

Gary Emory's "Outlaw" Porsches

by David Coleman in 1994

If there are two poles that define the continuum of Porsche pursuit, one would be labeled Concours and the other Consume.

On the one hand, you have the concours police, vigorously patrolling the Porsche kingdom in Targa cruisers marked "To Preserve and Polish." This force, invested with sacred edicts from the factory, determines transgressions against originality and metes out appropriate punishment in the form of Black Forest demerits. To these purist custodians, simply driving a Porsche is an unpardonable sin.

At the other extreme, you can find an equally demented group of Porsche perverts who actually believe their cars were built to be driven daily on real roads. This clan remains steadfastly insensitive to the mandates of the concours politizei, instead concerning themselves with pressing issues like tire inflation and shock valving. The driving brigade rates itself on a sliding scale based on nanoseconds of tardiness. Always pressed for time this sect issues Space Saver demerits to the lap-time impaired.

Gary Emory's friends call him "the Outlaw." Guess which end of the spectrum you can find him on. Here's a hint: he doesn't put a heavy premium on removing lint from the pores of air filters. True, there was a time when Emory cared about such perversions, back at the beginning of a long and varied career dedicated to the marque we all love. In 1960, he went to work as a parts boy for Chick Iverson Porsche in Newport Beach, California. By 1965, he had become thoroughly immersed in the concours scene, garnering third place in the full concours class with his '61 356 coupe at the Santa Barbara Parade.

He moved on to prepare a '58 speedster, which he displayed in the street concours category, and followed that up by displaying a couple of real oddball Porsches that could only have been spawned by the fertile "Kustom Kar Kulture" of Los Angeles. The first was the Bertone Porsche 911 that John von Neumann bought for himself, then sold to Chick Iverson. The second was the four-door 911 that Troutman and Barnes created as a test mule Porsche sedan. Later still, Emory, along with younger brother Ken, prepped a '65 C coupe which dominated Zone 8 concours events for three years in the late seventies.

But it gradually dawned on Gary Emory that his passion for polishing was waning rather than waxing. He was starting to take that hike down the Porsche highways from concours to consumption, and nothing was going to turn the tide back ever again: "I wanted to build cars I could enjoy more, and drive more, we were so busy toothbrushing 'em that we were afraid to drive them anywhere. In those days, we used to drive them to concours, then work for hours getting them all cleaned up. When we were all through, we'd say, 'You know, that wasn't so much fun.' After ten years of that, I decided to get into fun cars, especially vintage cars."

In order to sell his concept to potential customers, Emory decided to build a few examples of the kind of 356 he had in mind when he envisioned a "fun car." But Emory's idea of fun is just a little more refined than that of your average enthusiast because of his 25 year stint in the Porsche parts business. After 16 years with Iverson, he founded his own parts company, Parts Obsolete in Costa Mesa, California. There he concentrated on buying dead inventory from the seven Porsche distributors in the U.S., cataloging the parts, and making them available to enthusiasts who could find the nowhere else.

He also took charge of monumental cache of original racing parts for the 356, 550, 904, and 906, items that dealers had been unable to sell. The boom years for Parts Obsolete ended when Porsche Cars North America took over U.S. distribution of all factory parts in 1984, including the remaindered ones Emory had been buying from the distributors. It was then he started to steer his business toward its current direction—constructing and selling competition-look 356s.

In addition to an intimate working knowledge of Porsche nuts and bolts, Emory also learned to love the unhindered expressionism of the L.A. car culture. Growing up in the San Fernando valley of the fifties, he became immersed in the burgeoning customizing scene, because his father Neil ran a popular mecca for hot rodders called Valley Custom. The senior Emory collaborated with Dean Batchelor and Alex Xydias to field the legendary So-Cal Speed Shop streamliner which Batchelor drove to a 2 way average speed of 208.927 at Bonneville in 1950.

