WITH TWO NICKELS TO RUB TOGETHER

POLO ENGINE IS THE LATEST SWAP FOR THIS 356 OWNER

By David Mathews

Photographs by Michael Alan Ross


Speedster

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"When Megan and I decided to marry 12 years ago," began Ryan, "we thought it more prudent to use the bit of money we had to buy a beautiful silver-over-green 356 cabriolet, featuring a healthy six-cylinder 911 engine, rather than a more practical option—like repaying student loans. The second I became a quasi-adult with two nickels to rub together, I'd spend three on a car."

Now, what car person can argue with that logic? After all, Ryan suffered from a sickness that has afflicted thousands of Southern Californians. He succumbed to the siren song of air-cooled engines, winding coastal roads, and fresh sea breezes.

That cabriolet was just the start of Ryan's story. Next came an original-bodied Meyers Manx, the quintessential California Dune Buggy. "It was the work of the inimitable, one-man band that is Jim Rinker," continued Ryan.

"A few years later we found, a bit by coincidence, another Rinker 356, albeit a coupe, but featuring a 911 mechanically-injected six cylinder with a five-speed. That little blue coupe still sits proudly in our garage and, I dare say, is probably the most usable classic Porsche ever built. It can cruise 80 or 90 mph on the freeway undeterred and stops and handles far beyond most other 356 models, at least from our perspective. Perhaps most importantly, it'll make that magnificent 911 engine noise all wound up."

The glistening black 1958 Speedster featured here is the latest sequel. The 200-hp-plus Polo engine, uniquely built for this Speedster, provides the punch and the punctuation for Ryan's continuing story.

"Sometime around 2015, we found this freshly sorted, black-over-red '58 Speedster," Ryan said. "While arguably the most charming and iconic classic extant, in terms of a driving experience, it was a far cry from our Rinker-worked coupe. The problem was the Speedster was not that much fun drive to drive. It was slow. Its gearbox was a mess. After few years, we decided to see what might be possible to enhance ours a bit. We approached that rough thought with Jim. Eventually, his interest grew and the project began."

A bit about Jim Rinker, founder/owner/shopkeeper of Rinker Toys in Valley Center, California. Jim is a dyed-in-the wool Porsche guy who, for the past 50 years, has restored, modified, and massaged 356s in his one-man Southern California shop. He's done it all—mechanics and cosmetics, reconstruction, body and paintwork. He is nationally recognized as a 356 Porsche professional, initially hammering on his own tubs, and soon hammering on the cars of those who recognized his expertise and talent. Now getting close to retirement, he farms out the "heavy lifting" to Andy Elsener, owner of Andy's Sheet Metal in Huntington Beach, California. He has all the necessary tools and the tables to do any job. Jim still does all his own disassembly, paint, and reassembly.

"I started putting 911 engines in 356s way back in 1979," began Jim. "I decided to give it a try with my own car, installing a six-cylinder engine, five-speed transmission, and 911 suspension to

Below: **The legendary Jim Rinker stretches the legs of his latest Speedster build.** **Right, top:** **Louvers hint of something sinister beneath the engine lid.** **Right, bottom:** **The shift pattern reflects the five-speed transmission upgrade.**

Above left: The understated interior of this Speedster reflects high-quality craftsmanship. **Above right:** The serial number tells a tale of originality, but a twist of the ignition key adds some complexity to that story.

