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### Achtung, Baby

David Balsler's German Hot Rod

Photography: Eric Geisert

How much do you like rust? Not too many car people do, and neither does David Balsler, who hails from Encinitas (near San Diego), California. David has owned and restored a couple of Porsche 356 coupes (a '63B and a '59A) over the past 14 years, and he really liked his vintage tin. But after the restoration, tiny rust bubbles would pop up under the paint here and there, thus negating all the hard work that went into making the coupes look good.

Frustrating him to no end, David decided to go the 'glass route with his next car. Having always wanted a Porsche Speedster, Balsler searched for a suitable replicar manufacturer that could give him what he wanted. David's brother, Ed, was also going to play a major part with the look of the car, since he is heavily involved in building street rods, for both fun and profit. The traditional look of some hot rods also plays into the whole "outlaw" theme that is well represented in certain Porsche circles.



In fact, when David checked out the Web site [www.partsobsolete.com](http://www.partsobsolete.com), he found a special section on outlaw Porsches (there are actually a few sites on the Web dedicated to this style of car). A typical outlaw Porsche is race-inspired, with drilled-out pedal arms and gas cap lids, louvers and leather straps, and large-diameter racing wheels. And one of the most identifiable trademarks of those outlaws? Stance. They're usually pegged on the ground, with only the slightest hint of rake. Sports cars are generally minimalistic, but the outlaw guys just take it to the extreme. And the folks who own these outlaw Porsches are the ones most likely to piss off the Porsche purists, but they really don't care. They're into it because it's fun, and they drive the snot out of their rides!



So, with the outlaw idea planted in his head and his hot-rodding brother giving him ideas, David went looking for someone who was willing to help customize his Speedster the way he wanted it. As it turned out, Tom McBurnie was his guy. McBurnie, who owns and operates Thunder Ranch (El Cajon, CA), has been in the replicar business since almost the beginning of time itself. He helped pioneer the industry and some of his exploits have actually become legendary--just the outside-the-box thinker David needed to complete his project.

David likes to describe his ride as a "German street rod" or even a "'56 roadster" because of some of its styling cues. Old Ford roadsters were stripped-down versions of the option-loaded vehicles car salesmen tried to push on the public. But the roadsters had no frills--no radio, heater, defroster, side windows, fancy door pulls, or exterior trim pieces.

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For more of a racecar feel, Thunder Ranch added a center-fill gas cap from Moreland Choppers to the middle of the hood as well as a pair of Speedster-style side mirrors.

David and Tom worked together to create a one-off body that employed those themes, working with hot-rod design elements, such as a dash that wraps around and into the tops of the doors, similar to the cockpit of a '32 Ford roadster. To accomplish that, McBurnie had to add a 550 dash to David's 356--something other replicar builders didn't want to do--as well as reshape the tops of the doors to make the door lines flow correctly. But David calls the Thunder Ranch staff (Dan, Chris, Larry, Julio, Marco, and Phil) "talented" and "flexible"--two adjectives rarely used together when a car owner describes his relationship with a builder. McBurnie also added a small flair around the rear fender lip, just another item to set David's ride apart from any other on the road.

McBurnie started the build with a tube frame of his own design. A standard VW IRS transmission was used in conjunction with the torsion bar rear, but the front uses the VW twin torsion beam setup with dropped spindles added to get the desired low profile. Cream-colored (to match the gauges in the interior), powdercoated 15-inch steelies (accented with two thin, red pinstripes) are shod with Pirelli rubber (205/60 and 195/60) to provide grip in the turns. Stopping the tub is the work of four disc brakes mounted to each corner (the fronts are stock VW discs, while the rear are a from CB Performance). And you can't have a hot rod, German or otherwise, without some power under the hood, even if the engine is mounted out back. Balsler's 1915cc Type I engine, comprised of a 69mm stock stroke crank and 94mm pistons, is fed by a pair of 40 IDF Weber carbs mounted atop a set of EMPI heads. Underneath, a 1 1/2-quart sump adds extra oil capacity while up top, a 911-type fan and alternator replaces the VW's stock fan housing, which gives the engine a late-model Porsche engine look.

With the pan/chassis completed, the body was covered with DuPont Centari paint (a Dale Jarrett #88 red) and set in place. The single-



Cream-colored, powdercoated steelies detailed with twin red pinstripes and small hubcaps, a decklid with 37 wide louvers, and color-matched bumper blades all say "hot rod" for this German-born speedster. In fact, Dave's 356 got a lot of long looks when he showed it at the Goodguys' Rod & Custom Nationals in Del Mar, California, earlier this year.



