

Road Scholars
On the Pathway to Perfection
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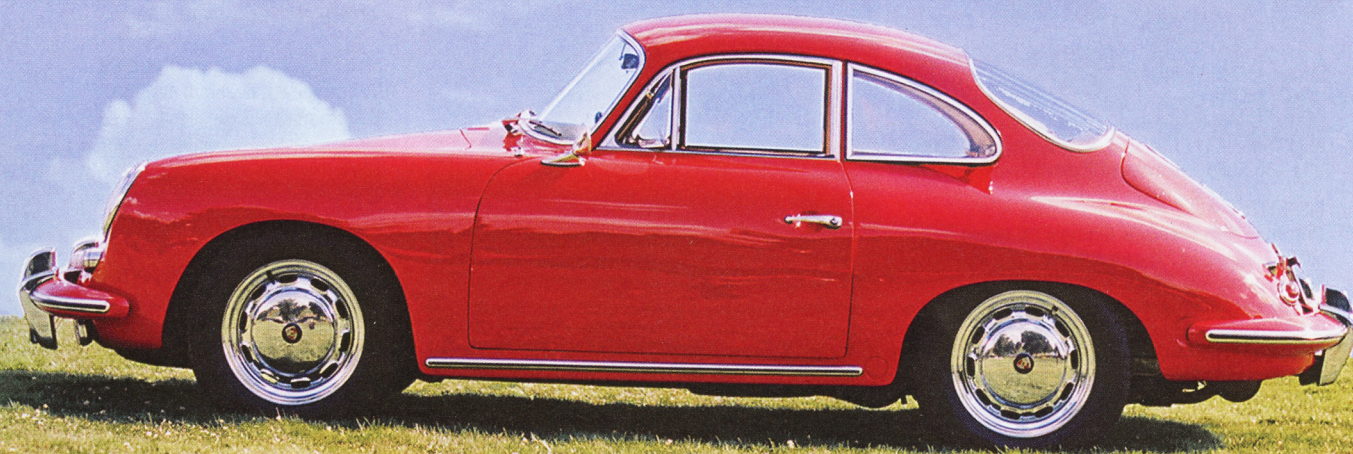


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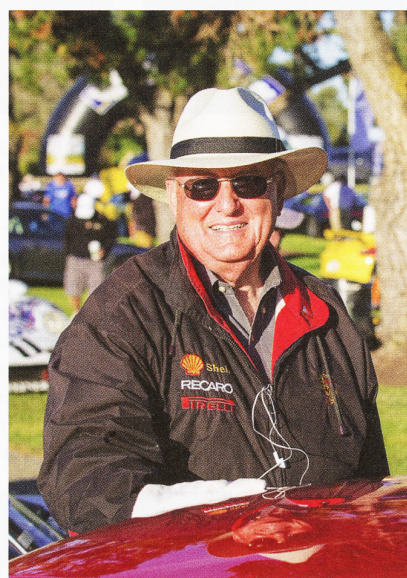
Cover: A photo by the late Shep Adkins at an East Coast track in the 1950s.
This page: Ron Davis of Virginia was at the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix where
Joey Kennedy took this shot of his C coupe, "Nifty 64"...

Road Scholars

On the Pathway
to Perfection



By Sean Cridland



Top: Cameron Ingram.

Left: Kevin Watts.

Above: Cam's father Bob Ingram only discovered Porsches in the late 1990s but he has become a serious and dedicated collector of 356s and 911s

If you're a Porsche enthusiast of the early 21st century, you've heard of Road Scholars. Cam Ingram and Kevin Watts are now well known for factory-perfect restorations and acquiring and brokering entire collections of rare and significant Porsches and other marques from their Durham, North Carolina headquarters. One or the other or both will often be seen at Porsche-centric events from Amelia Island to Pebble Beach to the Porsche Parade, the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb and Luftgekühlt and many places in between during the year. In between, Watts is flying around the world looking at prospective purchases, taking care of clients or monitoring values at the major automotive auctions.

