

# CIVILIZING A BEAST



HOW A 964 RSR WENT FROM RACER TO STREET-LEGAL CAR.

STORY BY **DAVID MATHEWS** PHOTOS BY **MICHAEL ALAN ROSS**

# The decline and eventual fall of Group C in the early 1990s,



combined with Porsche's decision to step back from CART and Formula 1, presented an uncertain future in road racing for the company. Porsche earned its chops in racing—a future without a viable race car for a viable race series was unacceptable. What was Zuffenhausen going to do? How would they answer the challenge? By reimagining the venerable 911, allowing a select customer segment to claw back into the GT arena. The result? The Carrera (964) RS 3.8L.

Weissach engineers massaged the 3.6-liter flat-six engine, taken from the road-going 964, by increasing the stroke by 2mm (the bore remained the same), redesigning the pistons to reduce weight, modifying the vibration dampers and oil coolers, lightening the rocker arms, and using the latest Bosch Motronic system that controlled both injection and ignition. The result was an increase to 300 horsepower at 6500 rpm and 265 lb-ft of torque at 5250 rpm. Suspension enhancements included multi-adjustable front and rear anti-sway bars, manual steering, and boosted brakes with ABS. Two-piece staggered 18-inch Speedline wheels were used along with a modified five-speed manual transmission. Aluminum and fiberglass replaced steel for the doors, hood, rear deck, and spoiler.

If one considered the 964 RS 3.8L a beast, then one had to consider its big brother, the 964 RSR 3.8L, beastier. A no-holds-barred, turn-key race car, the RSR had a more potent flat six with modified Motronic unit and higher compression. Suspension upgrades included Rose suspension joints, racing clutch, and brakes. Front and rear Speedline wheels each were widened a half-inch. The massive two-tier rear spoiler was balanced by a front splitter. Center-lock wheels, a pneumatic jack, and Recaro passenger seat were available options. Unlike stubborn Henry Ford, whose only color choice was black, Porsche would deliver a new RSR 3.8L in red, white, blue, and yellow, as well as basic black. A total





Although a serious race car, this RSR 3.8L retains vestiges of a street machine—window cranks, dial-type door opener, and Sport Leather steering wheel.

of 51 RSR 3.8L racers were built, 11 of which came to North America.

Chassis 496079, one of those 11, was delivered new to Jochen Rohr, at Rohr Motorsport, on November 4, 1993. “Jürgen Barth, head of Porsche Customer Sport, offered me a 964 RSR to purchase during the PCA Concours in Cincinnati in 1993,” Rohr said. “Porsche was looking for teams worldwide to re-enter the GT racing scene, and offered great support with labor, setup, and parts.”

Rohr ordered this RSR in gleaming Grand Prix White with the following race-oriented options: air jacks, center-lock wheels, Le Mans-specification exhaust, and the larger, 120-liter endurance fuel tank. “It was wonderful to drive, a very well-balanced package, fantastic brakes straight from the factory,” Rohr said. “We had to soften the suspension quite a bit for the bumpier tracks in the U.S. Power was good, but was restricted by an air restrictor due to regulations imposed by IMSA.” Rohr’s plan was to compete with chassis number 496079, referred to as Rohr 01, in the February 1994 Daytona 24 hours. A formidable race team of notable drivers was assembled—Rohr, John O’Steen, Jeff Zwart, and Larry Schumacher.

“I had great connections with Porsche Motorsport and Alwin Springer at Andial,” Zwart said. “Andial was

looking after a lot of the team cars in those days. I expressed my interest to Alwin that I would love to run Daytona. That just happened to align with (the fact that) Jochen was looking for another driver, so I signed up for that. I loved driving that car. There was much to get used to in a short period of time. Number one was Daytona. And then, of course, driving an RSR. When I got in that car, it was amazing. It was competitive...easy to drive. And finally, working with Brad Kettler (crew chief) and a team of drivers. But all went really well.” Until it didn’t.

**DURING A WARM-UP** period Saturday morning, as Zwart was leaving the track in his rental car to pick up his wife from the airport in Orlando, “I see our sweet little RSR coming back to the garage on a flatbed truck looking fairly damaged. I checked to be sure Jochen was OK, and he was, but I left (the track) not knowing if the car could be fixed or not.”

The trip to and from the airport was fraught with anxiety for Zwart—a 24-hour race looming, not knowing if he had a car to drive. “When I returned to the track and the garage, I saw the car under a cover not being worked on,” he said. “It was disappointing. My Daytona plans were finished.”



