





DOING THE CONTINENTAL

By David Mathews

Photographs by Michael Alan Ross

“Beautiful music,

Dangerous rhythm.

It’s something daring, the Continental”

When Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire samba’d across the dance floor to the beat of “The Continental” in their 1934 movie, *The Gay Divorcee*, movie audiences went wild. A dance tune penned by Con Conrad and Herb Magidson, “The Continental” was the first song to win an Academy Award for Best Original Song. And just like its lyrical counterpart, Bill Myers’s Continental, a 1955 Pre-A 356, is beautiful, a little dangerous, and somewhat daring.

Bill’s first brush with Porsche came in 1969–1970 while serving in the Navy. “A fellow officer came aboard one day, very excited about a 356 he just bought. He told me I had to have a ride in it. Well, I didn’t want to. Thought it was ugly. But I did anyway and was impressed with his Porsche’s handling and roominess. My big feet fit.”

So, when Bill had the wherewithal to buy a second car, he gave Porsche a serious look. His options at the time were a 356 Carrera for \$4,800, a nearly new 911S for \$6,900, and a 1967 912 for \$2,000. He chose the 912, a model that had the look of a 911 but that he was comfortable maintaining himself. Soon, though, an “early out” from the service provided Bill the opportunity to re-enter college for a second degree. He sold the 912 to defray college costs.

With a newly acquired M.E. degree in his pocket, Bill moved to Wisconsin to take a job. Bill’s thoughts again returned to cars, mostly American iron. Then an Oslo Blue/red 1963 B sunroof coupe came up for sale in Madison for \$1,500. “Despite the little I really knew about 356s, I jumped on that car.” Soon his appreciation for the 356 grew. “I realized after owning that car for three months, I rarely drove anything else. The Porsche was economical, roomy, comfortable, and it didn’t look bad after all.”

A Roadster and a Convertible D found their way into Bill’s heart and into his garage. The Roadster was a “driver,” but the D piqued his interest in concours competition. That is until polishing became ponderous.

What pushed Bill into Outlaw mode? “Well, it began with my Convertible D. We’d finished the D in late 1989 and [in 1990] took it to the 356 West Coast Holiday at Morro Bay, California, then the next week to the PCA Parade in Monterey. Those were both full-bore concours competitions. At Morro Bay, I was ‘gigged’ pretty heavily because I didn’t have a wedge—a wooden wheel chock—in the trunk. I had no idea that I needed a wheel chock, but I figured, okay, whatever. It was the first concours I competed in.

“Then I trailered the car to Monterey to compete. Did a lot better. Finished second or third in my class. Didn’t get gigged for not having a chock. Anyway, we got to the [vendor tables] part of the parade. Sitting there at a table was the judge from the Registry Holiday—selling wooden wheel chocks! I looked at that and considered the work and research we put into preparing the D for competition, never seeing a thing about wooden wheel chocks.

Below: Cibie driving lights provide plenty of candlepower for night driving. **Below Right:** A rare Emory 356 Outlaw badge is “frenched” into the rear fender to protect it from nefarious admirers. **Opposite:** The squat stance and meaty wheels and tires give this Continental a menacing demeanor.





I was livid! Didn't say anything to anybody but it did light a fire in me. I also had some running issues with the D and a friend gave me a ride in his 356 Coupe with a 912 engine in it. I'd never been in a 356 that ran like that. I thought about the wheel chocks. I didn't like trailering the D behind my Suburban. It wasn't any fun. Enough was enough. By 1995, I built the Outlaw, the one you see here, in my mind."

Did Bill consider transforming his D into an Outlaw? "No, it didn't cross my mind. The D was a show car. Anything I did to that car would have detracted from its essence, so I started looking for an Outlaw candidate. I wanted a coupe because of its beautiful shape." Consequently, he sold his open cars and began his search for a Pre-A 356. "I loved the contours, but the roof was a little too high to suit me. Kind of looked like a bubble up there. I loved the split windshield, the V-sunroof, the softly-rounded body of the Pre-A. Overall, I thought it was the prettiest Porsche built."