Though it would seem they're just about everywhere, as with anything else, they had a beginning, a point from which everything emerged.

Road Scholars was already in existence with Watts and a previous partner, but things started to change when young Ingram came on board in 2005 to lead the restoration side of the business while Watts continued with sales.

Ingram began his automotive restoration career at Randall Yow's International Coach Works while he was in college in Greensboro as an art student, initially working for free until he eventually convinced Yow to hire him. He worked for Yow all through college with both a mechanic mentor and a body mentor. As an art student, his studies focused on metal shaping and bronze casting with an emphasis on industrial applications. Unlike many art students, he looked to develop skills that would be applicable in an industrial environment.

Upon gaining his degree, he took a corporate job... but it didn't last long. He and his dad had taken a father/son trip to Monterey for Car Week and they'd both caught the Porsche bug. He quit his corporate job, dropped out of business school at Duke and bought into Road Scholars. For Ingram, it was the best decision he ever made. As part of their business plan, he and Watts drew up goals, some immediately attainable and some pie-in-the-sky. Close to earth, they wanted to deal only in significantly historic or rare cars and they had to be cars they liked. A little further out was winning a PCA Zuffenhausen award. And in the completely crazy category: to win at Pebble Beach with one of their own restorations.

If you take Road Scholars as an example, it pays to dream big—and take a few chances along the way—but be sure to deliver.

Says Watts, "Shortly after Cam started the restoration side, we bought a 1963 Carrera 2 cabriolet that had won at the 1988 Porsche Parade in Colorado Springs. It was a numbers-matching car, except for the fact that it was painted red with a tan top and a tan interior rather than its original Condor Yellow with black interior and top. We called one of our clients on the West Coast to see if he might be interested. He asked, 'When will you be back at the shop?' I told him tomorrow morning. At 8 am, he walked into our shop; he had gotten off the phone and driven directly to the airport. He really wanted the car, but wanted it put back to its original colors. Oh, and the car hadn't been started in nearly 20 years. So he wanted a mechanical restoration too."

Watts, not knowing then what he knows now about the restoration process, quoted the client a price of \$28,000: \$10,000 for paint, \$8,000 for top and interior, and \$10,000 for miscellaneous mechanical work. Needless to say, he was off the mark - by a six-figure amount. Still, he and Cam Ingram stuck to their price, delivered the car to a very happy client and then took it to the 2008 Porsche Parade at Charlotte where it won a Zuffenhausen award. One of their first goals was achieved.

The client knew he'd gotten a good deal and promised the partners they'd make it up in volume. As it turned out, that client was an executive in one of the world's major software firms and has returned the favor - many times over. He and several of his friends became repeat buyers of several rare and expensive collector cars from the Road Scholars guys, appreciating Road Scholars doing world class work and sticking to their quote. Goal two, achieved.

If winning at Pebble Beach with a Porsche restoration of their own doing seemed a fantastical, unreachable goal, the following story will seem too strange for fiction.

Cam Ingram begins:

"We bought a collection in 2009 that included every model of 356 going back to Gmünd Coupe 356/2-045. Once we listed it for sale, our phone began ringing off the hook. Among the many calls was one from a high-pitched German man saying his name was Rolf Sprenger. After wracking my brain trying to remember where I'd heard this man's name, it came to me: Rolf Sprenger had run the Porsche Special Wishes/Exclusive department for decades. He also served as right-hand man to Wolfgang and Hans-Peter Porsche in the management of their personal collections.

"A couple of days later, Sprenger arrived at the Road Scholars shop in Raleigh to see the car and make an offer on behalf of Hans-Peter Porsche. It didn't take long to seal the deal, but following that transaction, Sprenger had a question. Mr. Porsche would like to have the car restored and shown at the 2011 Pebble Beach Concours. Would Road Scholars be interested? Honored, but a little overwhelmed, I asked why the Porsche Exclusive department wouldn't want to do it..."

That's when Watts the salesman jumped in: "Of course we'll do it!"

