



# A Boxster, HIS WAY

HOW A \$6,000 USED BOXSTER S  
WENT FROM BEING A HAY HAULER  
TO A CONCOURS ENTRANT.

STORY BY DAVID MATHEWS PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ALAN ROSS

**MICHAEL MURPHY IS** the consummate car guy. He's raced them, wrecked them, fixed them, restored them, and modified them. Bitten early, Michael's first car was a 1965 Mustang that he drag raced while in high school. Shifting gears to something more nimble, his next car was a Datsun 240Z.

"Sports cars were much cooler," quips Michael, "and the girls liked them better, too." A rusty, brown 1975 Targa, purchased for \$4,500, was Michael's introduction to Porsche. "I thought that I could fix it up and make some money on it, but after it was done, I drove it for the summer and fell in love..."

Fast forward to Jay Peak and the 2016 Parade Concours, where we struck up a conversation with Michael about the one-of-a-kind Boxster he had entered in the 2016 Pa-





Lead development engineer Hans-Juergen Woehler and exterior designer Grant Larson drew inspiration from Porsche's racing heritage, blending elements of the mid-engine 550 and 356 variants, when they created the Boxster.

rade Concours. "I was looking for an inexpensive Boxster to try to make a cool, affordable Porsche driver, one that was in good mechanical shape," he told us. From there, well, things got a little crazy...

**LIKE THOUSANDS OF** other sports car enthusiasts, Michael fell in love with the Boxster concept car when it was introduced at the 1993 North American International Auto Show in Detroit. "I planned to put in an order for my first ever brand-new Porsche," he says. But when the production car came out in 1997, he was disappointed. The silhouette was different. The vibe was different. Years passed.

As he watched the prices of 911s

climb stratospherically, he thought a modern, mid-engine Porsche, one that might need some body repair, was just the ticket. After considerable searching, Michael heard of a "cheap" Boxster that was about to be offered for sale by a repair shop in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Michael called the shop owner and told him that he'd like to see the car when it became available.

"No problem...will do," is where they left it. But after a week or so, Michael came across an ad for the same car on Craigslist. "I called the shop owner and yelled at him for not contacting me first," says Michael. "He told me that he decided to sell it for parts because the body

and interior were so rough."

Although that assessment may have scared some buyers, Michael was not deterred. The 2001 Boxster S with a six-speed manual transmission was just what he was looking for. With this car, Michael would have a blank canvas—an opportunity to create his own prototype. They shook hands on a \$6,000 selling price that included the installation of a new IMS bearing and clutch, parts that Michael purchased on his own. "A few nights later, we replaced the old stuff with new stuff—started at 5 p.m. and finished up at midnight."

Now the car ran, but it was still in sorry shape. A minor crash had

left the front bumper cover half gone, the interior was trashed, and the rear trunk lid was MIA. Michael was told that an eccentric former owner had used it on his farm to haul hay and straw. Yes, it's hard to believe, but stems and pieces of straw clinging to the filthy trunk liner seemed to confirm the story.

**ONCE THE BOXSTER** was his, Michael began rummaging through storage boxes to find his scale model of the original Boxster concept. He also studied photos of the concept car and the production car to determine where they differed—most notably the front bumper, the smooth rear deck, the taillights, and



the wheels. The side profile reflected differences in the overhang, shorter on the prototype than on the 986. The wheel arches, rolled on the concept car, were cut flat on the production car, as if it had gone through a cheese slicer. And yes, those gorgeous side vents were replaced with ducts higher on the rear quarter panel.

Because of family commitments and his busy auto repair business, Michael's work often commenced late at night, bleeding into the early morning hours. In deference to his understanding but very frugal wife, he carefully and creatively managed the costs. He began his transformation at the front of his car, with the front bumper cover.

"I purchased a plastic welder and planned to use it, but after some research, I decided to use 3M structural bonding material," he says. "I grafted what was left of my original bumper to another stock bumper I bought for 60 dollars at the Hershey swap meet."

The front air scoops presented a

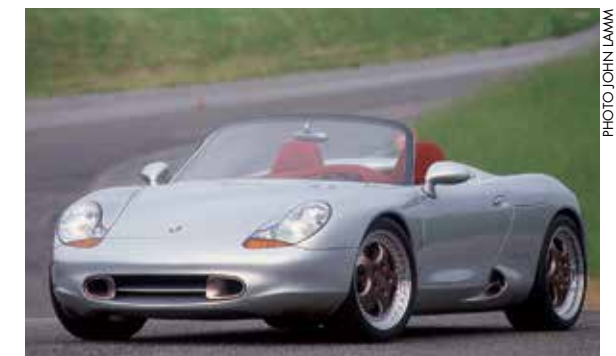
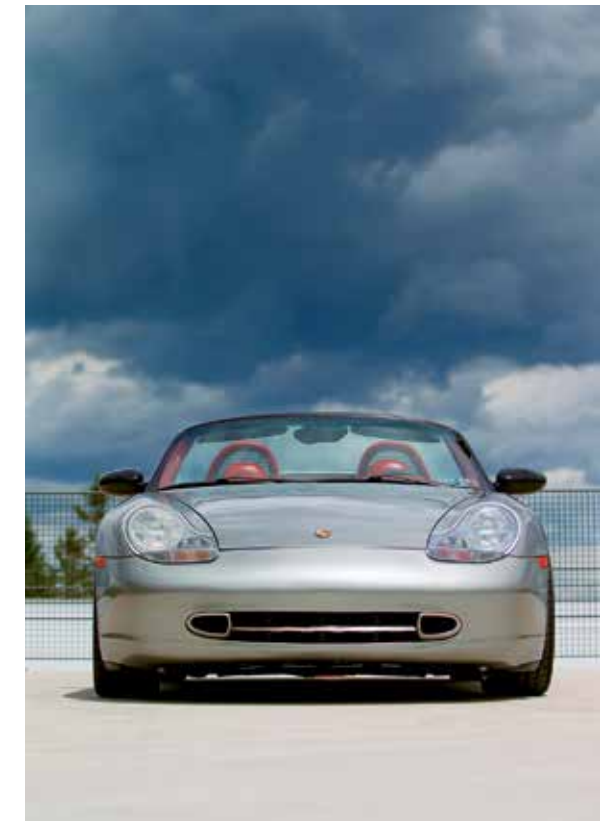


