

# PUTTING THE PORSCHE 356 B BACK INTO "PRODUCTION" *At What Price?*

By Jerry Sloniger



*Rebirth of a very familiar silhouette from the sixties, in any color you like, so long as it's metallic silver.*



# First, the exciting news.

*A small series of 356 B Coupes and Cabriolets, all powered by the 1600 Super engine of 75 HP . . . is coming out of Austria where the 356 got its start.*



*Kaan retains car's original chassis and engine plates but adds his own with sequential numbers so any "new" model can be identified later and matched to its computer data sheet.*

**P**orsche's 356 B is back in "production." Well, sort of. What's more, at what the restorer considers an "affordable" price for the quality offered. Relatively speaking. The sobering news in all this lies between those two sets of " ".

A small series of 356 B Coupes and Cabriolets, all powered by the 1600 Super engine of 75 HP and painted any color you like so long as it's metallic silver, is coming out of Austria where the 356 got its start. Provided you live in Japan, at least for this year, you can order one with options limited to red or black for the leather interior. Once the computer in Graz has sorted out a program for parts and permutations, however, so that cars can be built to the 80-85 point level in a reasonable number of hours, starting from rusty Class 4 donors, a man named Richard Kaan plans to offer his new idea in Porsche restorations worldwide at a price certain to range well above DM 100,000 (\$55,000-\$60,000).

Right off, he's got a problem. European wage scales and building to "Porsche-like" standards, mean such

cars are already above the median price for so-called complete restorations in most markets. This is where price demands in the magazine ads diverge from reality. Never mind the claims of condition 1, none of the cars offered for 60-80% of the Kaan price are restored to the last nut and bolt. Even if they truly are condition 1 cars. Home or partial rebuilding is cheaper but simply not compatible with original factory standards, as purveyors of other brands have found. You can buy a Mk II Jaguar from an ad in England for a third the price a works-class reconstruction costs.

These 356 Bs are a case of classic restoration — and yet they're something different too. Even the elevated price is lower than it would be if each was a one-off job. But is it viable to expect twice the going price, even assuming you do provide something far finer? And even if some are willing and able to pay for perfection, what does this do to the overall market? Contentious cars here.

Kaan, a young Austrian engineer and one-time race driver who reached Formula 3 level, founded his own operation on the edge of Graz in May, 1981, initially to upgrade the MB/Steyr G range of off-rovers. He gathered

skilled staff and found a niche in one-off restorations for Maserati, Facel Vega or Ferrari owners. But Kaan soon realized that neither he — nor most other shops — really knew exactly how much sheer labor time and parts seeking went into each car. Prices were an educated guess, factored on the high side to ensure some sort of profit. This quickly reached the point where proud owners could hardly justify the risks of driving their works of art.

Logic stepped in. If Kaan concentrated on just one interesting, but not unique, automobile type and did the whole job — from buying basic wrecks through to driving test — restricting variations and rigidly controlling costs, it should be possible to build early-sixties automobiles with all the image and fun that phrase suggests at a price which wouldn't exclude daily — or at least sunny-weekend — use. The goal would be cars better than Porsche made, without cutting a single corner to meet the price. Profit had to come from rationalizing "production." By feeding the computer with data on every minute worked and every part refurbished versus purchased, Kaan hopes to establish a data base from the first six to a dozen built which might be applied to any comparable





**Kaan Bs are externally fine restorations with no clues to their "series" background a second time around.**

restoration. Ideally, he might even sell such software to other restorers one day.

First he has to build a run of 15-20 Bs of actual ex-works standard and see if the costing checks. To protect this investment, he found a partner in Japan to market the first dozen or fifteen — over a year's output in the startup phase — but this isn't exclusive. Would-be 356 B drivers in any land can have a silver streak too.

Provided they will accept the base lines: engine, color and model. And appreciate the difference between private condition 1 dreams and "like new."