No PDK or sequential shifter here: a short-shift five-speed was at the driver’s right hand. Analog gauges reflect what was a simpler time.



Back behind the wheel after 30 years, Jochen Rohr drives his old RSR with focus and forethought. Opposite: The infamous 3.8L that prompted Jeff Zwart to say, "Make me another."

Rohr said, "Due to not having enough parts at Daytona and the time needed to repair it properly, we decided not to fix the car onsite but rather concentrate our efforts on a second car we'd entered, serial number 496081. At the event (Daytona), I went ahead and ordered a new chassis with 'glass in'... which also included all the electrical wiring, lights, etc. We completed the chassis with engine, gearbox, suspension, brakes, and various other parts we took out of the consignment spares we carried for Porsche at that time to make a complete car. The factory, upon inspection of the car, issued a VIN plate for it—496108."

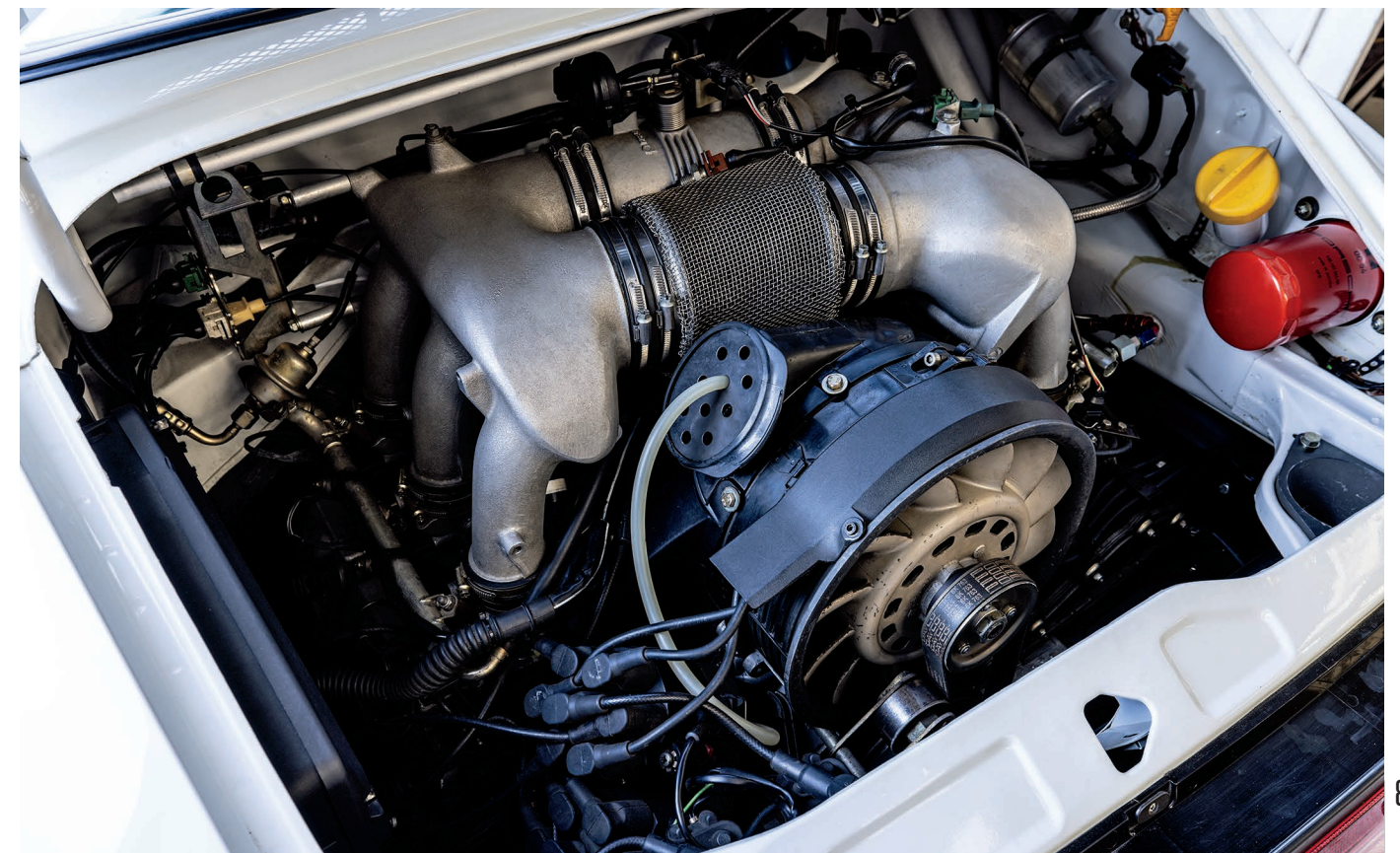
What happened to Rohr 01? "Upon return to our shop in early February 1994, 496079 was properly repaired at our facility (no structural sheet metal needed)," Rohr said. "We were able to fix it, put on a new fender and bumper, and had it ready for the 12 Hours of Sebring in mid-March that year to run again as a two-car effort."