Ingram knew two things. While it would be a great honor to do the work on a car for Hans-Peter Porsche, it would also require a huge amount of work in a short period of time. Was it even possible? Second, they would have to do a better job than Porsche Exclusive could. Not just daunting. Terrifying.

Watts knew something else: "You only get one shot to restore a car for Hans-Peter Porsche. They won't ask twice. Of course we'd take it."

Like the Zuffenhausen Award-winning project, both Watts and Ingram were quite sure that it would be a money-losing proposition, but that it could quite possibly cement their reputation for excellence in the Porsche restoration community. It was a huge gamble. But, as Watts says, "I've never made an outrageous claim that Cam couldn't deliver on." Sure enough, less than two years later, after many, many eighty-hour work weeks, countless live video conferences with the Porsche team in Zuffenhausen, several visits from Sprenger, hundreds of hours of research, a few arguments about the process and level of originality and all those other little things that can crop up in a project of this importance, the car rolled out at Pebble Beach... and won. The first and only Porsche to win at Pebble Beach in a non-Porsche-only class.

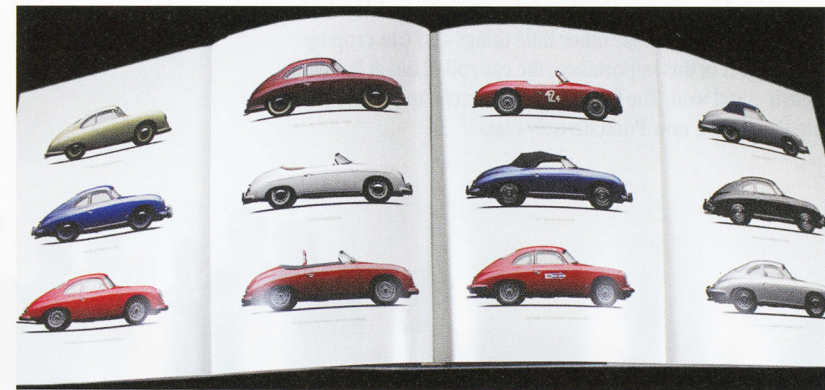


Though they had taken many PCA trophies to that point and had a solid reputation, after Pebble Beach their world began to change. It was around that same time that Ingram set to work with automotive historian Randy Leffingwell and studio photographer Michael Furman to co-author the book *Porsche Unexpected*.

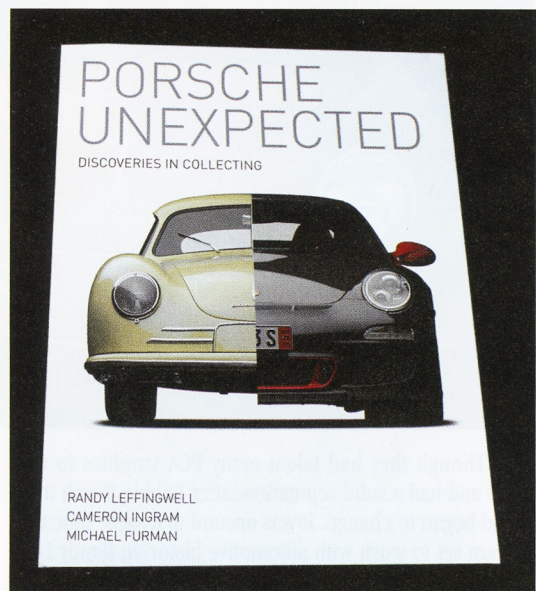
Ingram says it was one of the most pleasurable, but also one of the most stressful periods of his life. Like many of us, he'd always dreamed of writing a book, but had no idea what it might be about or when it might happen. That it should develop from his passion for sculpture, art and automotive history and restoration was both satisfying and surprising. He's both humbled and proud to have worked with arguably the best automotive historian and studio photographer in the business. He looks to Leffingwell as a mentor and friend. "Randy is one of the nicest people I've ever met; a consummate gentleman and historian. It was great to work with him and we got to interview some of the greatest collectors in the world, not just Porsche-centric people. We really wanted a full, rich perspective of what it's like to collect in the modern era."