Bill also developed an ongoing relationship with Gary Emory, speaking with him regularly throughout the mid-90s. "He was a sounding board for me. Very accommodating. Anyway, I started to look for a Pre-A coupe, specifically a Continental."

Easier said than done. With no 1955 Continentals on the market, Bill bought an early 1956 Coupe from a seller in San Francisco. But it wasn't the same. It wasn't what he *really* wanted. Bill continued to look.

Six or seven months later, Lady Luck kissed Bill on the cheek. Arizonan Steve Proctor advertised his 1955 Pre-A Continental Outlaw project for sale. It was partially disassembled, but all there. No sunroof, but it was a Continental. Bill bought the '55 and sold the '56.

Bill knew a guy in Colorado, Bill Edwards, who had parted out a '55 Sunroof coupe and had that section... that precious V-sunroof section. "Bill wouldn't sell it." Badgering finally worked. "I called

Bill repeatedly. I told him I had the car to put that sunroof in and I needed that roof clip. What would it take to get it? He replied that he wouldn't sell it, but he might trade for it. He said that if I had a concours-quality set of accessory wind wing deflectors, he'd swap for those." Bill Myers had two such sets. Hard to find? OMG, yes. Scarce as hen's teeth. "So, I shipped him the wind wings, he shipped me the V-sunroof clip, and we were both happy."

Pre-A coupes did not have vent windows, just one-piece glass side windows. Without vent windows, wind could buffet the occupants with the windows lowered. To address the problem, accessory wind wing deflectors could be screwed into the top of the door and the door glass frame. The wind wing deflector sat outside of the actual door glass and allowed the driver and passenger to redirect the wind by adjusting the angle of the deflector when the side window was lowered.

Back to the '55 Continental. Steve and the truck driver prepped the car for shipment, wrapping it securely with a plastic cover, and then taping the plastic down, so that everything would "stay put" while being transported on the open trailer to Wisconsin.

Lady Luck turned fickle. "Partway to Wisconsin, some of the tape pulled off. The driver, concerned that the loose plastic might slap against the paint, stopped and removed some of the covering. Well, the plastic was holding the front hood in place. The wind caught the hood, folded it back over the top, dented the roof, kinked the cowl, and bent the hood all to hell. So the driver stopped and removed the hood. But he didn't check the gas tank—it started bouncing around and blew out of the trunk and was then crushed by oncoming traffic. The good thing was that I received a fair insurance settlement that paid for much of the subsequent sheetmetal work."

One fortunate circumstance was Bill's acquaintance with Jeff Takala, a body man and pattern maker. "Jeff did a great job fixing





The cabin has many unique details, from the wood steering wheel to the custom-fit walnut dash plaque made by Bill's father. The green sun visor—modified from a Mercedes-Benz SL. The fully functional horizontal fan atop the flat-four 2.5 liter (below) is reminiscent of early racing Porsches.