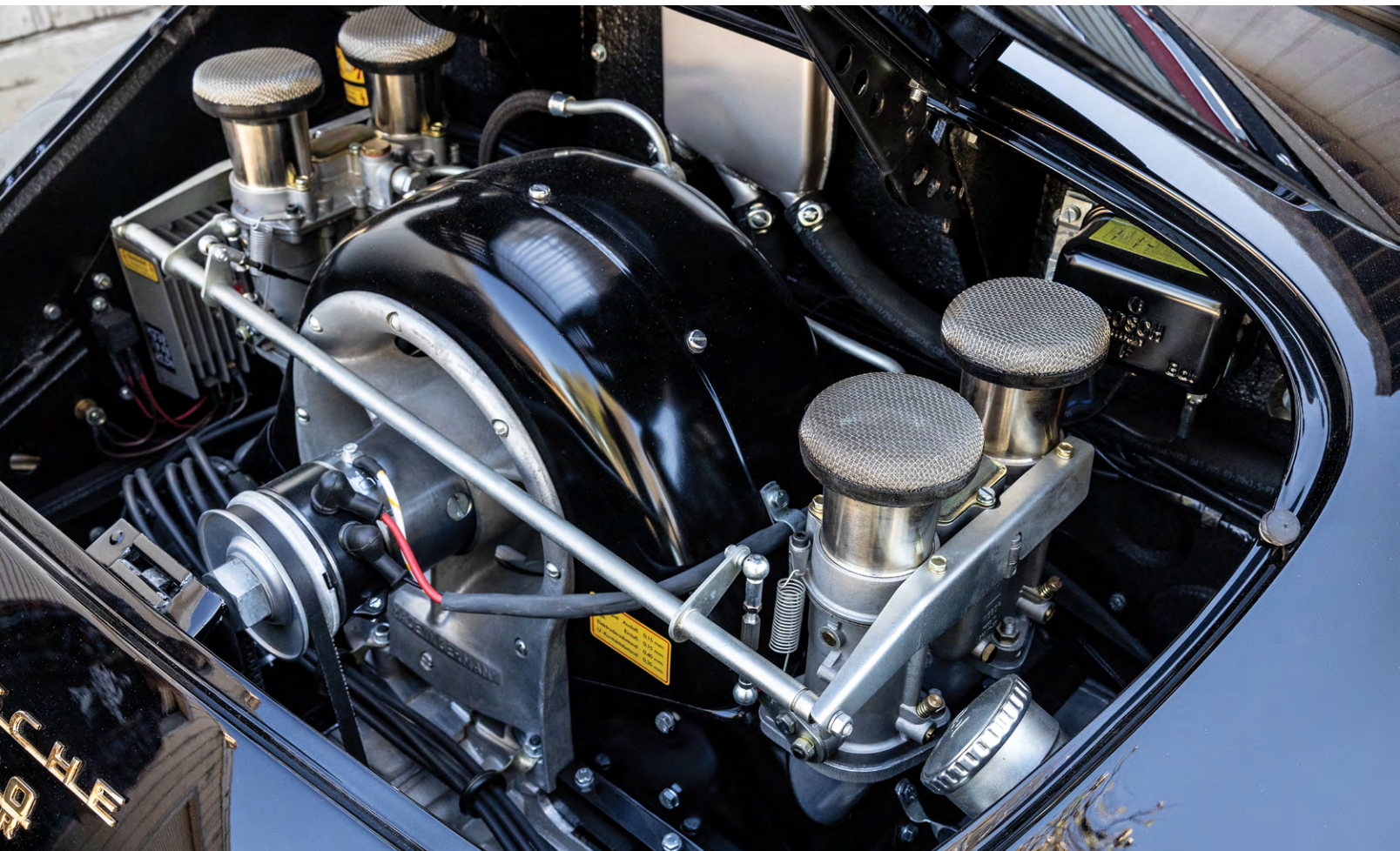
see how it would work. You know, it worked out pretty well. That car is still around today. The present owner really enjoys it.

