



Doctor'd D

Outlaw Convertible D Suits its Owner to a T

By David Mathews

Photography by Nick Berard

Rivaling the venerable Speedster in terms of desirability, the Convertible D is one of the most sought-after 356 production models. A “one year only” car with only 1,331 examples built (some sources say 1,332), the Convertible D was Porsche’s lowest-priced model in 1959, spanning the gap between the 1958 356A Speedster and the 1960 356B Roadster.

With only a passing nod to creature comforts over its predecessor, the D featured a slightly taller—but still removable—windshield, a larger rear window, padded seats versus the “hard as a rock” Speedster buckets, crank-up side windows, door pockets on both doors, and windshield washers.

Remarkably, values of Convertible Ds have shot past those of its more luxurious sibling, the Cabriolet. The last five Convertible Ds changing hands on Bring a Trailer brought an average of \$220,000. Coveted by most 356 enthusiasts and coddled by deep-pocketed collectors, some of those pristine examples will likely be destined to spend the rest of their days hibernating inside garages and enclosed trailers.

Midwest 356 Club and PCA Chicago Region member Rick Gurolnick is cut from a different cloth. His Convertible D? An Outlaw. An anathema to Porsche purists.



Fuchs wheels and braided oil cooler lines were not standard equipment on a 1959 Convertible D.

A creative thinker, an inventor, and an automobile geek in the truest sense of the word, Rick's first commercial success came while he attended design school at Arizona State University in 1977. His semester project was to design a product for feeding, sleeping, or bathing an infant. What became the first kitchen sink-mounted baby bathtub, the world-famous "Gerry Cradlebath," was first pooh-poohed by his college professor.

"He told me it wouldn't work, that it was a big part of the semester grade, and that I should focus on something more practical... more marketable," recalled Rick. "I told him it *would* work, and I was going to stick with it."

Although Rick received a B on the project (his only B) his bathtub eventually found traction. While job hunting in California, Rick carried details of his baby bathtub in his portfolio. An interview at one design studio led to a discussion about the bathtub and that discussion led to, "... this is a great idea. Let's make it!"

"A year later, and six months into my new design career, I was let go from my first real job at a Chicago-area design studio," Rick said. "I glumly headed home, but when I checked my mail, I found a royalty check, the first of many, for \$12,000. For a 23-year old in 1979, that was huge money!"

"The Gerry Cradlebath provided the foundation to start my own design business, buy a nice home, and a couple of Porsches."

One of those Porsches was a 1960 356 Roadster race car, later named *Doctor Dreadful*. "That Roadster, campaigned in the early '70s in SCCA's San Francisco Region, was the beginning of what became my next automotive passion—vintage racing," Rick said.

Doctor Dreadful? That name came from another of Rick's successful inventions in 1994. As the front man for his design



Drauz Karosserie Werke was tasked with building the Convertible D.

partnership, Rick pitched the idea of a mad scientist laboratory set with which kids could "make all kinds of gross and disgusting concoctions, all of which were edible. Brains bubbled out of skulls, drinks changed colors, warts were edible..." It was a huge



Fitting a 3.0-liter six where a 1.6-liter four used to reside may have required a shoehorn.



hit with the kids and another financial home run for Rick and his partnership. “Those toys paid for my toys.”

Another of Rick’s toys was this 3.0 liter flat-six-power’d, 901 transmission’d, disc-brake’d, 12-volt’d, Fuchs-wheel’d, Light Ivory Convertible D Outlaw.

“I’d been racing my Roadster for about ten years before I got the [Outlaw D],” recalled Rick. “I wanted to get a street driver, an open car, something I could enjoy with a passenger. When I went on road rallies with my [former] 356 street car, I had to pedal hard all day. I was always bringing up the rear. Last one to the rest stop, late to lunch, whatever. I yearned to make a six-cylinder 356. I’m an industrial designer, a product designer. I loved automotive design. I often wondered why Porsche chose to offer a four-cylinder 911 [the 912] and not a six-cylinder 356. I yearned to own a 356 Porsche had not made.”

