

CLASSIC DRIVER

This perfectly patinated Porsche 356 Speedster proves beauty accumulates with time

Lead

Restoration - yes or no? And if so, to what extent? These questions increasingly occupy the minds of collectors. Patina has value in itself and serves as a testimony to a car's lifetime of use. ChromeCars' rare and authentic pre-A Porsche 356 is the perfect example of this.



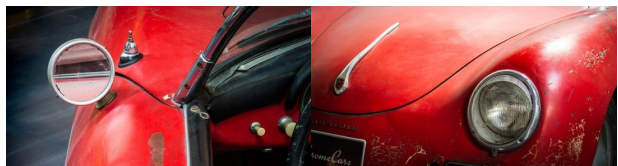
It was in 2015, [ChromeCars](#) in Laasdorf, near Jena, had just been founded, when its managing director, Kai Nieklauson, discovered this Porsche 356 A Speedster at a small auction in the United States and immediately jumped on it. Where others would have envisaged this car as the basis for a comprehensive restoration, Nieklauson saw the beauty and value in the signs of use that had accumulated over decades, and decided it was something he wanted to preserve. "Back then, my intuition was probably ahead of the times," he says, "but in the future, the originality of a car will play an increasingly important role." ChromeCars' motto "Automotive Archaeologists" is no coincidence.



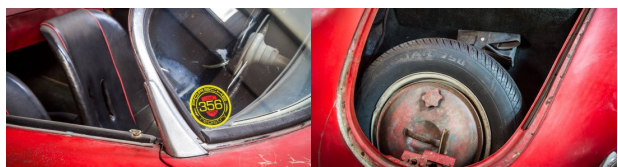
The comparison may seem drastic at first: Monument conservationists speak of a controlled ruin where an important building is saved from decay, but not rebuilt. An expertly restored Rembrandt shouldn't look as if the old Dutchman had just put brush and palette aside. Patina is expressly desired. Kai received confirmation of his purist philosophy during a visit to the garage of the ultimate Car Guy, Jay Leno. Sat rocking heavily on the bonnet of his Mercedes-Benz 300SL "Gullwing", Mr Leno said: "I can only do this with an original vehicle, one wouldn't dare do this to a restored car."



This 356 A Speedster was manufactured in 1957 for Porsche by the Reutter body shop in Stuttgart, especially for the American market. This was at the instigation of the famous US importer Max Hoffman, to whom North America also owes the BMW 507 and the Mercedes-Benz 300SL. The first owner sold his Speedster in the early sixties. This - presumably - second keeper had reported to Kai when he picked up the 356 that he had used his car every day in California and also regularly drove amateur races. The historic daily driver belongs to the exclusive circle of coveted and highly traded pre-A models of the first 356 series. James Dean also had a pre-A-Speedster before he decided, with tragic consequence, to swap it for a Porsche 550 Spyder.



The Speedster has been part of the ChromeCars collection since 2015 and has remained in its purchased condition ever since. It was exhibited at trade fairs and, along with its accumulated awards. Only the mechanical aspects of the car have been overhauled so that it is ready to drive: the engine has been repaired but not overhauled, while the brakes have been overhauled. "I believe that now the time is ripe for its condition, as well as its provenance, to be appreciated by a future customer," says Kai.



Those interested in this truly authentic piece of German automotive history can also look forward to a unique piece of documentation: Guido Eickholz, head of Erbkönig Classic and historian as well as archival keeper of Reutter bodywork, which was taken over by Porsche at the end of 1963, created an extensive and detailed Reutter Body certificate of authenticity. Illustrated with many photos of this 356 when it was delivered to Porsche on April 10 1957, with the Reutter body number 83244. Like the ChromeCars team, he is an advocate of authenticity - which shouldn't always be equated with originality. "This Speedster is a survivor! The body parts are all original, and wear parts that have been replaced over time are also allowed to meet this requirement." In addition to the rear lights and wounds on the exhaust openings and holes closed with reflectors on the buffer horns, this also includes the floor mats, which were replaced decades ago. As you can see, the ravages of time gnawed at the black leatherette seats as well as the roof. The long faded signal red paint, as neither Nieklauson nor Eickholz are 100% sure, could have been renewed in period. But its patina is authentic, even if it may not be the original paintwork.



In this golden era, Reutter was not a supplier to the still young Porsche company, but an equal partner and producer. The Stuttgart-based company, which was only a stone's throw away, manufactured the tools for building the bodies, supplied 356 variants such as a coupé, a convertible, a variant with a convertible hard top, a speedster, and the early 911 complete with built-in interior including seats and dashboard to Porsche. This is where the marriage between the engine and gearbox - and wheels - took place. For the final inspection, the vehicle then rolled back to Reutter. Even the subject of matching numbers can turn into a very complex puzzle for the profound expert Eickholz, because the Reutter stamps were actually distributed in different places.



If you leaf through the expertly crafted history documentation, you can actually feel the historicity of the specimen, which results from longstanding ownership. Every feature from the seats and tarpaulin to mirrors, door handles, windshield wipers, or indicators are either marked as "authentic according to the model year" or the subsequent changes, which of course also happened decades ago, are recorded. It is truly an impressive level of transparency.



Market connoisseur Hoffman had selected this Speedster with wise foresight. In its day it was something of the sports car manufacturer's gateway drug and cost less than \$ 3,000 at the time! That is why it was "slimmed down" and, for example, not equipped with door compartments, without a lined hood or a glove compartment. The windows were plugged in and the 1.6-litre boxer engine was also lightweight - no wonder the second owner competed in races.

It is said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But this term is not an immobile ideal; it changes over time. Isn't this specimen a beauty that wears its patina with dignity?

Gallery

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