At Pebble Beach in 2011, Wolfgang Porsche (left) stands in for his brother Hans-Peter at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance where the Gmünd coupe restored by Cam Ingram (second from right) and the Road Scholars crew took first place in class.

Photographer Michael Furman, left, and Randy Leffingwell, author of dozens of automotive books, and some of the most acclaimed Porsche books of the last decade. They discuss the book project *Porsche Unexpected* in a 2014 YouTube video by RoadsandRides.com. Some of Michael's photos in the book are below.



Above: A monthly digital magazine is edited by Randy Leffingwell and features articles by many automotive writers. **Right:** Cam Ingram was one of the contributing authors in the North Carolina Art Museum exhibit "Seduction of Speed" event book and helped curate the show. The overall concept for the show was the brainchild of Bob and Jeanie Ingram.



As for Furman, he says "What can you say about Michael? His reputation for sensitivity and excellence in automotive photography is exemplary and rings true from the many people who have tried to copy his style. His contributions were invaluable. Michael contributed beautifully with his unique photographic perspective to illustrate both the genetic continuity and the evolution of the Porsche design over the last six decades."

To gain and present a fuller understanding of the world of serious car-collecting they dug deeper than the requisite automotive resources. "We read books on fine art, anthropology, psychology, history and politics. We wanted to understand the mindset of Porsche personalities, but also dig into what the trends were at the time and what the engineers and designers were attempting to achieve. Although the book is ostensibly about my father's collection, our goal was to contribute to the Porsche community at large about the intricacies of collecting in the modern age; to help people avoid some of the mistakes we made and to enrich their experience of the hobby."

Those three events, the Zuffenhausen award at the Charlotte PCA Parade, the win with Hans-Peter's Gmünd at Pebble and the release of *Porsche Unexpected* contributed to a hurricane of activity and some major attention for the Road Scholars duo.

Says Ingram, "Up to that point, we were still kind of the little guy. We'd go to shows and not that many people in the concours world knew who we were. We were building our reputation and winning awards, but we were still thought of as the new guys. After we won at Pebble, the floodgates opened. Then, I co-authored the book. That helped our reputation significantly. It opened a lot of doors with other collectors seeking either to add to their collections, broker various cars, or do top-tier restorations. But just as significantly, it helped Kevin and I to gain a better understanding of who we are and what our goals and identity are. There's nothing like the blaze of attention coming from several highly public successes to force you to think about who you are and what you're doing."

Recently, they've also been also been doing more preservation work and are recommending to clients that they do more mechanical restoration work and preserving the cars if it's at all possible. Watts, loves the original cars. On preservation: "I go crazy over original cars because they would have had to be so well cared for because of the rust issues. I think a car that at its newest was built in 1965, if it's original, then it was well cared for and should be preserved and is one of the coolest things ever."

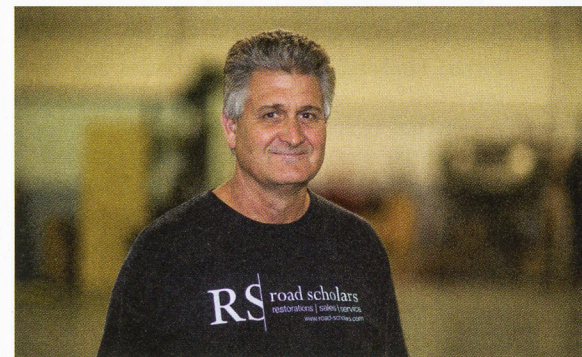
Though the Road Scholars are especially well known for their sales of highly collectible exotics and some of the finest concours restorations available, they have deep appreciation for some of the other "less traditional" aspects of 356 driving and collecting.