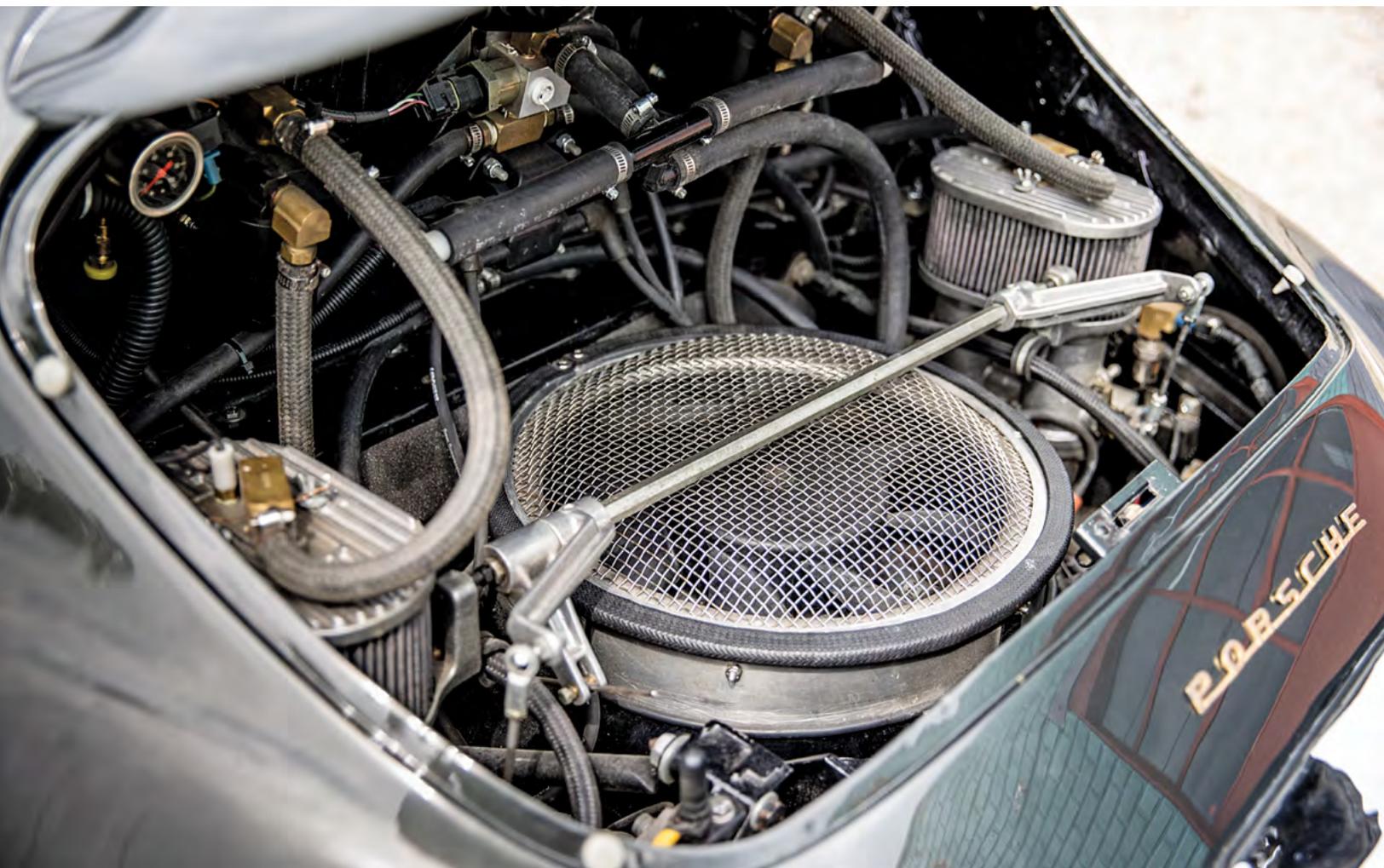
the hood and cowl... you couldn't even tell it'd been damaged. It really worked out well when you think about it. I actually got paid by the insurance company to modify the car."

And the sunroof? Bill didn't know how long that job would take, but he'd already started down that slippery slope. Two days later, Jeff called. "Well, your sunroof is in."

Bill couldn't believe it. Two days? He worried that it was a disaster, but no. "You see, when the factory added a sunroof to a car, they just took a coupe off the line, cut a hole in the roof, and installed the sunroof. Jeff did the same thing. Took the sunroof

from the clip and installed it. There's not a flat spot on a 356... the body's softly rounded. So the sunroof had to have a curve to it. And that curve was slightly different at the leading edge than at the trailing edge. Mine fit perfectly."