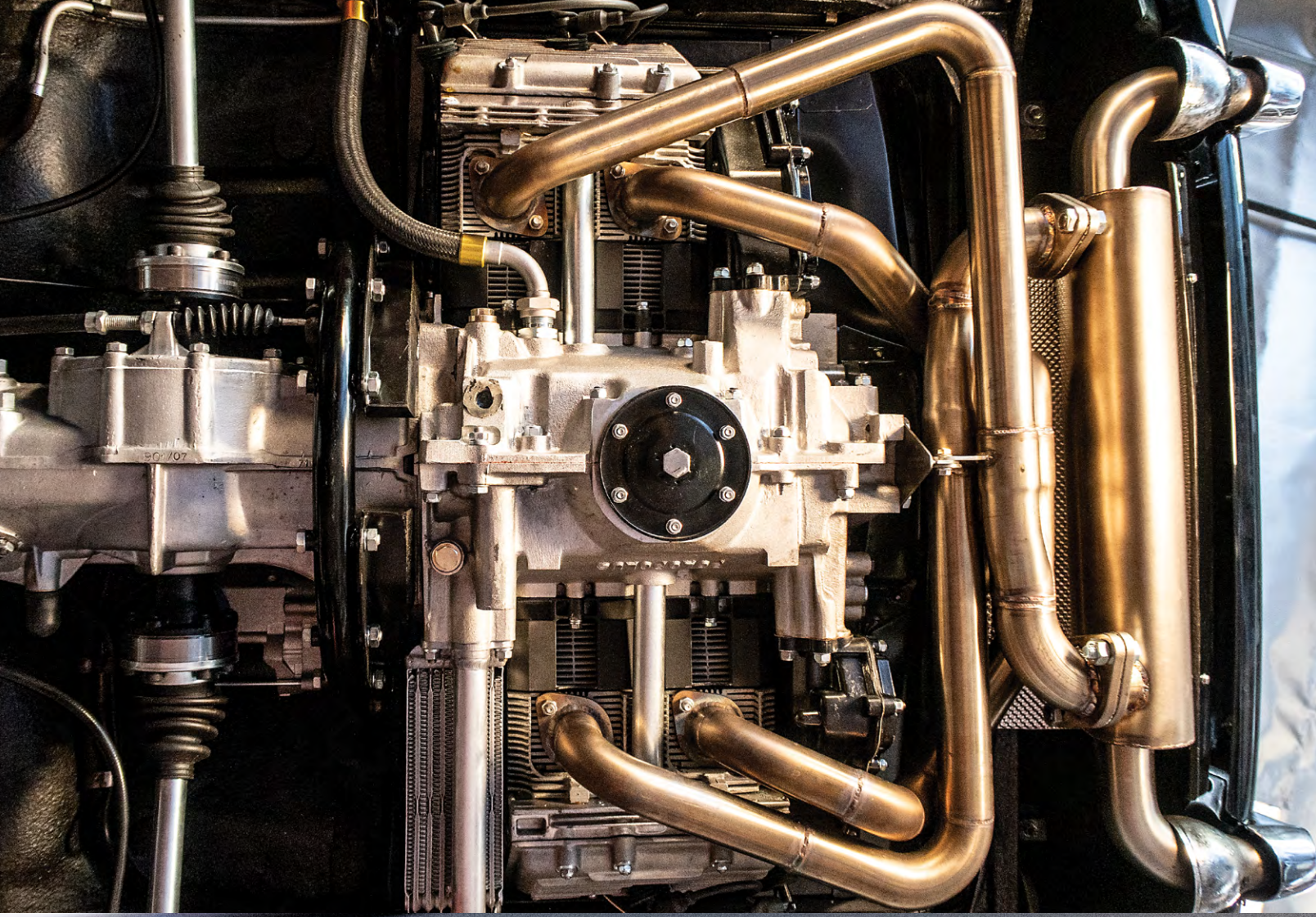
"I've done about nine or ten of those Outlaw-type projects over the years. I have one of my own. With about 200 horsepower, it goes right down the highway and still looks exactly like an original 356."

Not a fan of heavily modified bodywork, fattened fenders, or chopped and channelled styling, Jim likes to keep his projects looking like the factory cars, just adding a bit more power together with a greater ability to turn and stop. So when Ryan approached Jim with his ideas for the Speedster, Jim was wary. "What do you want to do?" asked Jim. "Do you really want me to start cutting on this beautiful Speedster?"

Ryan responded that he wanted a Polo motor. The Polo would fit in the engine bay without much fabrication. Even the suspension modification and the five-speed transmission (Type 901) installation that Jim did was easily reversible if someone wanted to return the car to original specs. With 200 horsepower, the engine did

Below: The Polo engine, with a nod to the Carrera four-cam engine, is a work of art. **Opposite, top:** The custom-built stainless steel exhaust system enhances both beauty and performance.