Kaan contends the dichotomy between what he will ask and prices quoted in 356 magazines is not due to an excess of Austrian ego but a case of private restorers who count everything but their own time invested because an accurate accounting

would only make them cry. It is entirely natural for deepest-dyed 356 fans to try and hold prices down, to save their hobby. They are the ones who will go head and head with the new factory division called Porsche Classic, where only top (original "Porsche") work and parts will do. (Porsche Classic is the name of a new division which will provide parts and service backup for 356s, 914s, and 911s up to 1973. It is still in the start-up phase.) They are



*(above) Interiors are true, except better. Meaning leather throughout, choice of red or black. Dash is authentic, even down to missing second heater/ fan slide on B model. But wheel is leather for better control today. Typical touch for this range.*

*(left) Chrome parts like headlight rims are more economical when bought as new replacements than rechromed. Such logic will be part of software to allow halfway reasonable sales price by pinning down labor versus purchase for each individual part.*



also not the market for this B series. As Kaan puts it:

"I see three categories on the old-timer scene at our level. First, the total madmen who must have every screw perfect, whether that is good for running a car or not. They do a great deal personally, with no idea what a fortune has been invested and carry the result around on a trailer. Second group are speculators with no special feeling for the cars. It's the third group we want to talk to. Those who can afford almost any toy and buy ours because they have some memory of 356 glamour. Emotion for the car but they want the fun of driving one too. Ours combines image with everyday reliability."

This is where the controversy with "save-the-356" people will begin. They want to keep Bs on the road for current prices, authentic if possible but not at any cost. Kaan wants to build cars he can and will guarantee for a year, thanks to blueprinted engines,

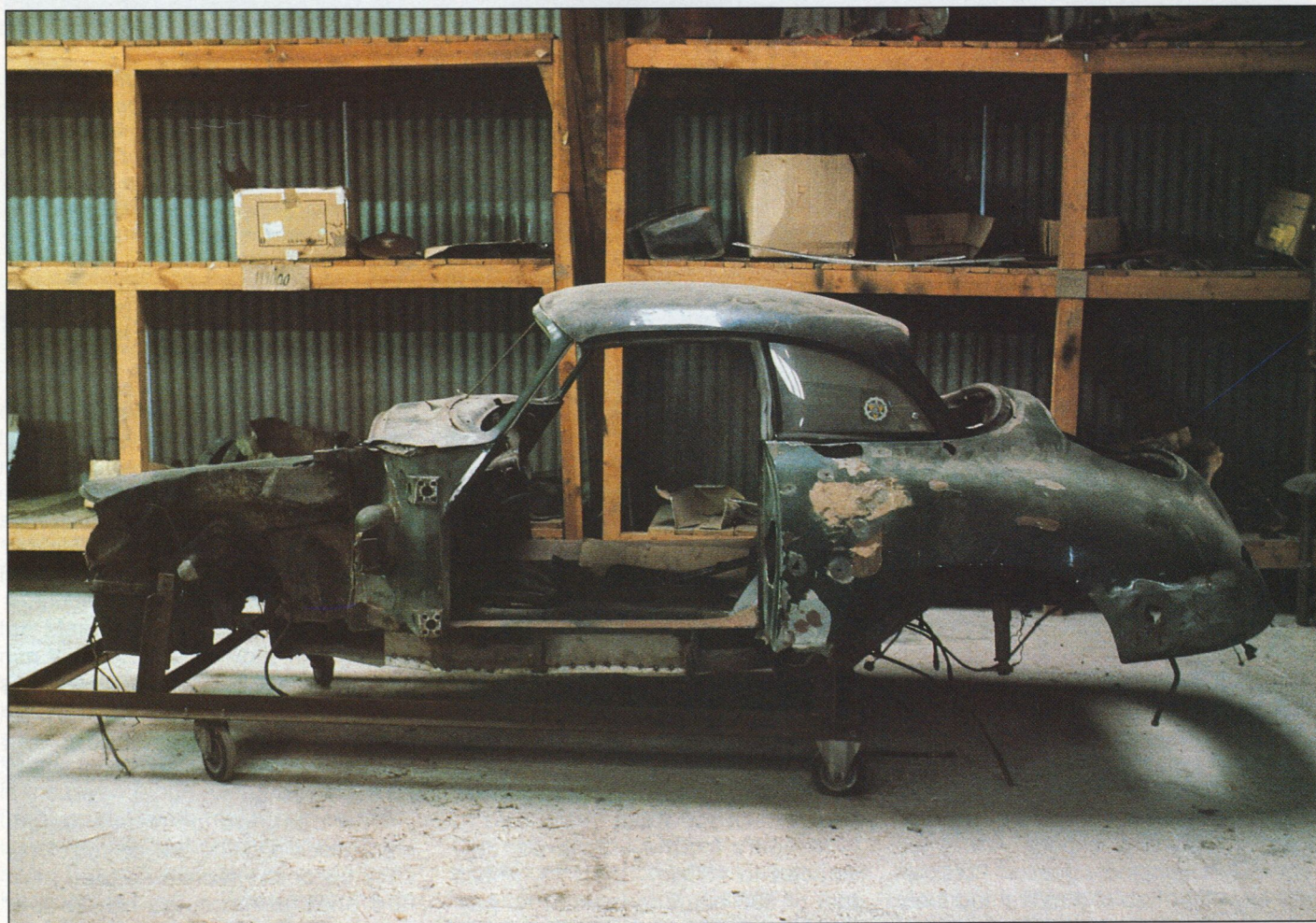
600-mile pre-delivery road tests and "improvements" like undercoating or sill stiffening in the Cabrios. It's as if he said, "This is what we feel Ferry would have done in 1960 if he'd had today's tooling, materials and knowhow." It's not maintaining a hobby price line but rather, building better Bs. "Better" being subjective as well as objective, admittedly.