In the late fifties, Neil Emory closed the family business and signed on as body shop manager for Chick Iverson. By 1960, son Gary had joined the staff as an apprentice gofer, and there in Newport Beach, he observed the worlds of Porsche and Cal Custom colliding to produce a unified vision of Teutonic Kool.

Emory watched as one 356 customer after another left Iverson, sporting Nardi or Derrington wood laminate steering wheels, and decambered suspensions to lower ride height. Other tricks of the day included reversing the rims to gain offset toward the outside of the car, then chroming the beefier-looking wheels for improved appearance. Nerf bars replaced the clumsy stock bumpers, factory exhausts gave way to Bursch stingers, and Lucas Flamethrower driving lites assumed precarious perches on slender nose brackets. It was a stripped, sleeves-rolled-up look that Emory would not forget when it came time to have a little "fun" with the 356s he would design for driving rather than judging.

Although Emory would never suggest tampering with any rare, original 356, he convincingly argues that there are many early Porsches which can be improved by judicious customization: "There are a lot of cars that are not suited to be full concours restorations. It's just too costly and the parts are too hard to get. I wanted to prove that you could take a car that didn't have everything to begin with, and turn it into something people could still appreciate."

Ever since 1957, when Emory first laid eyes on pin-striper Dean Jeffries' tastefully remodeled 356A show car, he has had the urge to give Porsche's inverted bathtub the Cal Custom treatment. By the time he was ready to follow through on that wish some 25 years later, he had drastically refined his vision of the uncluttered look exemplified by Jeffries's seminal coupe, Emory added his own blend of vintage production racing equipment to the portfolio. Different combinations of the same basic mirrors, wheels, lights and seats keep surfacing on all the 356s he currently turns out.

Emory's initial foray into the resurrection business was a '57 A coupe which was to set the pattern for subsequent restorations. Initially, the idea was to use the coupe as a test horse for a color scheme Emory intended to transfer to a speedster he also owned and planned to restore. The Speedster had originally been factory finished in aqua with red leather, but before committing to that combination on such an expensive car, he decided to do a trial run of those colors on the A coupe- "I'm gutsy, but I still wanted to see the combination fresh before I started the speedster." He finished the coupe in record time (45 days), called it "Quickie" in honor of that fact, and pronounced himself happy enough with the results to proceed with the same colors on Speedster, because "everyone went ooh and ahh at the events where I showed Quickie."

However, Emory didn't quite have the guts to duplicate the original shade of aqua, "because I don't care aqua myself." Thus the color of choice for Quickie as well as the Speedster became Wedgewood Blue. The leather stayed Red, and Quickie turned up with most of the styling cues that would identify all of Emory's future projects cars: plastic side windows, roll cage, Speedster seats, leather GT hood straps, Derrington steering wheel, mesh headlight baskets (stoneshields), large racing numbers (in this case, white roundel, black #80), and finally, the signature of the Emory series, the Mobil Flying Horse, Pegasus hand painted on both rear flanks, Carrera Panamericana style.

By 1990, Emory was really into the spirit of revitalizing Porsche's early cars. The '56 A Coupe he completed in time for the 356 Holiday at Morro Bay in June, 1990 carried the big number "45" on its flanks. It is a prime example of its genre. When it arrived in his shop, it was the Oksana Baiul of the 356 world- an orphan whose parts had been utilized for the greater good of restoring a '58 Speedster. Emory was on the verge of torching the remnants to salvage front and rear clips when his dismantler reported that doing so would waste a platform that was still basically sound. A little investigation enabled Emory to locate some of the missing parts which had just been sold by the previous owner. While the engine, transmission and gauges were irrevocably committed to the Speedster, he was able to retrieve the hood, doors, and decklid that belonged to the coupe.