Once the sunroof was installed, Jeff began other body modifications. The '55's roofline looked too "bubbly" for Bill's taste, so Jeff... "lowered it one inch. He took an inch from the A pillar and an inch from the B pillar." But there was sheetmetal behind the quarter windows that had to be removed to attain the silhouette Bill wanted. That process took weeks to figure out. Finally, Jeff made



pie-shaped slices behind the rear windows, removed excess metal, and then patched the remaining material, allowing the roofline to drop just enough to smooth the contour. The windshield section remained straight and true. That “bubble” disappeared.

Modifying the rear of the car to accommodate a beefier suspension and larger wheels and tires was the next step. “The Pre-A came with 3.25 x 16-inch wheels. I needed more rubber on the road and decided that 6.00 x 16-inch wheels were my best choice.”

Jeff split the rear fenders gradually, starting behind the doors, then widened the back clip by a total of four inches in order to accommodate a 1968 911/912 rear suspension with adjustable swing arms and spring plates. “Just imagine how difficult that was. He disrupted the original shape of the body, flattened the roof, widened the rear, then formed it back again. It was just beautiful what Jeff did.”

What about those wheels? Why the 964 seven-spoke alloys? “Well, I hated those wheels at first. I wanted Mahle Gas Burners, but they looked terrible on the car. They were too small, for one thing. Tried 16-inch Fuchs, but they didn’t look all that good either. Even tried 993 wheels on the car, but still no soap. Well, I had to put something on the car because we needed the lift, so we stuck 964 wheels on and put the car on the ground. One look and I said to myself, ‘That’s it!’”

Next came the bumpers. “I wanted bumpers close to the body with that GT aluminum strip on them. That meant cutting both bumpers—the front a little narrower, and the back four inches wider.

What about Bill’s choice of engine? Most Outlaws want more juice beneath the right foot—for a faster getaway perhaps. Some massage their original motors. Some choose a flat-six variant. Some go the Polo-4 route or choose a Jack Raby special.

Not many in the Outlaw crowd choose the Type 4 914 engine for their hotrod 356s, but Bill is an outlier... not part of the crowd.

Why the Type 4? “I was building a long-distance driver and wanted a car powerful enough to keep up with pretty much anything on the road.” He wanted durability and reliability. He wanted a strong, robust case. The bigger heads of the 2.0 liter were easily built up. Bigger jugs, pistons, and other enhancements gave Bill the power he craved and bumped displacement up half a liter. Fuel injection alleviated issues with elevation or humidity. Mike Manicke, owner of Foreign Automotive in Marshfield, Wisconsin, built the engine, which produced 150hp at 5,000rpm on the dyno. He fabricated the engine tin and the fan shroud. Mike also completely re-wired the car including the LED lighting, hung all the suspension parts, and added vented disc brakes.

One interesting characteristic of the Continental’s 2.5-liter flat-four is its horizontal fan. “I got the inspiration of a horizontal cooling fan from the racing Porsches in the 50s. The fan was run by a belt that was connected to the crankshaft. I loved the look of that horizontal fan, but there was no way I was going to run a belt over numerous pulleys making a 90 degree turn. So, I went with an electric fan. Then I could install a horizontal fan



Above: Talented body man Jeff Takala incorporated the sunroof with an expert’s touch. **Above right:** A modified quartz heater unit keeps the rear window clear in inclement weather.



Very pleased with the result of his multi-decade project, smiling Bill Myers admits he “could look at the car all day.”

with a wire mesh screen over the engine to blow cool air directly on top of the cylinders. One unexpected challenge was to fit the screen over the fan. Mike Manicke was an ingenious guy. He purchased two frying pans, one that nestled inside the other, put a screen between them, and mashed the pans together. Voilà!”

What about that Outlaw badge? “Gary Emory and I bumped into each other at the 2000 Registry Holiday in Roanoke, Virginia. I saw a couple of cars there with Outlaw badges. Gary called me and asked that I stop by his room. He gave me one of his badges. It was pretty rare back then. I was thrilled to get it, considering that I didn’t even have my car finished at the time. Eventually, I Dremeled a hole into the rear quarter panel and mounted it there. Didn’t want anyone to steal it.”