Let's follow the prices through from purchase of a category 4 basket case — all bits included if possible — to a machine for 1991 roads. So far the donor machines have come from Europe, with rust holes as large as the window openings, although they still cost DM 15-20,000. Ideally these will have original papers, or at least provenance. Then Graz takes the trouble to confirm chassis and engine numbers so resale can be properly documented. Out of the first handful they have already found several with chassis numbers from a total wreck welded over the original: meaning once-stolen.

In one case they stripped the paint to find a welded-in number, cut that out and found another welded in below it. The real factory number was third down: twice-stolen at least.

To ease the rebuild process, all current purchases are T5 or T6, 1600 S models, although they could contemplate 356 Cs if the overall idea of recreating the sixties works. Even early 911s further out if the concept proves successful. Kaan doesn't change 1300s or S 90s to Supers because he is a restorer, not a replica builder. He is willing to squirrel away any 356 parts he comes across on buying forays though. They can only become rarer. He figures the 75 HP engine is the best value for reasonable performance with reliability. S 90s are simply too fragile to send to a far country with guarantee.

Once a near-wreck reaches Graz it will be stripped to every last part, over 5000 of them, sandblasted and inspected. The core of his plan is to



**Project is based on roughly class 4 cars of relatively poor condition (although they still cost around DM 15-20,000) which are stripped to the bare metal and rebuilt. Here part of the warehouse reserve.**





*(above) Each car, coupe or cabrio, is put on a surface plate and jugged to ensure symmetry, another item usually missing with tooling of that time. While no effort is made to build 100-point cars, new series must be done to best Austrian and work levels possible.*

*"Production" runs from rusty wreck to finished car, via undercoated floor pan. Not an "assembly line," the project does move in stages, more like original Porsche production. Master Helmut Bartel has been with Kaan most of the firm's ten years, a key to quality.*

establish a balance between what they can repair and what is cheaper purchased as either a refurbished or recreated part. New parts alone triple the investment in a wreck. Along the way he has found from 65 to 85 lbs of lead on every original body — and not one truly symmetrical. Neither Porsche nor any other firm of that era had tooling approaching today's precision. Like any other "factory," but on a much smaller scale, this operation has

its departments and specialists. They employ four body builders, two men for engines, transmissions and axles, two in paint and two upholsterers. These work along parallel lines. Bodies take the most labor: 780 to 1000 hours for the first three, now reduced to 480 for the fifth, with a goal of 330 hours to make it all pay. Their work includes surface plate, factory-quality jigs and handwork skills. If a panel can't be restored, new metal is

welded in, using butt seams and the inert-gas method. Replacement panels come from the same suppliers Porsche Classic will use when it is fully up and running.

New castings for transmission, crankcases and the like couldn't possibly be cost-effective so they must find enough housings capable of restoration to as-new condition. For instance, a new steering box would cost DM 3500, one from a wreck per-



haps 50, plus 600-800 DM to bring it up to "new" condition. The computer tells only home truths about such costs. Alloy brake drums with steel rings shrunk-in are extremely rare now and must be reworked rather than recreated, for similar cost reasons. The two metals were never compatible so that the ring has separated or grown wavy — reason for brake judder in most 356s, even those supposedly restored. They do fit new brake cylinders and pistons.