Questioned on the Outlaw 356 and R-Gruppe 911 movement of recent times, Ingram's voice sparks with enthusiasm. "I think it's a total revelation. There are some people who are still hard-core preservationists. But I think the Magnus Walkers and Rod Emorys and John Willhoits are really contributing a great deal to the Porsche world with their various approaches to body work, paint and engine building." While serious concours restorations attempt to preserve the perfect "from factory" look and feel for the ages, there's also room for the "you only live once,

life is short, so we might as well enjoy it" approach. The R-Gruppe and 356 outlaw drivers are sub-cultures of the Porsche world and keep the original intent alive in a different, dynamic way.

"I got into this because I love the cars, I love driving them and I love seeing other people driving them and having fun. A lot of our customers, after they've been on the concours circuit for a couple of years start using the cars as road cars and have fun driving them. I think it's great. From a different angle, some of our other customers have only driven the newer, more technologically advanced cars. I love it when one of them gets in the driver's seat of a 356. You see the smiles emerge and the joy taking them over as they experience essential early Porsche technology in its purest form."

Because his focus is on sales, Watts regards the outlaws a bit differently: "I think they're awesome. They're like hot-rods, built to someone's personal taste. The ones that Rod Emory does are so different from the ones John Willhoit will do; there are no rules. They're awesome. But when you go to sell an outlaw, you either find a guy who has the same exact taste as you, or you're going to lose a lot of money."

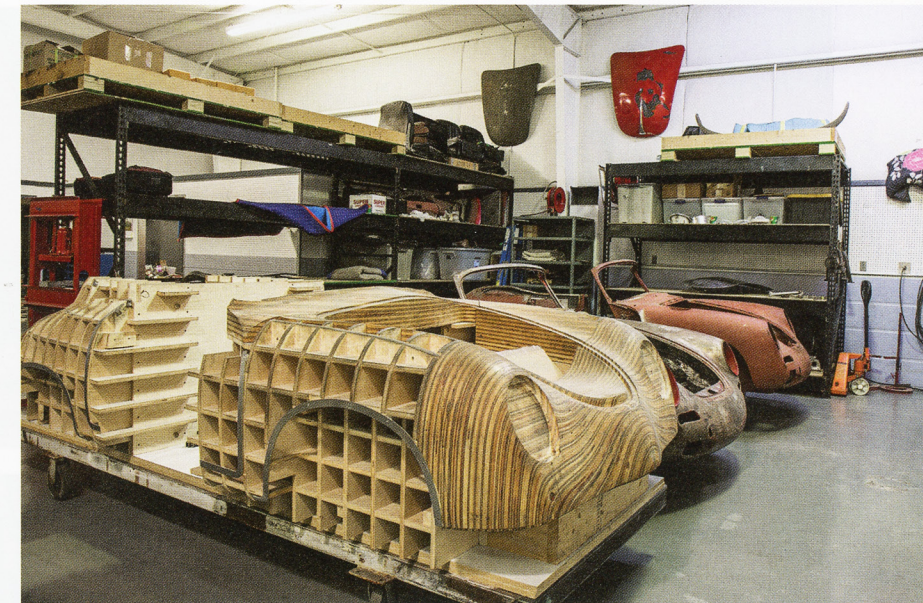


While the Road Scholars restoration shop is decidedly smaller than some other shops, with a staff of eight people led by Billy Woodruff—a former Champ Car team manager for A.J. Foyt and for several NASCAR teams—they work with a more focused approach. Ingram says, "Billy has built more race-cars from scratch than most people have seen in their lifetimes."

Depending on the level of restoration required – from paint and interior refreshes down to deep historical research and fabrication of new body panels or parts – they can be working on as few as two or as many as seven or eight projects at a time. Currently they have two Carrera 2s – one cabriolet and one coupe—and three 1975 homologation Turbos in process. Because of rust issues on the older cars, they are more labor and time intensive, while the 1975 cars are – in the scheme of things – relatively easy.

In any case, it's their approach to know all the minutia, such as the specs of every nut and bolt, the technology used in the original factory build process all the way down to the curvature and stuffing of the seats. Says Ingram, "When we're done, we drive the cars for a few hundred miles to make sure they drive, feel, even sound the way the car was supposed to be when it left the factory."