In 1995, that thought bubbled to the surface. “When I saw an advertisement in *Hemmings* for a Convertible D that the owner had *attempted* to convert to six-cylinder power, I got excited,” Rick said. The Carmel, California, owner offered it at a Monterey auction, but bids didn’t meet his \$33,000 reserve.

“I called the guy and he subsequently invited me to come out and see the car,” Rick said.

There were reasons why the D hadn’t sold. “It was only... okay. Didn’t run well. Leaked oil. The wheels and tires looked odd and out of place in

the fender wells,” Rick said. “I knew all these things could be fixed, but a person attending an auction intending to buy this car and drive it home, well...”

Negotiations began. The value of old Porsches was rising but hadn’t reached the stratospheric prices they command today. “The



Factory-looking badge is both correct and a bit of an inside joke.

drama began when I told the owner the car was worth \$24,000—maybe. ‘How dare you offer me such a lowball price?’”

Cooler heads eventually prevailed. They settled on \$26,000. Rick hired Passport Transport to bring the car to Illinois. “After I drove it to the Vintage Festival at Elkhart Lake in 1995, I realized I had a lot of work to do. It ran like crap,” Rick said.

It took a couple of years to get the car sorted out. Little things. Big things. “When I bought the car, it had a 2.7-liter engine in it. It leaked oil like crazy because the head studs were pulling out of the case,” Rick said.

Friends and vintage racing buddies came to the rescue. James Cox and “Big Mike” Marshall from the Kansas City area provided invaluable help. “James was perfect for this job. He built 356 and early 911 race cars, so he had experience with both models. He also had shelves filled with 356 and 911 parts,” Rick said.

“Another of James’s customers was a PCA club racer. He had a 3.0-liter and wanted a 2.7-liter to compete in a different class. We traded engines and I gave him a little cash to sweeten the deal. James and Mike rebuilt the engine. They worked hard to get everything right.” And the wheel fitment? “When I bought the car, it had low-profile tires mounted on 928 wheels. I asked James what I should do. His reply? ‘We’ll deal with it, no problem. I’ve

got wheels that’ll work. I have the gears. I’ll measure and have custom axles made. Don’t worry.” Rick remarked, “Nothing was ever a problem for James and Mike.”

The duo worked on the car throughout the winter, after which Rick returned it to Illinois. “The car was much better. I drove it on a fall color tour in Wisconsin. I thought this car would be perfect for that, but unfortunately that outing resulted in my first experience coming home on a flatbed. The drive gear for the distributor failed.” Just one of the challenges of owning an old car.

Multiple visits to James’s shop resulted in continuous improvement. “Running wider wheels and tires did a number on the front suspension,” Rick said. “James reinforced the front end with 356 race car parts—what a difference! On another visit they installed the oil cooler, and on yet another visit they welded heater boxes onto the headers to get some heat into the cabin. The exhaust system is all homemade, including the shortest, flattest mufflers they could find.”

So, all in, what did it cost to transform that tired Convertible D into the sassy girl you’re reading about? \$50,000, and that includes the initial cost of the car!

The pace of those driving tours was no longer a challenge. Rick kept up with the best of them. “There was a 356 West Coast Holiday at Park City, Utah, in 2010,” Rick said. “The D didn’t dawdle. That’s





Pitstop: the 3.0-liter is a bit thirstier than the original engine.

what I built this car for—to drive in the mountains. Man, oh, man, we were rocking in the Rockies.”

How did the flat-six-powered D compare with four-cylinder 356 street cars? “It handles more like my race car,” Rick said. “The 3.0-liter engine is tuned for mid-range performance. I wanted it to be reliable, not temperamental. Steering is impacted a great deal by what you do with the throttle. When you push the pedal down, the back end digs in and you get a lot of grip. The front doesn’t get light. The car responds well to judicious throttle input... ‘judicious’ being the key word.”