When it comes to engines, Kaan is leery of partial rebuilds for guarantee reasons. Even those purchased as "fully reconditioned" are torn down again. Heads are planed, passages freed of sharp edges, although he can't afford full port and polish jobs. Pistons and cylinder barrels are always replaced, rods weight-matched, while new valves are ground in, with matched springs. Crankshafts are reground with main bearings trued to the original seven-hundredths clearance. For this reason they specify Shell Rotella oil. Modern oils with wider heat ranges are keyed to three-hun-

panels, meaning a touch better than new, just like the leather-rim wheel. Out-of-sight assemblies like window crank machinery will be zinc-coated this time around, not just painted. He'll remain authentic to the extent of leaving off the second heater slide (Bs only had a slot for it) but has no qualms about a warning blinder switch tucked out of sight. Headlight bulbs are 6 V but halogen, keeping the original electrics but giving far better night vision. Wiring looms are a mix of new and restored. Outside mirrors on the right (LHD models) and inertia-reel seat belts may not be strictly authentic but they are practical necessities now. Incidentally, since international rules require a 20 g mounting point for the belts and crash testing wouldn't be practical, they over-engineer. External Cabrio tops are bought and trimmed by Kaan.

Chrome is an environmental problem. A new chrome shop would never be approved in Graz so they either buy "new" old parts — most from U.S. suppliers such as Stoddard of Tweaks — or have unobtainable items done by

in addition to the Porsche original — giving the job sequence number for the new car, keyed to its complete data sheet. The customer gets a copy of that, the figures, right down to carb jet sizes and faults rectified after road testing, which also remain in the Kaan computer. All this consumed 2000 man hours for the first restoration but their goal is less than half that figure. It is the only way to do such a total restoration "affordably," even with their price tag.

Kaan himself performs the 600-mile road test of every car, the first 300 at 3000 RPM before a complete engine service by the Porsche manual, then 300 miles at 4500 and finally 5500 RPM. This includes highway and city use, even trips to other Austrian cities on his regular schedule. Each car is fitted with extra dials during this period, to record oil temperatures and the like, supplementing his observations and subjective driving notes. As the boss puts it, "If a car is going to come apart, I want that to happen in Graz, not some distant land." Next step will be a test-mule 356 to run the first 300 engine miles without endangering new paint.

The project is up and running now, with five cars delivered to Japan and plans for 15-20 each year by 1992. With roughly 30,000 known Porsches on tap in the world, Kaan anticipates no supply problems for donor wrecks. Orders run up to nine months ahead of "production" with roughly a third taking Cabrios. Right-hand steering is no more trouble — apart from finding the starter cars of course. After 18 months, Kaan is only beginning to get a clear view of the price parameters. They want to establish Graz as the place for truly top-grade 356 Porsches, permitting one-off restorations of exotics like the Speedster later, once there's a clear idea of true costs.

Leaving only our original caveat: is the world waiting for a reborn 356 B at the elevated price such ground-up rebuilds must cost? Does this save cars from the wrecker or move them beyond the reach of old-line fans? Rational restoration from the Austrian builder's standpoint won't always match the hopes of private 356 fans. Kaan isn't aiming at them — he's introducing a thirty-year-old Porsche which works like any other car in today's traffic. It's old, it's new and it's not cheap. But it sure is a handsome 356 B.

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dredths clearances. Carbs and ancillaries like distributors are rebuilt, using new jets, bushes, et cetera. Then each engine is run on a stand to Porsche standards for that era: ten minutes at 1500 RPM, so many at 3500 and so forth.

Suspension is both original and better. Meaning choice of 22, 23 or 24 mm torsion bars, as you might have specified then, but new, adjustable Koni shocks. Most cars will be set up slightly softer than mid-range but a firm or "sporting" ride is possible within the given range. Gearbox ratios are the ones delivered most often originally, others would theoretically be available. But options are not something Kaan wants to offer. Wheels are 4.5 or 4 inch, a choice available then.

Inside, the cars are trimmed entirely in leather on original seat frames and

an existing specialist. The same holds true for paint, a two-layer VW silver-metallic color Kaan simply likes better than the Porsche original. Full PVC underbody coating is not original but certainly more rust-resistant for daily use. Further protection comes from penetrating oil for all cavities. Front and rear glass is available as reproductions, side glass flat safety panes.

Once all the subassemblies are complete and the body painted the entire team goes into assembly mode, again to a carefully-staged plan designed so that nobody has to wait for his chance at the left front corner. This extends to computerized spares supply, delivered on trolleys in batches for each specific job. Saves all that time mechanics love to spend wandering over to the stores window. The final touch is a Kaan chassis plate —