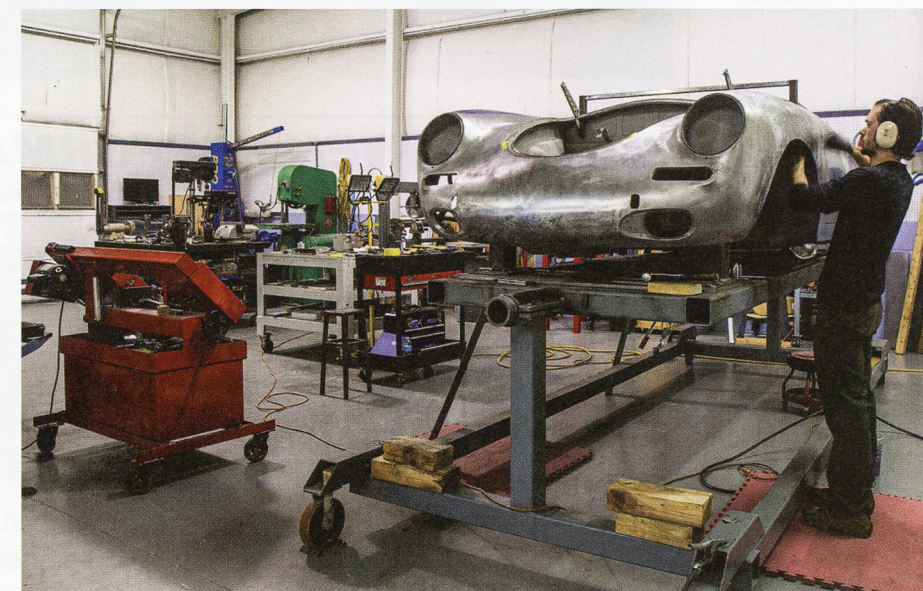
Though Ingram and Watts know there's not a huge market of people who are willing to pay the kind of money it takes for their level of detail work, that's the market



Far left: Billy Woodruff. His credentials include a win with AJ Foyt's Gilmore Racing Coyote team at Indianapolis in 1977. That's him just behind the Borg Warner trophy in the cowboy hat.

Top: A wooden buck with a solid nose for an A car waits for its next assignment next to a pair of disassembled cabriolets.

Below: A B Roadster's skin is freshened. Original panels are saved whenever possible.





The Road Scholars facility in Durham, North Carolina, shown here, is now joined by another shop in Friday Harbor, Washington.



they're most interested in serving.

For their retail store, the Road Scholars partners really wanted a facility that would appeal to hard-core car people. Its look and feel is that of a glorified man-cave with rare books, authentic posters, comfortable yet appealing furniture that would be great to hang out in on any Friday night or Saturday morning. Though the facility is not huge, its layout is clean and efficient with a modern-industrial tech ambience. The layout is such that the lounge, retail shop, and service bay are open to one another yet each have their own distinct segment and feel. Magnus and Karen Walker helped them pick the furniture. All the cabinetry in the service area is custom designed with the cleanliness befitting a surgical theater, a NASA rocket assembly area or a Formula 1 factory at Woking. They're now working on their new restoration shop that will move their metal shop from Mooresville to the Road Scholars campus in Durham.

While their restoration and preservation business has been largely Porsche-centric, their sales and service departments have now ventured out toward other exotic marques such as Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati, Mercedes, and more.

Yet they're not done and have no plans for standing still. Their current project is to bring their restoration shops onto the main Road Scholars campus in Durham with the same level of excellence and personal involvement, making it easier for Ingram to be involved in the process and for customers to have a completely integrated Road Scholars experience from beginning to end.

Ask Ingram and Watts where they're headed in the next five or ten or twenty years and it's something like this: to provide their customers with the best selection of cars, the finest preservation and restoration services and to have the most fun. As Watts says, "We only buy the cars we like. So if the world comes to an end or the bubble bursts, at least we'll have some stuff we really like." 🚗

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