The electronics? “I went to a 12-volt system with a 90-amp alternator because I wanted to run everything modern—power driver’s seat, Cibie Oscar driving lights, power ports, LED foot-well/overhead lighting, intermittent wipers, and GPS.” The battery, ECU, and relay board all reside in a hinged compartment beneath the rear seat.

Correcting the inherent deficiencies of the 356 heat/defrost system was also important to Bill. He planned to enjoy his car in early spring and late fall without bringing along an armful of shop towels to wipe off the condensation that formed on the windshield. “At a truck stop one day, I saw this small heater gizmo you could plug into your cigarette lighter. I hadn’t planned to have heat in the car because we sliced into the heat tubes to widen the floorpan; consequently, no defrost. So, I bought this portable ceramic heater, took the guts out of it, and re-installed it in small, custom-made boxes. The system has three separate switches, allowing heat to be directed to the driver, the passenger, and to the windshield for defrosting. We also have a fresh air blower located in the nose of the trunk.”

Over the span of 25 years, a number of hands have touched Bill’s Continental. Jeff Takala did most of the bodywork. The paintwork, an original factory color of course, was Graphite Metallic (5403) done by Lee Pernot, owner of Pernot Automotive in Janesville, Wisconsin. Brad Mayeur (914 Limited) built the 901 transmission with modified gear ratios that allowed Bill to stay in the “sweet spot” as he rowed through five forward gears. Jim Bach (Bach Racecraft) did much of the final detailing.

Twenty-five years in the making? “Well, it’s been in ‘finishing mode’ for a few years. If you know what you want, you gotta allow time to get there. We had a fire in 2017 when the car was in Marshfield. Fortunately, a fire extinguisher was handy, but the fire blistered the paint on the decklid and made a mess of the engine compartment.” A setback, but not the end of the world. Work and re-work continued.

And now... “I wanted the car to look like it is the perfect, ‘modern day’ 356. Not a hot rod, a race car, or some kind of California canyon cutter. I wanted the upholstery correct, headliner correct, fit and finish—correct.” There have been bumps along the way. Six attempts to trim and install a windshield before deciding on Lexan, seats and headliner done, re-done, and then done a third time. Minor tweaks to the engine.

“When you first look at the car, you think, well, that’s a ’55 Continental. But looking more closely, you see the differences... the subtle modifications... the bumpers, the wheels, the ‘squat.’ I could look at the car all day. The curves of the car are absolutely gorgeous. I can’t believe it’s my car.” **356**

“It’s very subtle, the Continental

Because it does what you want it to do.

It has a passion, the Continental”

THE 1955 PORSCHE CONTINENTAL

The 1955 Porsche Continental, a uniquely-badged, Reutter-bodied, bent-windshield 356 Pre-A, was marketed to capture the hearts and snatch cash from the wallets of American sports car enthusiasts. The brainchild of Max Hoffman, the same importer/dealer/marketeer who pushed Porsche to produce the stripped-down Speedster for hot-shoed enthusiasts, the Continental tipped the opposite end of the options and features continuum. Porsche Continentals, so named to add a little European cachet to the model, were basically Pre-As dolled up with the excess bells and whistles found in Porsche’s parts bins.

Telefunken signal-seeking radios, reclining seats, leather this and that, whitewall tires, and fancy chrome wheel covers were standard features of the Continental.

A one-year-only production model (October 1954 through October 1955) the Continental died from legal strangulation after Porsche produced approximately 1,200 units. Ford Motor Company claimed naming rights, despite having not produced a Continental since 1948. Pointing out that they planned to introduce a new Lincoln Continental in 1956, Ford demanded that Porsche discontinue using the name. Porsche acquiesced.