A couple of special twist distinguish #45 from anything Emory has done before since. The first is the unique treatment of the rear quarter windows, which are no longer transparent, but solid, louvered plates in the tradition of fifties Le Mans-type Porsche. The effect adds just the right touch to the silver coupe, imparting an authenticity to the finished product

that convinces you of the car's racing provenance. I recall thinking, when I first saw it displayed at the Monterey Historic races in 1990, 'This must be one of the factory Le Mans team cars from the early fifties..'

The windows were a brainstorm inspired by Emory's desire to make the '56 look like "an early Gmund race car." The creative process involved playing with cardboard and primer until he achieved the effect he wanted - "I rolled the edges of the templates and finally decided, why not just weld them in place? So I took the drip rails off, and welded in the quarter window" The louvers are also functional, with shallow Plexiglas ducting that starts at the front inside edge of each window, and grows into a large scoop which feeds fresh air to the engine compartment.

Since so much of the original car had been sacrificed to rebuild a Speedster, it seemed only appropriate that the coupe should in turn claim a dash panel usurped from a defunct 356 convertible. The idea came to Emory in the form of a dream- "I woke up one time in the middle of the night and thought how neat it would be to have a Speedster dash in a coupe. So I stuck a Roadster dash in there after I cut the original one out." Red Speedster seats, a red leather-covered dash, and a 550 spyder "banjo" style steering wheel complete the virtual falsity.

The Mobil Pegasus horses, hand painted on both aft quarters by Phil Anderson, are just the right finishing touch to the project. Power comes from a 2.0 liter 914 engine using an upright, rather than horizontal, fan assembly, A Sebring exhaust, 80-liter gas tank, polished spyder brakes, and 6 x 16" wheels complement the specification sheet. Although Emory built the coupe himself, He sold it to Mike Letterman, who lives in Italy and now campaigns the car in European vintage races. Emory's insatiable appetite for rehabilitating 356s quickly prompted him to undertake a new family project.

As a gift to his son Rod, Emory backdated a '53 A to look like a pre-A dating from '50-'51. Rod, who is now 20, has a predisposition for athletic machinery. He has already been racing three-wheelers and superlites in Mickey Thompson stadium events for years, so dad thought a tricked-out, racy driveable 356 would suit his son just fine. The '53 coupe was very rough when it came to Parts Obsolete, riddled with dents and hail-like pock marks everywhere. Using some of his extensive parts inventory, Emory converted the basket case to show car condition. He redid the interior to look like an early coupe, using original parts throughout, including wooden top rails on the door panels. The early bumpers are reproduction items, but the beehive taillights, Ray dot mirrors, amber driving lights, and Sebring pea shooter exhaust are all original Porsche stock.

Emory is the first to admit that "if you had a real '50 or '51, you wouldn't want to make it into a race car like this," but he sees nothing wrong with taking a clapped-out wreck and honing it to a fine luster. In the case of his son's car, that luster is a deep Mercedes blue, counter-pointed by hand-painted yellow numerals (#80) done with a sign painter's flourish by Phil Anderson. Steve Schmidt of Honest Engine in Costa Mesa, California collaborated with Vic Skirmants of SCCA E Production renown to build a 1300cc G Production motor that keeps the lightweight coupe sufficiently on the boil to titillate its 20 year old owner.

For his own pleasure, Emory then crafted a '65 356 that in many ways represents the mirror image of his son's car. The most obvious flip-flop is the color scheme of the '65, which is chrome yellow Mercedes blue digits (#81). If you closely at the photographs, you will see that #81 happens to be right-hand drive, one of the last 356s to leave the factory for England in 1966. The Cardex , or build sheet, reveals that this car sat at the factory, unsold, until it was finally shipped, still new, to England- long after 356 production had actually ceased. Bumper removal cleans up its appearance dramatically. 550-style oil cooler ducts replace the turn signals of the track-only car. The Super-Oscar frog-eyed landing lights appended to the hood contribute an impertinent cartoon character to the coupe's visage, But the businesslike interior is on joke, with its factory rally package instrumentation, Plexiglas windows, full roll cage, and Danny Ongais blessed 935 steering wheel.