PHOTO MIKE MAURPHY

PHOTO JOHN LAWAN

**Details and contours made the Boxster show car an instant hit, as they do with Michael Murphy's tribute car. Inspired use of discarded parts transformed a wreck into a concours contender. Below: The original Boxster concept car.**





PHOTO MIKE MURPHY



**Not tied to originality but influenced by it, Michael's artistry shines in his use of color and contrast. It's a big departure from the ratty interior the car had when he bought it.**

"The grille and tie bar came from a Mercedes C240, recovered from another body shop's trash bin."

Michael eschewed the early Boxster's speed-bump tonneau cover for one in keeping with the prototype. "I formed the mold for that cover by using a buck made from plywood and garden hose," he reports. The taillight covers also resulted from Michael's Irish ingenuity.

"I was playing with some masking tape, trying to create something different from stock. Eventually, I came up with covers I made from a fleece material soaked in fiberglass resin. I bonded them to the stock taillights with silicone, in case I ever wanted to remove them." He rerouted and rewired the Boxster's reverse lights to two LEDs that replaced a couple of the license plate bolts. Finally, he changed the sockets and wiring to make the running lights double as turn signals.

**AS WITH EVERYTHING ELSE** on the Boxster, reconstructing the interior was a challenge. Years of abuse and inclement weather had rendered it

useless. Once again, Michael found the solution on eBay. He purchased a complete interior for pennies on the dollar and then re-dyed the leather in a shade of red borrowed from Ferrari.

A fanatic about color, Michael deliberated for weeks over the exact shade of silver for the exterior. He finally found the one he wanted at a Lexus dealership—a 2014 color called Atomic Silver. It was just the right tone with the perfect amount of metallic sparkle.

Choosing the wheels was also a challenge. "Initially, I planned to use 3.6 Turbo wheels because they were close in style to the concept car, but I found RH wheels on Craigslist that were considerably cheaper," says Michael. First, he refinished those wheels to match the body color, then he changed them to a copper color like the concept car, then to a darker gold, and finally to Porsche's Weissgold-Metallic. "By the time I settled on the wheel color, I could have bought two sets of those 3.6 Turbo wheels," he jokes.

Although Michael liked the look of the side vents, he decided they were not only impractical but would be difficult to re-create. "I put louvers on the sides in place of the vents, but later I returned to the vents. The general consensus was the vents looked better."

One might think that Michael would "enhance" the 3.2-liter flat six while so deeply involved in his dream build, but that wasn't the case. "The stock engine has plenty of power for the street, in my opinion," remarks Michael. He did, however, replace the water pump, plugs, coil packs, and oil separator, and renewed all the suspension parts (new Bilstein struts and H&R springs). "I am considering some sort of sport exhaust," he admits.

**MICHAEL CONSIDERS THE** flat six's 250 hp sufficient for the street, but he is not bashful about pushing heaps of horsepower around the track. A PCA instructor and veteran track junkie, he has spent plenty of time behind the wheel of various race cars. "I entered the second PCA club race ever held in an orange 1971 911T," he says. "I bought it with a tired 2.2-liter engine in it, sold that motor, dropped in a 3.0-liter, bolted 60 pounds of lead to the floorboard, and headed for the track."

Enamored with the thrill of road racing in that 911T, Michael purchased a Crossle 16F Formula Ford in need of restoration and went to work on the sprightly Irish racer, returning it to form. His infatuation with open-wheel racing came to an

abrupt end, however, when his car was clipped by another during a practice session. The Crossle came to rest in pieces. "I sold it at the track for parts; still hurts to think about it," he laments.

From that open-wheeled misfortune, Michael returned to Porsche, juicing up a 1984 Turbo-look coupe with a 993 engine. A tubeframe GT2 Datsun 280Z was next. "That car was so much fun, but so much trouble (to keep running) that I decided to go back to Porsche," he says. These days, Michael owns a 1975 914 with a 300-hp 2.9-liter twin plug engine. Weighing only 1,800 pounds and running nine-inch slicks, it "eats GT3s for lunch."

You might conclude from this story that Michael Murphy does not

stand in one place too long. And you'd be right. Although he has no plans to sell his Boxster, he is immersed in yet another project. "I'm currently working on an Austin Healey Bugeye Sprite that I've owned for 30 years." Car guys—you gotta love 'em. ☺

**Rolled fenders contribute to this Boxster's smooth simplicity. Below: Michael Murphy in his transformed Boxster.**