1950-1957
DEUTSCHE
SPORTWAGEN
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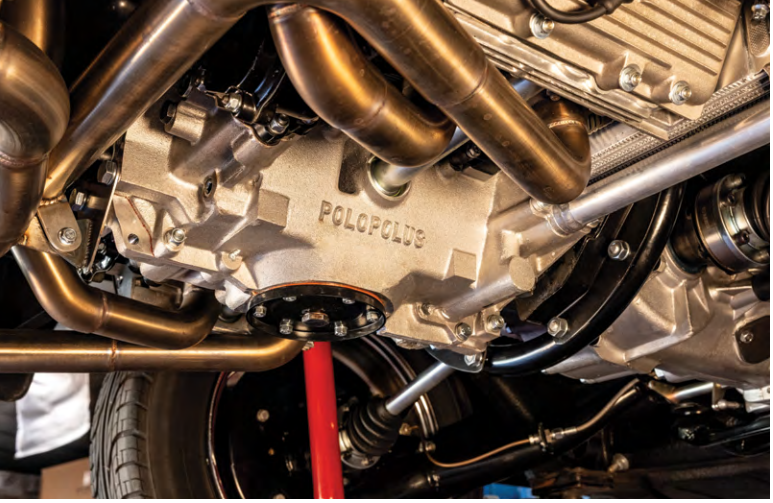

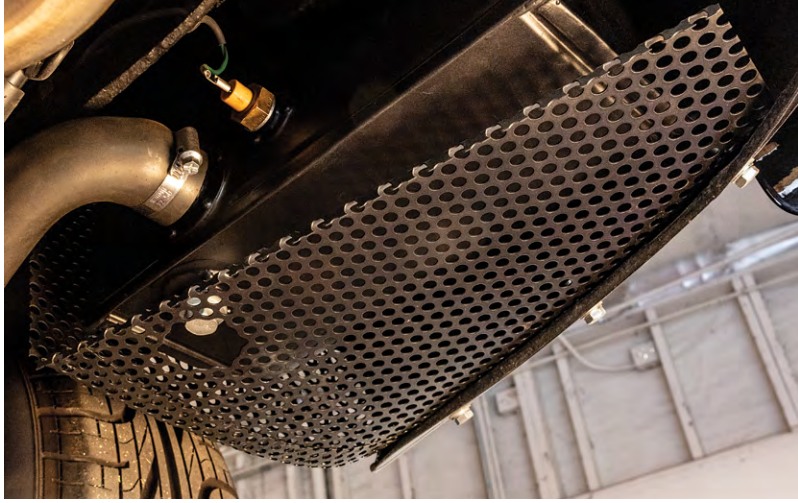

Above left: POLOPOLUS stamped into the case clearly identifies this 2.5l engine as a rare beast. **Above right:** Carrera-style underbody shielding.

not overpower the front suspension and short wheelbase. The 911-style rear suspension allowed each wheel to move independently, improving handling and ride quality compared to the older swing axle design.

The more Jim considered the Polo idea, the more he warmed up to it. "I first met Dean Polopolus when he'd stopped by my shop to talk. He's just a half an hour up the road from me in Temecula. He heard that I did six-cylinder conversions and wanted me to suggest using one of his four-cylinder engines to my clients. Early on, Dean was cutting up six-cylinder engine cases to make his four-cylinder engines. Then he got serious about it and had his own engine cases cast.

"Dean brought one of his engines down to show me. I told him that if he machined off the saddle that holds the 911 fan, his engine looked like a four-cam engine case. I told him I thought he could put a four-cam engine fan on his engine."

However, that conversation didn't get legs until Ryan told Jim he wanted a Polo. Jim brought up the possibility of grafting the four-cam fan configuration onto the Polo, making up some manifolds, and mounting the carburetors (Weber 48 IDF) in approximately the same place as the original four-cam configuration. At least at first glance, Ryan's Polo engine would look like a Carrera four-cam. Ryan gave the okay and the long transformation began.