Rohr 01 competed throughout 1994 under the Rohr Motorsport banner at venues that included Indianapolis Raceway Park, Laguna Seca, Lime Rock, Phoenix, Portland, Road Atlanta, Sebring, and Watkins Glen. After a six-year stint in high-level competition, first with Rohr

Motorsport, then Hendrick Porsche, and finally with Alex Job Racing, this particular car, chassis number 496079, was acquired by Michael Harley, who kept the car in the United States until 2007. Paul McLean, founder of GT Classics, purchased the car, took it to Europe, and completely restored the car, returning it to Rohr/IMSA livery. After McLean's ownership, a subsequent owner had it fully road-registered in the United Kingdom, receiving a Porsche Letter of Origin.

The memory of driving that RSR remained vivid for Zwart. "When I got back to Porsche Motorsport and Andial, I asked them to build that same 3.8L motor for my Carrera 4 championship rally car," he said. "The power of that car at Daytona spoiled me. It was pretty cool."

**LIKE CLIMBING MT. EVEREST,** swimming the English Channel, or competing at the Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest, some people do things just because, well, those things are there to do. If a person wanted a high-powered Porsche race car to drive to the local 7-Eleven for a gallon of milk, take their kid to school, or drive on 1,000-mile road rallies, who were we to question motives?





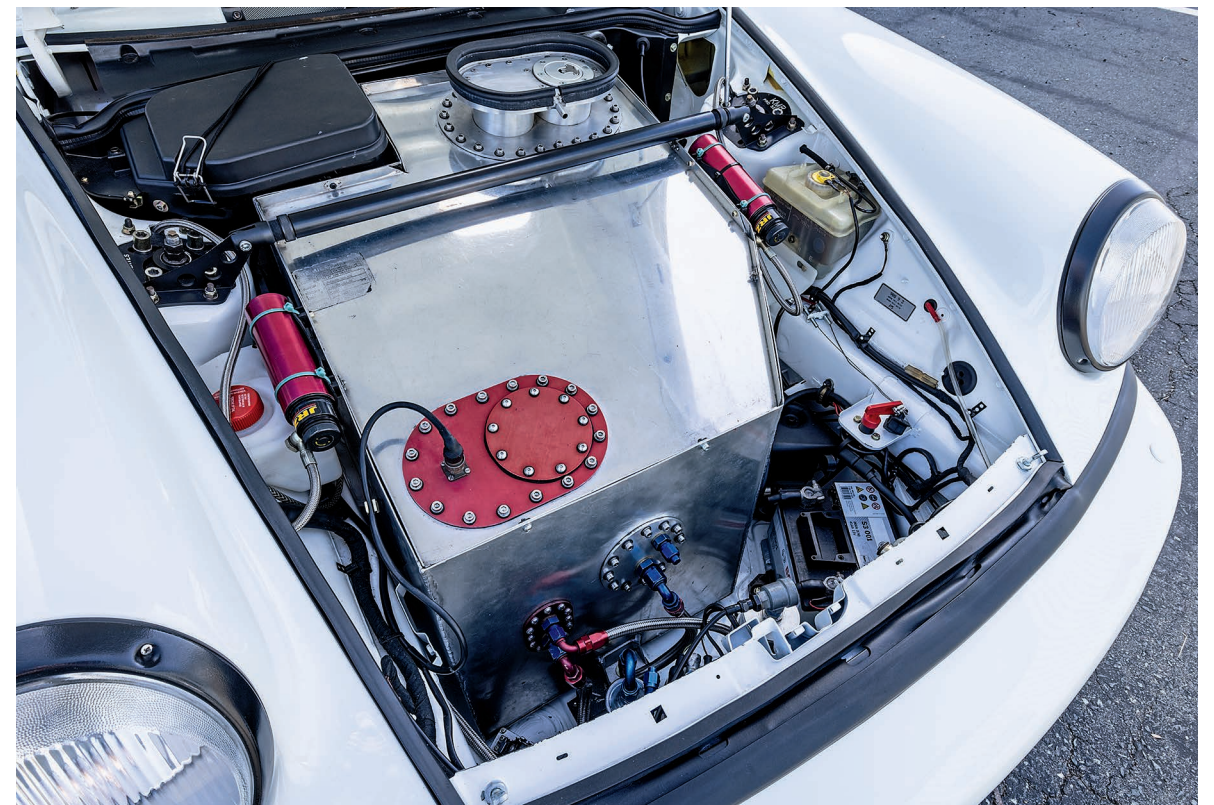
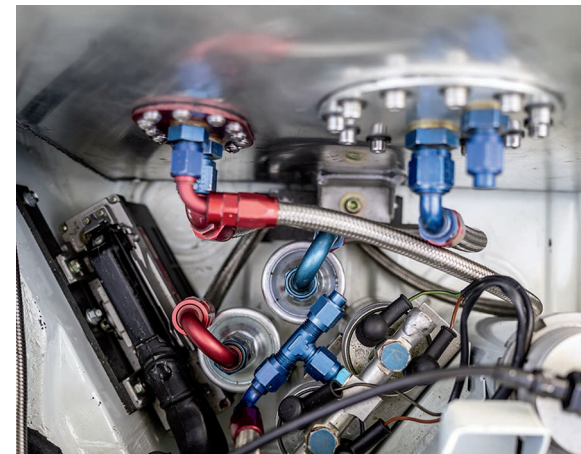
“Anyone who bought a Carrera RS 3.8L to use on the road,” said the magazine *Auto Motor und Sport*, “has too much money and too little sense. RS driving is real work.” Now, if *Auto Motor und Sport* wrote that about the buyer of a Carrera RS 3.8L that generated 300 hp, sufficient to scoot from 0-60 mph in 4.8 seconds, then what do you think they’d write about the buyer of a carnivore like the lightened, tightened Carrera RSR 3.8L that produced 325-350 hp, enough to launch it from 0-60 mph in 3.7 heart-stopping seconds? The RSR also stopped just as phenomenally. Paul Frère, a former Belgian race driver and journalist, was quoted as saying, “What really impressed me most was the fabulous stopping power of the oversize brakes and the race-tuned ABS. Stops measuring up to 1.4g were achieved...”

