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Jim DeBlois' PORSCHEs

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Like many of us, Jim DeBlois looks back upon the 1960s and '70s era with fond memories. Not just because the energy of that era was manic, youthful, rebellious and fun—although that was certainly a good part of it—but because it was one of the best periods for cars, ever. Pre-emissions, pre-safety . . . pre-heavy. The muscle and sporty cars of that era were pure expressions of speed, power, and handling. For many people, it was Detroit muscle, but for those of who preferred cars that actually go around corners and can stop in short distances, the Porsche 911S was a thing of pure joy. Lightweight, incredible handling, and a relatively high power-to-weight ratio combined with German engineering and a solid chassis, meant that the 911S was destined to be one of the greatest cars of its generation.

Jim DeBlois, grew up in Roswell, New Mexico, graduated from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces in 1969 and then moved to Southern California to begin his banking career. There he was soon infected by the sports car bug. He bought one of the first Datsun 240Zs to come off the ship from Japan. Meanwhile, someone at the same apartment complex bought a Porsche 911T, which cost almost three times as much. At first, DeBlois wondered why anyone would spend so much, when the Datsun performed as well as many cars two or three times its price. It didn't take long to notice that the car just didn't hold together long term like the Porsche did.

Over time, he realized that the Datsun's paint had discolored, the interior stitching was weak and the performance trailed off, while the neighbor's Porsche continued to hold its luster, held together well and ran and ran and ran. Not to mention the unique 911 look and the strong reputation of the Porsche brand. That sparked his interest and started a habit. Since then, Jim has owned, to the best of his recollection, somewhere in the neighborhood of 20-23 Porsches, including two different 914s, a 912, a series of 911s including two different early '70s 911Ss, a couple of turbos, a Ferry Porsche Commemorative Edition, two different 964 RSAs, and a 944 turbo S. While he says that he has nothing against any of the modern water-cooled 911s, he just likes the original 911 shape, air-cooled engines, and the rear-wheel-drive powertrains. He admits that pricing has had something to do with that, but not overwhelmingly so. He also notes that to own and drive a Porsche means to participate in the Porsche reputation for panache, exclusivity of ownership, and that PCA has built a great organization that keeps everyone interested. Porsche as a company

builds performance automobiles which continue to evolve and improve. A Porsche owner participates in that reputation no matter if they have the latest turbo Panamera or the earliest 356 or anything in between.

Still, when looking to purchase a car, uniqueness enters in. Whatever the model series, he looks for the most exclusive, iconic models. Hence, the 911Ss, the turbos, the RSAs, the Ferry Porsche edition, etc. He's looking for something that will be fun to drive, will show well, and will hold its value when it comes time to pass it on to the next owner. As a matter of personal preference, he eschews the cars from '74-'77 because of their weight gains and complexity from conforming to NHTSA bumpers and EPA emission controls. According to DeBlois, that's when they shifted from performance cars to touring cars. Later on, with the SCs and the Carreras, Porsche found suitable solutions to return and improve performance levels. Though he's owned over 20 Porsches in the time since, he says "you never forget your first girl."

In 2000, Jim was in the market for an early 911. Now living closer to home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he thought back fondly on the time in his life that was the most fun and was also one of the best periods for the 911, too. He had recently sold a '73 911S coupe and was feeling a bit down. So, he decided to get another one if he could find just the right one. Soon, an Albuquerque-area Navy man returned home from California with a Targa. Jim looked through the receipts and found that it probably had four or five owners, but they were all in California, up and down the coast between San Diego and the Bay area. The car was mostly stock, but had a few aftermarket bits like a Sony radio and MOMO steering wheel. There was a bit of wear too: a cracked dash and some upholstery wear. The original mechanical fuel injection had been replaced by Weber carburetors, a popular aftermarket fix for the often-difficult to adjust injection system. A convenient fix, for sure, but it wasn't original, as he'd liked.



Currently, the five-figure odometer shows 27,000 miles, but Jim reasoned from its level of usage that it must have had more like 127,000, with the speedometer turning over once. DeBlois says "it cost me \$8,000 and it was an \$8,000 car," no more, no less. The paint had faded and oxidized, so he dismantled the car and stripped it to bare-metal himself. Along the way, bondo emerged on the right side of the engine lid. That meant having it reshaped and led to the original, perfect shape. The original color was silver, but silver has never been a favorite color of his. Instead, after stripping it, he had it repainted black. A respected colleague, Chuck Rumschlag, of The Color Works in Los Lunas, New Mexico painted it for him. Rumschlag is known for his restoration of older cars, so there was a two year backlog wait. Eventually, the body came back to DeBlois in February of '04. But according to DeBlois, it was worth it. The car has a beautiful, deep luster that only comes with a well prepared surface and a painstakingly good paint job.

The original black interior stayed black. Rumschlag found a replacement carpet kit from Germany. DeBlois had the seats from an earlier 911T. He had a new dash put in it, replaced the MOMO steering wheel with the original steering wheel, and bought some reproduction door pockets. So now the interior looks as it did from the factory. He had Dave Brown in Boulder, Colorado, recondition the original Targa top. Brown's been doing them since 1974. He recreates the dimensions of the Targa itself. Next was getting rid of that heretical Sony radio (that might have been okay in his 240Z!). DeBlois called around and eventually found a replacement, so the radio is an original model Blaupunkt, as you would have found in 1973.

Who wants a beautiful looking 911S that is down on power, as this one was after turning over 120,000 miles? So, he removed the engine, transmission, and drive line, put them on his flatbed trailer and drove them to Carl Young at Porschehaus of Las Vegas, Nevada. Young would work on the engine for DeBlois on the condition: "that you don't call me, don't bug me and you don't question me." No problem. But Jim had a condition of his own: "You don't check out on me." Deal struck. Young rebuilt the engine, transmission, replaced the clutch and flywheel, installed an original mechanical fuel injection system, and repainted the engine shroud. All of that was finished right about the same time the body was done. Jim took the body to Vegas and Carl and his staff re-installed the engine and transmission. Albuquerque's Mickey Hollingshead, owner of Jim's Fine Cars, helped him find the few odds and ends needed to finish the car to a perfectionist's standard.

When all was said and done, there was just one problem. Now that the car was "perfect" he became nervous about where and when he drove it. The car became a garage queen. He's only put about 500 miles on it since the restoration was finished in 2004. After having it sit in the garage for several years, he now figures it's time to pass it on to its next admirer, someone who will appreciate it and continue its maintenance and improvement, maybe even show it. But DeBlois has enjoyed the process so much that he couldn't bear to see anything happen to it. Of course, there's the value



aspect too. Well restored early '70s 911Ss are now entering the realm of investments! According to DeBlois, "this is the last Porsche I have left. I've had a lot of them and still like them. It's very possible I'll get another and start over...." Given his history with Porsches and his fondness for the era, it's likely that buyer's remorse could strike again...and the process of looking, prepping, restoring, and rebuilding could be nothing more than a vicious (or delicious) circle starting all over again. 