Did hanging a six-cylinder engine behind the rear wheels make it tail-heavy? No. James installed adjustable spring plates, heavier torsion bars, and tweaked the balance. 195/60 Michelins helped

to keep the rear planted. An oil cooler mounted behind the front horn grille, together with air flowing through an ingenious vent cut behind the rear license plate, kept the six running cool. Fabricated sheetmetal around the engine deflected heat emanating from the headers.

“These guys that buy and flip cars... that’s not for me,” Rick said. “My motto? Follow your heart. Get what you want and drive the crap out of it. I love this open car. I had a new top made for it a few years ago because the top was showing its age and the back window had cracked open, but I never put it up. Because of the car’s aerodynamics, once you get going, the air [or rain] just flows right over your head.”

Maintenance on this Outlaw? “You know, every few years I take it to someone who really knows these cars to have it checked out. Up on the rack, everything gets looked at. Jim Bach, owner of Bach Racecraft in Verona, Wisconsin, does a magnificent job. During one inspection, he found a bad motor mount. A good smack into a big pothole could have been disastrous. Jim fabricated a new one. On another visit, he replaced the clutch, transmission synchros, and the brakes. Another good friend, Lance McDonald, rewired the entire car because I was concerned that the old wiring would cause problems. He even put in a USB port to charge a cell phone.”

As always, there were naysayers. Rick began, “There has been no shortage of people that come up to me and say, ‘you know you should do this, fix that,’ like it had a disease... like it met with some horrible tragedy. ‘You gotta install the original engine, you gotta...’ an entire litany of things I should do before I sell it. And I look at them and say, ‘This is a driver. It’s a keeper. I don’t intend to sell this car.’ This car is an extension of the ’60s California custom car culture. It’s just the way I want it.” **356**

LIKE FATHER LIKE DAUGHTER

Racing fever, particularly vintage racing fever, runs in the Gurolnick family. Rick’s daughter took to the race suit and helmet thing at an early age.

“I have twins, David and Robbie,” began Rick. “They were at their first vintage car race at Grattan when they were six weeks old.”

Both David and Robbie started with indoor kart racing when they were seven. Robbie became enamored with outdoor kart racing because it offered higher speed and keen competition. At 15, Robbie, with Dad’s consent, began doing high-speed track days with Rick’s Mini Cooper under the auspices of Shawn Young, owner of LAPS Incorporated. “With some kids, instructions go in one ear and out the other. Robbie listened and learned,” Rick said.

After trying other racing schools and venues, Rick and Robbie decided that vintage racing was the best fit. Fender banging was not tolerated. Vintage drivers were more respectful; the atmosphere family-like.

For Robbie’s 18th birthday, Rick wanted to do something special. A trip? Some fancy clothes? Without hesitation, Robbie chose to race *Doctor Dreadful*, Rick’s track car. “I reached out to the officials at SportsCar Vintage Racing Association [SVRA] to see if she could drive in their 2015 event at Mid Ohio,” Rick said. “We wanted to share driving in the enduro. They knew her ability and agreed.”

SVRA racing at Mid Ohio equates to jumping into the deep end of a swimming pool, and not just because of the serious level of competition. That weekend it rained... and it rained.

“Robbie was good in the rain; she was ready for it,” Rick continued. “We had a good set of Hoosier Radial Wet H2O rain tires we could use. But just before the race, the weather appeared to be clearing so we opted for dry tires. We were gridded about 25th. I started and did okay, got us to ninth or tenth. Then I turned it over to Robbie—in a sudden downpour, still on dry-weather tires. Well, she plugged along. Some of the faster cars dropped out, but she hung in there. Finally the checkered flag dropped. People were shouting, waving, and pointing. I thought ‘Oh-oh, something happened to Robbie. Did she break something, hit something?’ No. Robbie finished the race first in class!”