In the rarefied air of über-special classic car transactions, who you know is more important than what

you know. In 2022, Gregg Blue received a call from his friend Davide De Giorgi, a classic car guru at Girardo & Co. “Davide told me they acquired a car that I had to buy because he knew my taste and I would love it,” Blue said. The car? A Porsche 964 RSR 3.8L, one of the most awesome race cars Porsche ever produced. A winner from the get-go, the 964 RSR 3.8L notched overall wins at the 1993 Spa-Francorchamps 24 hours and Nürburgring 24 hours, class wins at the Le Mans 24 hours, the 1000km of Suzuka, and in 1994 took the first four places in class (third overall) at Daytona, and first in class (fifth overall) at the Sebring 12 hours. De Giorgi was offering chassis number 496079. Blue listened and considered, but because he already had a collection of loud, gutsy sports cars, didn’t immediately jump into action. What a difference a year made.

A lucrative real estate transaction, combined with

**Center-lock wheels and a 120-liter fuel tank were part of the original package. RSR designates this Porsche as something very special.**



Tastefully discreet, the model designation molded into the two-tier rear spoiler is a subtle reminder of the beast beneath the hood.



a favorable monetary exchange rate, gave Blue unexpected buying power. He bought a 993 RS Clubsport, then two more. He shipped them to the U.S., planning to resell two of them. He then reached out to De Giorgi to see if he still had the RSR, which he did. "Listen, Davide," Blue said, "I don't have any money, but I want to buy the car. Davide just laughed and said, 'Go ahead and write your own contract.'" So that's exactly what Blue did. In January 2023 a deal was made and a contract signed. The RSR went into "layaway" until Blue was able to sell his other cars.

A couple of weeks later, De Giorgi called Blue with a surprise proposition. Would he break that contract for \$100,000 and walk away from the RSR? De Giorgi had another interested buyer with deeper pockets. Nope. By that time, Blue's infatuation with the RSR was insatiable. With several of his cars in his collection sold, Blue accumulated the cash and sent the check. Transportation arrangements fell into place. Blue's RSR went to California in mid-April.

After the deal, Blue called Rohr, who lived in Northern California. He told him he'd just purchased Rohr's RSR, and asked if he'd be interested in driving the RSR, accompanying him on an upcoming SCM rally. "Yes, of course," replied Rohr, closing a circuitous, multi-continental loop that had begun 30 years earlier. 🌐



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