Emory appreciates the reverse symmetry of the father/son team: "The old man gets the later car with the right hand drive and the big bore (1720cc) engine, the kid gets the early car with the left-hand drive and the small bore motor." Photographer Hal Thoms, who has witnessed the pair competing against each other, comments "You should see them going side-by-side down the track , racing each other in events in the Pacific Northwest. I won't tell you how is faster...."

Faster than either of the Emory's be a bunch is Milt Minter in Desperado, yet another 356 creation of Emory's fertile imagination. Minter, the semi-retired hotshoe whom many acknowledge to have been fastest Porsche ace on the West Coast in his day (1960-70), is currently tooling around his farmland in Sanger, California in Desperado, and outrageous track racer, now only marginally related to the Porsche 356 from which it sprang over a decade ago. In 1982, when this

'56 A coupe had outlived its usefulness as a production racer, Emory and Jacques La friant of San Diego, California decided to convert it into a PCA/POC time trail test bed for their development ideas. Originally raced with a pushrod motor and a 901 gearbox, the ratty coupe soon received a VW transfusion in the form of a Type 4 motor pumped up to 2.4 liters.

It was then that Emory recruited Minter as test driver for a Willow Springs POC (Porsche Owners Club) event, where Minter surprised everyone by cranking out a timed lap at 1 minute, 32 seconds- astoundingly rapid for a '56 Porsche. Emory narrates the events of the weekend: "We asked Milt what he thought of the car. So on Saturday, he goes out in practice, makes one warm-up lap and one hot lap, and comes back in. In that German/Mexican accent of his, which is really hard to duplicate, he says, 'Oh ya, man, it's rilly quick, but mebbe you need a little more top end.' So I asked him, 'Milt, what gear were you in at the top end?' And says, 'Fourt' gear, man.' I said, 'Milt, It's a five-speed...' " The next day, Minter collected the POC track record with only one warm-up lap and two flyers.

Since that time, the Desperado has grown quicker by the year. The type 4 powerplant has given way to a four cylinder conversation of a 2.25 liter 911 motor. The condensed four is brainchild of Dean Popopolus, a former business partner of Kevin Jeanette at Service Porsche in San Juan Capistrano, California. Popopolus constructed the flat four as a prototype for midget racing applications. Similar in principle to the winning V-4 midget motors SESCO produces by shortening GM's V-6 block, Polopolus' exercise in shrinkage now displaces 1500cc. The shortened and re welded case eliminates the center pair of grafted 906 camshafts, and produces 200 reliable horsepower at 6,500 rpm.

To augment the improvements under the engine lid, Emory revamped the aerodynamics of the coupe after Minter admitted that the Desperado had moved over six inches, unannounced, at Willow Springs, between Turns Eight and Nine. That deviation led the crew to revise the front fender wells, 917 style, for better air circulation, and fit a late Turbo decklid to the rear end for time trial use. The underpinnings of the coupe are really more 911 than 356, since the rear suspension is all 911, and the 15" Fuchs alloys are 8" wide in front and 9" wide at the rear. Although the car has never been street legal, Minter still drives it daily in the area around his Sanger home.

Emory figures that if the Desperado's mutant engine passes Uncle Miltie's daily abuse test, then it has a future on the circle tracks of America as well. So if you happen to see something painted like the German flag blast past you in Central California, you can assume it to be UFO-356, AKA Desperado, piloted by alien Can-Am test driver. As Emory says, "We finally sent it up to Milt to see if he could beat it to death. He lives out in the middle of the grape vineyards there. He used to worry about the crops, then he started giving rides. Now they don't bother him anymore."

Emory claims he's never been hassled for driving and 356 with large print numbers on the street. Maybe that's because the cops are too startled by the outrageous color combinations to react negatively. At any rate, these Porsches, with their fanciful assortments, come so close to being street toys that they ought to have pull strings attached to their nerf bars.