

## RUST BUCKET REVIVAL by Ron Davis

Ever since I sold my '56 black 356 1600 normal coupe back in 1965, I always knew that someday I would have another one. I finally got serious and started looking in the late 80s. Checking the car ads in the Sunday Washington Post I spotted an ad reading: "FOR SALE -- '64 356 SC Coupe, Moving, must sell. Excellent condition. Best Offer". It was Sunday morning and I went immediately to see the car. It was located in D.C. parked in a back alley garage. The car looked in rough shape, but it was all there. The seller said it had been stored for five of the previous seven years and, other than needing a new clutch, it was driveable. Boy, was he an optimist! I would have hated to see a car he considered in rough shape! He said there were 23,000 miles on the rebuilt engine and he had full documentation to prove it. As we bargained over the price his phone kept ringing as other Porsche hounds began calling about the car. Since he hadn't specified a price, I began thinking someone would outbid me soon enough. So in a rash moment I offered him \$5,000 and closed the deal.

The clutch wasn't a deal breaker because I had tinkered with cars since my teenage years and had done a clutch on my '54 VW Bug! The 1600 cc four-cylinder SC engine was the top of the Porsche line in its day, turning 95 HP. Now 25 years later it dutifully started, but sounded like it was only firing on 2½ cylinders, [which was easily resolved with new plugs and points](#). The maroon interior was dull and very ratty by any measure. Undaunted, I was sure I could revive the car to daily driver status, which was all I had in mind. I put an assortment of tools in the trunk of our Riveria and Diana and I picked up the car that Sunday night. I drove it away, expired plates and all, with Diana in the trail car. Thankfully the route down Arizona Ave to Canal Road and over Chain Bridge up to Military Road and out Lee Hwy to Annandale was largely deserted. I say thankfully because the clutch was so worn that I had to do the entire run in 1st and 2nd gears!! The crawl up the hill from Chain Bridge was really scary.

I couldn't wait to start checking out my great prize, but was in for a real shock. As I got under the car I discovered that someone had FIBERGLASSED THE ENTIRE UNDER SIDE, including suspension parts! The idea must have been an effort to preserve the underside which it did in certain solid places where the fiberglass held. However, where it was loose and held water it was all rust. I spent many hours that winter on the garage floor with the car up on jack stands with goggles, respirator mask, putty knife and hammer slowly chipping off fiberglass. (SEE PHOTOS) That's when I discovered that it needed new floor boards and a battery box. In addition, the rocker longitudinals that are the main uni-body frame members holding the car together were riddled with rust. As I sanded the top-side I quickly discovered the entire nose panel was too rusty to be saved. Realizing I needed professional help in 1989 I found Lou Hauser of "Karosserie" in Fairfax. He is a genuine 356 restoration expert and he did a top notch job welding in new floor panels, longitudinals and a battery box.

When I got the car back it was time to drop the motor and [replace](#) the clutch. I also removed all the sheet metal and had it powder [coated](#) at American Stripping in Manassas. Then I returned to sanding the newly stiffened SC, stripping it down as much as possible to save money before it's eventual repainting. A neighbor referred me to his relative, Barry Moose, a paint and body man in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. By October, 1990 I was ready and trailered the Porsche to Barry who said he would have the paint and body work done by the next spring. What a great find he was, because the car needed a whole new nose panel and lots of other panel work. (see photos) As far as color, it had to be "signal red" and he did a fantastic job! In March Barry phoned me and said now was the time to redo the ratty headliner, because the front and rear glass was already out for painting and it had to be removed to do a headliner. Moreover, he knew an expert upholsterer in town who could do that work as well as re-do the interior and install a new windshield. I had a tan interior upholstery kit shipped to him and he did a great job installing the kit and headliner.

In early April, '91 the call I had been anxiously awaiting came. Barry said, "Come and get your car". When I saw it I could not believe my eyes as a miracle had happened! (PHOTOS) When I told Barry I had expected an ordinary paint job, not a "show car" job, he explained that he only did that

level of work. What luck finding a perfectionist! When my car buddies saw the car they said, "You can't use it as a daily driver, it is way too beautiful. It has to be a show car". I agreed and then realized I could not put the dull, pitted chrome I had removed back on. So off went all the chrome trim to "Paul's Chrome", at that time in Mars, Pa. (All the good car stuff is in Pennsylvania in case you didn't know.) I was truly impressed by the beautiful work Pauls did and it has lasted 25 years. I also ordered all new weatherstripping, and other rubber parts.

Now I was facing the really scary part--reassembling all the trim, including side window frames and putting glass in the vent windows and rear pop-out windows. I soon found out that the car was NOT HAPPY with newly chromed parts and new rubber seals, Nothing wanted to fit back together without a struggle. Seeking advice from other 356 restorers, over a period of months I used bungee cords from one door to the other to gradually tighten the doors against the new seals. Fitting the side glass into the frames took hours of tedious labor. After the beautiful engine sheet metal was reinstalled and the motor was back in, it looked as good as the body.

By summer 1991 my dream 356 was finished and I eagerly put on its new "Nifty 64" license plates. We have been having fun with "Nifty" over the past 26 years and collecting more than a few trophies along the way. (SEE PHOTO) More than one concours judge has admitted "Nifty 64" is the car they'd love to have in their garage.

Commentary: In the very early 50s when I was 14 or 15, a man returning from the Army of Occupation in Germany arrived to visit our next door neighbors. The car he was driving blew my mind. It was a new silver Porsche 356, which the owner parked near dad's Duesenberg and 33 Packard Super 8. In retrospect, it was an odd gathering of cars in our WWII housing project.

I couldn't wait to pester the owner into giving me a ride, which he did gladly. This included testing its road-holding ability at a notorious curve made all the worse by railroad tracks crossing in the middle. This thrilled me no end.

The next week, the owner - by himself - tried to better his earlier run across the tracks only to lose control and crash into a utility pole. The owner had his bell rung, but was otherwise okay. Unfortunately, the car was totaled, which broke my heart probably as much as it did his. These days, that car would have been salvaged and restored, no questions asked. That is because old Porsche values have skyrocketed. If Ron ever had any misgivings about investing so much in his 356, he must smile about it now.  
– Steve White