Dean built the 2.5-liter engine and gave the case to Jim. It's a twin-plug motor, using a 12-volt electrical system. Jim did all of the complementary modifications, such as the sheet metal work, shrouds, manifolds, and linkages. He modified the generator so that it would line up with the pulley, and wired the entire ignition system, among other tweaks.

Bob Ashlock, owner of AshlockTECH in Orange County, California, made the ignition box, using an early 911 magnesium-case CD box. It could fire both sets of plugs and command both coils, enabling Jim to mount the coils as they are in a Carrera Speedster. It has one modified distributor, allowing it to fire eight plugs rather than four. (The original four-cam engines had two distributors.)

Because Ryan wanted a highway cruiser rather than a stoplight scorcher, he immediately dismissed shorter gears. Jacques le Friant, owner of Scotts Porsche in San Diego, California, built a 901 transmission for Ryan's Speedster, keeping the standard gear ratios (11:34 A, 18:34 F, 22:29 M, 25:26 S, 29:23 Z).

The stainless-steel exhaust system is custom-built. It consists of equal length tubes leading into one can and exiting through the two

Below left: From any angle... **Below right:** The wood-rimmed steering wheel adds a touch of class.

bumper guards—like they were originally. "The exhaust note is reasonably aggressive," added Jim. "In fact, it's loud. It's sassy. After all, it is a Speedster. You have the wind in your hair, and the sound is all behind you. But when you put your foot down, it does respond with authority."

Without a doubt, the 356 Speedster is a timeless work of art. In this modern era of angular shapes, gills, scoops, and massive spoilers, the Speedster's contours and silhouette transcends time. Ryan's 1958 Polo Speedster, with its glistening black exterior and red interior, is beautiful, yet that beauty is more than skin deep. An open engine lid reveals the simplicity *and* complexity of German engineering—with a unique twist. The stainless-steel exhaust system twists golden around the case, from manifolds to bumper guards.

Ryan's Speedster is truly special.

Dean Polopolus: Creator of the Polo Four-cylinder Engine

"Back in the day, I owned a Speedster but it didn't run," began Dean Polopolus. "So I built a 356 pushrod motor with a turbocharger on it. When my brother wrecked the car, I took the engine out and stored it at Gary Emory's shop in Mission Viejo, California. Mike Lederman, President of the Porsche Club of Italy at the time, saw it at Gary's Shop and wanted to buy it. After putting him off for a couple of years, I sold the engine to Mike because I didn't know when I'd complete the repairs on the Speedster.

"So, when I finally finished the Speedster, I needed a motor for it. I cut two cylinders off a magnesium Porsche engine block. I nearly set the shop on fire during the process of taking the studs out. All the filings from the Sawzall caught the bench on fire. Anyway, after I reassembled the engine, put the fan shroud on it, put the heads on it, and put it in the Speedster, the engine lid closed perfectly.

"I thought, 'Wow, this is definitely going to work.' I realized that the internals of this motor were all symmetrical. I could shorten it and still keep the same architecture. The Porsche engine was the perfect example of German precision engineering. It was durable, built to run hard, and last."

After nearly 36 years, Dean has the Polo engine build down to a science. He benefited from working with many friends with particular skillsets and vast experience to create a unique engine. Eventually Dean made a casting pattern, added special alloys to T6 aluminum prior to casting, and then gave the case an aerospace heat treatment, which made the case extremely dense and durable.

Porsche factory parts are used extensively in his Polo engine. With different pistons and cylinders, the twin-plug Polo four-cylinder can vary in displacement from 2.0L to 2.8L. And it provides huge benefits. The engine weighs about 100 pounds less than the Porsche air-cooled six, has twice the horsepower of the original 356 engine, and fits perfectly into the 356's engine bay.

Durable? Yes. More powerful? Yes. Looks and fits like original equipment? Yes. Expensive? A matter of opinion. Dean's unique four-cylinder creation meets or exceeds exacting Porsche standards. Compared to the cost of a rebuilt, original, four-cam Porsche engine that tickles $250,000, or a new four-cam reproduction engine at approximately $200,000, the custom-built Polo is worth serious consideration.