



SIMPLICITY DEFINED

By David Mathews
Photos by Richard Chenet

Bugatti's Chiron, the world's latest, greatest, super-duper sports car, is 178.9 inches long, 80.2 inches wide, and weighs 4,400 pounds. Alex Finigan's 1959 356A coupe is 155.5 inches long, 65.4 inches wide, and weighs 1,800 pounds. The Chiron is powered by an 8.0-liter, 16-cylinder, quad-turbo, dual overhead cam, 64-valve engine that produces 1,500 horsepower at 6,700 rpm. It is mated to a 7-speed, dual-clutch automatic transmission that telepathically changes gears in nano-seconds. Finigan's coupe is powered by a warmed-over 1.7-liter, Zenith-carbureted, 4-cylinder, 8-valve motor that produces a little north of 70 horsepower at a breathtaking 4500 rpm. It is bolted

to a 4-speed manual transmission, and gear changes are made through gentle manipulation of a wobbly shifter. The Bugatti will rocket from 0-60 mph in less than 2.5 seconds, and flirt with a top speed north of 260 mph. Alex's Porsche... won't.

Both cars leave their owners awestruck, though. Saudi oil sheiks, youthful California technocrats, and some less scrupulous bureaucrats will fawn over the Chiron's carbon-fiber monocoque, the carbon-silicon-carbide brake discs, and the aluminum 8-piston calipers.

Alex will effuse for hours about his coupe's classic lines, its heritage, and the multitude of stone chips dotting the front hood.



This A coupe wears rock chips like a badge of honor. Above: Speedster seats add to the no-frills aesthetic.

He loves to relate how its former owners took Sunday afternoon drives on the backroads of Santa Clara county, a wicker picnic-basket full of sandwiches and Nehi grape soda strapped to the luggage rack atop the engine lid.

Although Alex has seen his share of supercars, he steadfastly remains in the “slow and easy camp” when it comes to his personal preferences. “When I first laid eyes on the coupe back in 1999, it just *spoke* to me,” said Alex. “The fact that it had only two previous owners, and was mostly original, only made me want it more.”

His 356A came to him by happenstance.

In the fall of 1999, Alex, the sales manager of a prestigious Massachusetts-based classic car restoration shop and purveyor of fine automobiles, received a call from the owner of an ultra-rare 1959 356A pushrod Speedster GT who expressed interest in selling her car. Alex pondered briefly... only six or seven of those cars were ever built... the market for 356s was heating up... why yes, Alex would be interested in buying that car. He took the first flight to California to take a look at the Speedster. “[The owner] picked me up at the airport in a ’59 356A coupe. As I looked around *that* car, I was blown away by its condition and simplicity. She told me she bought it from the original owner ten years before, and it was her only means of transportation.”

Taking care of business first, Alex told the owner that he definitely wanted to buy the Speedster (who wouldn’t?) and that he planned to put some work into it and sell it. But how about the little coupe? Would she sell *it* to Alex as well?

“She declined,” Alex recalled. “She said she planned to keep the coupe for a long time.”

If nothing else, sales managers are a persistent lot. Following up, staying in touch, keeping your name in front of the prospect—it’s all Sales 101 stuff. “I called and faxed her regularly for a year,”

5.5-inch painted wheels, a Talbot mirror, and a lowered profile lend a purposeful look.





Plenty of sports cars have passed through Alex Finigan's hands, but this one is a keeper.

all of the wear items, doing virtually all of the work himself. "I replaced the front and rear wheel bearings, installed a new brake master cylinder, wheel brake cylinders, all the hard and flexible lines, new axle boots, and Koni shocks."

Alex addressed the six-volt electrical system, rebuilding the generator, starter, and the distributor. He swapped the original rims for 5.5-inch steel wheels and new Michelin tires to give his car a slightly larger footprint. He also lowered the car and installed larger sway bars. "Although I've had a number of different engines in the coupe, I recently rebuilt the original engine to 1,750cc," said Alex. "I wouldn't hesitate to get in it and drive to San Diego."

If the market for 356s was warm in 1999, it is a total conflagration now, with even marginal examples commanding six-figure selling prices. Has Alex considered selling his coupe for a tidy profit? After all, that's what sales managers do.

Not on your life.

"I didn't plan to restore it, just to do all the mechanical work necessary to make it a reliable driver. I installed a set of red Speedster seats that I had in my attic for years—they match the original red vinyl perfectly. The paint is stone-chipped and buffed through in some areas, but all the gaps are perfect. I love it that way. And when it's parked next to fully restored models, my coupe is the one all the people gravitate to. It's like the most comfortable pair of moccasins that you've ever worn. I have no plans to ever sell it."

Spoken like a true enthusiast. **356**

continued Alex, "until she responded to a Christmas card I sent her. She had developed arthritis and no longer felt comfortable driving the coupe. She was ready to sell the car."

Alex was in the business of buying and selling cars, but this one was different—it would be his. "I flew out again in April 2000, test drove it, and bought it on the spot. Intercity Lines transported my car back East for me."

Although the coupe had been regularly driven and maintained during its life in California, Alex set about to renew or replace