A hot-rod flair to the tub's interior was achieved by wrapping the Spyder dash around and into the tops of the doors. Mark Luhr's Custom Upholstery covered the seats with tan vinyl and finished off the floor with tan square-weave carpet. Opting for a simple look for the 550 dash, Dave used four Classic Instrument's Vintage Series gauges to let him know what's up with his ride.



Hot-rod-type door pulls from Lokar and a Lecarra banjo steering wheel cinch the deal.



The double-bubble tonneau is a 'glass unit whose shape was lifted from an '89 Porsche Speedster, though he does also have a cloth top for the car, too.



blade bumpers, which were color-matched to the car, were moved in close to the body (within a 1/4-inch), another typical example of hot-rod fitment. While the car is parked, the vintage '56 California rear license plate is tucked up and out of view with the help of a Dan Fink Metalworks Retract-A-Plate (the plate comes into view when the ignition switch is hit).

Another outlaw trait is the exposed gas cap, this one coming from Moreland Choppers (Solana Beach, CA) and mounted in the middle of the hood. In keeping with the race theme, a 'glass Carrera-style louvered decklid (with 37 wide louvers) was bolted in place, and a pair of Speedster rear-view mirrors were color-matched to the car and mounted on top of each front fender. Even the stone-guard headlight grilles (from Parts Obsolete, McMinnville, Oregon) are race-inspired items.

Old roadsters had simple interiors, as does David's. The clean 550 dash houses four Classic Instrument gauges (the fuel and oil pressure in 2 1/8-inch while the tach and speedo are 5-inch models) finished in the Vintage Series colors (cream with red dials). Banjo steering wheels were used on some early Porsches, but this leather-wrapped version from Lecarra is more along the style of a '37 Ford, long popular with the hot-rod crowd.

Mark Luhr's Custom Upholstery (Santee, CA) covered the seats in tan vinyl and added tan-colored German square-weave carpet, too, but also created a set of red floor mats to give the interior a splash of color. The seat's lapbelts, an aircraft design from Nolan White, were finished with red material to match the car's exterior. And though the tub has a working fabric top, Balsler wanted something a little different to top his car off. So a hard tonneau, whose design was "lifted" from the tonneau of an '89 Porsche Speedster, was fabricated from 'glass, made to smoothly flow into the tub's cockpit design, and than color-matched to David's ride.

If you look closely at the photos, you'll notice there aren't any Porsche badges to be found on David's Speedster. It's not because he feels his replicar isn't a Porsche, but rather more like a hot-rod roadster, all stripped down and void of flash. But that doesn't really help because just by pulling into any market parking lot or just cruising down the highway causes onlookers to nearly twist their heads off their shoulders as they try and get a glimpse of the bright red tub as it drives by. Subtle indeed!

DAVID BALSER
Encinitas, California
1956 Porsche Speedster

CHASSIS	
Frame	Combination square tube anad VW by Thunder Ranch, El Cajon, CA
Wheelbase	4.5"
Rearend	VW
Rear Suspension	VW torsion
Rear Brakes	CB Performance disc
Front Suspension	VW twin torsion w/ dropped spindles
Front Brakes	VW disc
Steering	VW
Wheels	15 x 6" VW
Front Tire	Pirelli 195/60-15
Rear Tire	Pirelli 205/60-15
ENGINE & TRANS	
Make	1915cc VW
Crankshaft	VW 69mm
Pistons	VW 94mm
Alternator	Porsche 911
Heads	EMPI
Induction	Twin 40mm IDF Weber carbs
Ignition	Pertronix
Headers	New School Motorsports
Mufflers	Magnaflow
Transmission	VW IRS
Shifter	VW
Trans Mods	3.88 final gear
BODY	
Manufacturer	Thunder Ranch
Body Mods	'89 Porsche tonneau, Spyder dash, 37-louver decklid, molded dash
Bodywork	Thunder Ranch
Paint Type	DuPont Centari Dale
	Jarrett #88 Red
Painter	Thunder Ranch
INTERIOR	
Gauges	Classic Instrument Vintage Series
Wiring	Thunder Ranch
Steering Wheel	Lecarra banjo
Seating	Custom buckets by Thunder Ranch
Upholsterer	Mark Luhr's Custom Upholstery, Santee, CA
Material	Tan vinyl

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