were so much wider that they rubbed on the rear fender lip, necessitating some crude modifications with a large hammer. They also rubbed on the inside, so Niederer visited all the other Porsche teams in the paddock, looking for some spacers to borrow. One team from

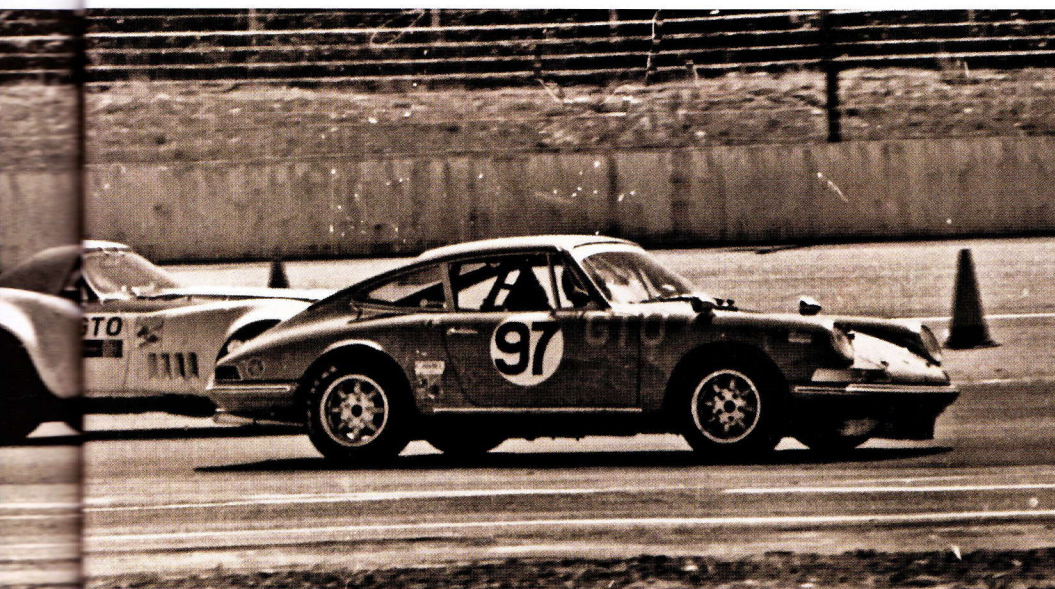
Ohio graciously lent him the required spacers for the weekend and Niederer was in business, immediately cutting more than 10 seconds from his lap times.

Niederer says his experience as an SCCA flag marshal served him well; he knew when the starter was going to wave the green. "When he raised his arm, I got on it!" Diving down close to the wall, he moved quickly toward the front of the 54-car pack, but once the GTO cars got up to speed, cubic inches took over.

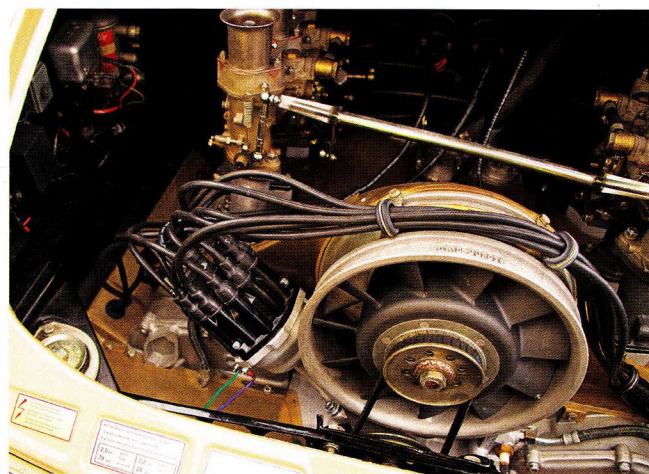
Niederer recalls with some pride that he never suffered a mechanical DNF in his 911, but came close at that Pocono race, when a fire broke out in the engine compartment. "The hollow bolt that held the gas line to the carburetor on the right side loosened and the car would sputter then go like crazy again." Another driver, Hans Ziereis, had spun out ahead of him. As Niederer passed Ziereis's BMW, the other driver shot back onto the track and hit him in the rear fender.

As Niederer pitted, gas sprayed out of the leaky fitting and onto the hot exhaust and suddenly the rear of the car was ablaze. "Ziereis had stopped in front of me and there was a Camaro pitted behind me. Both of those crews quickly put the fire out. After things cooled off, we were able to look at the damage. Everything, of course, was white from the fire extinguisher, but we found the bolt. We re-installed it, cleaned up the engine and went out again. My co-driver Fran Larkin then missed a shift and broke a rocker arm and came in. We fixed that, I went back out and finished the race."

He and Larkin would be classified in 22nd place, completing 111 laps, 68 fewer than the race winner, but they did finish. Says Niederer, "The car was fast; if we



Top left: Sam Posey (l) chats up Hans (r) and his crew at Lime Rock. Top right: A faster GTO entry passes Hans's 911 at Pocono; the Porsche finished but the Corvette did not. Below, left to right: A homemade nose spoiler, a 906-spec engine that makes plenty of power, and a simple racing interior.



hadn't lost so much time with the fire, we might have finished much higher."

