



“FROM THE CHASSIS CONTROL TO THE DOOR CLOSURES AND THE CNC-MILLED IVORY KNOBS, EACH CAR EXHIBITED THAT LEGENDARY MILLED-FROM-TITANIUM PORSCHE SOLIDITY.”

auto avatar

The bathtub Porsche reimagined in Cameron-grade HD/3D/CGI brilliance

■ illustration doug fraser

THE CONCEPT of an automotive avatar or surrogate is compelling. Why subject your precious and fragile six-figure classic to distracted drivers, crumbling roads, or personal overexuberance if a less pricey stunt-double could stand in? Lots of neat old cars are being “knocked off” today, but most “replicars” struggle to achieve reasonable trompe l’oeil from 20 feet and fewer still can fool the rest of a driver’s senses. But if the classic you wish to clone is a 1955-’59 Porsche 356 Speedster or Convertible D (Black Book valued at \$115K-\$170K), there’s a company in Vancouver, Canada, that delivers the look, feel, and jewellike precision build quality of Zuffenhausen’s original while delivering

modern performance, comfort, and Swabian durability starting at \$44,900.

Intermeccanica was founded in Turin, Italy, in 1959 as a speed-parts provider and soon began producing complete vehicles like the Apollo GT, Italia, Murena, and Indra. But founder Frank Reisner had always loved bathtub Porsches. He shopped for a used one in the late ’50s, but was appalled at the degradation they’d suffered in just a few years. Fast forward to 1975. Having relocated to California pursuing a deal to build Indras that ended up falling through, Reisner developed a Porsche 356 Speedster replica instead, based on a shortened VW floorpan. Frank’s baby has been continuously refined ever since, and

his son Henry is now employing some clever engineering to maintain the pace of evolution.

Years ago, the flexy VW chassis was ditched in favor of a perimeter frame custom-welded of 3x5-inch steel tubing that’s riveted and bonded to the fiberglass body. The exterior and most of the trunk and floor structure are molded in a single piece, using a special tooling-grade epoxy resin and a complex nine-piece mold. Four air-cooled VW flat-fours are offered producing 75, 100, 145, or 165 horses, but Reisner has recently introduced water-cooled VW engines for those willing to trade the authentic engine note for modern electronics, fuel injection, and up to 180 horses’ worth of turbo power. Rather than bolting in VW’s entire transverse setup amidships, he preserves Porsche’s longitudinal rear-engine layout by bolting the engine to a VW bus transaxle. The radiator packages out of sight in the front, while air pumped by the rear tire into a boxed-in rear quarter panel is ducted through the intercooler providing factory-spec outlet temperatures. Want more power and authenticity? Go for an air-cooled 911’s 225-horse flat-six powertrain. Squeezing it in requires a 2.25-inch-wheelbase stretch that also swaps the 356-authentic VW-style suspension for 911 bits all around.

In back, Reisner has engineered an inboard torsion-bar mount that vastly simplifies ride-height adjustment and an inner semi-trailing arm eccentric mount that eases alignment tailoring. The front strut upper mounts are spherical ball joints that allow drivers to arrive at an autocross event, quickly alter caster/camber specs to sharpen handling, then switch back to touring settings for the drive home. Slick.

I sampled the authentic 100-horse version, the 1.8 turbo, and a wide-body 911-powered car with 72,000 miles. From the chassis control to the door closures and the CNC-milled ivory knobs, each car exhibited that legendary milled-from-titanium Porsche solidity. Weighing between 2000 and 2250 pounds, they all go, stop, and turn as ardently as 007 pursuing Pussy Galore, but each stands a far better chance of catching whatever you chase than the original 356 (or an aging Connelly) ever could today.

<http://www.intermeccanica.us/> ■