Restoring the Rally-Kitted 911

By late 1974, racing for an unsponsored driver had grown too expensive, so Niederer parked the car. "The races I ran were lots of fun for me and good experiences. I enjoyed the whole thing." The racing engine had been damaged in its last race at Lime Rock that fall, so it came out and the car's original powerplant was reinstalled. Then the 911 was carefully stored away in his garage in Oxford, New York, still wearing the racing tires from its last track excursion. The car had accrued fewer than 36,000 original miles.

As the years passed, Niederer divorced and remarried; he and his new wife Carol remained active in the sports car community. They bought a 944 Turbo, and Niederer

later write that he trailered the beige coupe back to his shop in Palm Beach and took it apart, determining that the paint was about 90 percent original, with almost no evidence of rust or accident damage. He took note of what he described as "trackside" rear fender flares to make room for those wider Minilite wheels and a bit of a scrape to one rocker panel, but otherwise, he was happy to find the car in almost fully original condition.

The tub was placed on a rotisserie and all the undercoating was scraped off, then it was given a full media blasting. All the bolt-on panels were removed for stripping, and then everything was taken to Greg Michaelian's restoration shop in Stuart, Florida, where it was resprayed its original color of Sand Beige, then returned to Klubsport for reassembly.

Ahearn had scrapped the damaged

rated Rally Kit II brakes were overhauled.

The fuel tank was replaced by a new 22-gallon ATL fuel cell. Although the dash pad was recovered, along with the door cards and rear interior panels, Bagley writes that he left the rest of the interior largely as it was found. Carefully preserved were all the little dash plaques from Niederer's early autocrosses and races. The pair of 911 R-style deep bucket competition seats was retained, along with the car's original single hoop roll bar and Prototipo steering wheel.

Writing in the Early 911S Registry's *Esses* magazine, Bagley said that after the restoration was completed he drove the car on the street for a while, then race-prepped it and installed a period-correct set of headers and megaphone exhausts. He took the car to the Monterey Historic Races in 2009 where it appeared in its former IMSA livery.

In 2010, a set of polished Fuchs alloys was installed and the hood panel was painted flat black. Bagley then offered the car for sale, and noted California Porsche collector and vintage racer Jeff Lewis became its next owner. Lewis kept the car from July 2010 through the fall of 2014, when it again passed through Don Ahearn's hands in a trade for another 2.0-liter 911 race car. While in Ahearn's custody, the Minilite wheels had been replaced by American Racing five-spoke magnesium wheels and was trimmed in Niederer's original SCCA C-Production livery.

In December 2014, it was acquired by its current Colorado owner, Andrew Larson. In 2015, the car with its original engine was delivered to Mark Eskuche at Ecurie Engineering in Mequon, Wisconsin, and that engine was rebuilt. The 906-spec engine that had been supplied by Klubsport was completely rebuilt as well, and that engine is in the car today.

Hans Niederer was reunited with his old 911, again in GTU trim and shod with period-correct Minilites, at Rennsport V in Monterey last September. Wearing a wide smile, he and his wife and daughter watched as Larson put the car through its paces around the challenging Laguna Seca circuit. It is believed that of the 40 or so 911s delivered from the factory with Rally Kits, fewer than 15 survive, and there are only four or five that retain their original engine. For those who believe that the late 1960s and 1970s were the Golden Age of Porsche's production-car racing dominance, watching a pack of 911s like this running at full song was a highlight of the weekend. ■

1967 911 Rally Kit Specs

Drive	Rear-wheel drive
Layout	Rear-engine
Wheelbase	87.05 inches
Engine	2.0-liter flat-six
Transmission	5-speed manual
Horsepower	160 hp
Torque	140 lb-ft
Weight	2,100 lbs
Power-to-Weight	13.1 lbs/hp
0-60 mph	8.0 seconds
Top Speed	129 mph
Original MSRP	\$6,358 (1967)



Above: Hans Niederer earned a lot of silverware with his Rally Kit-equipped 1967 Porsche 911.

remained involved with the Southern New York region of the SCCA. Then, as interest in vintage racing continued to grow and the value of old Porsches with a racing pedigree began to rise, Niederer felt his old 911 needed a new home. In late 2004, the 911 with both engines was sold to New York Porsche collector and racer Don Ahearn.

Says Niederer: "I gave him the Homologation papers I got from the factory, the New York Road Racing Championship Trophy I won in 1971 and other material with the car. The history of the car is what made it valuable."

Ahearn quickly contacted his friend Phil Bagley at Klubsport Racing in Florida, and a swap was negotiated. Don got Phil's 1968 911L Lightweight, and Bagley got the Niederer 911. Phil would

race engine case, so Klubsport specialist Bruce Elsworth, using the best of the Carrera 6 pieces in his inventory, carefully built up a new twin-plug race motor. The car's original engine was "bagged and shelved" since Bagley recognized its value as part of the 911's history. Elsworth rebuilt the transaxle using the gearing that had been in the car when Niederer raced it. The early Nadella half-shafts were replaced with later-type CV joints.

The suspension was rebuilt with hard plastic bushings; all components were media-blasted, replated, and repainted. The chassis was fitted with 32-mm torsion bars in front and 21-mm bars in the rear, along with factory-correct adjustable spring plates. A set of new adjustable Konis was installed, and the 911's original up-